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How Bivocational Church Planters Have Operated in an Irish Context

By

David J. Montgomery

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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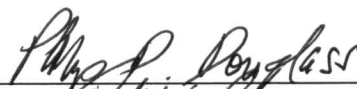


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ABSTRACT

In the past hundred years, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has planted churches in line with population migration. The few exceptions to this have been slow and expensive, involving planters fully remunerated from central funds. This study examines the experience of Irish planters who worked bivocationally in order to see if this may be a more viable option for future Irish Presbyterian planting strategy, particularly in the Republic of Ireland.

The study examines the church planting literature, discovering that there is little addressed to either the reformed or Irish contexts. It also shows that there has been a noticeable shift in the literature from the Church Growth methodologies of the 1980s and 90s to taking cognizance of a variety of emerging ecclesial models, many of them small, community-based “new expressions”.

Literature was also consulted in the area of work and the interplay of vocation, work and ministry, with the aim of uncovering the key theological and practical issues surrounding bivocational ministry. Finally, the history and culture of the Irish Presbyterian Church was examined for examples of church planting which may be of relevance to the contemporary context.

For the purpose of this qualitative research, ten planters and five other interested parties were chosen to participate in informal semi-structured interviews. Most of the ten were Irish bivocational planters, although one full-time Irish planter was interviewed along with two reformed pastors from elsewhere with experience in the field of planting. The study looked at how the planter and the plant were affected by the leader’s vocational status.

The final chapter sought to isolate the key theological, ecclesiological, missiological, vocational, practical and contextual issues surrounding bivocational planting and its potential introduction to the contemporary Irish Presbyterian context.

Variables included location, the type of jobs with which church ministry could be combined and the issue of whether bivocational ministry was seen as a permanent or transitional calling,

It was discovered that bivocationalism, although not without its difficulties, could contribute to the planting process in several key ways: in the areas of vocational integrity, missional authenticity, financing and resourcing ministry, enabling and equipping disciples, developing leaders, as well as encouraging the church culture to forsake any unhealthy and unbiblical sacred/secular divide.

It was recommended that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland consider seriously the merits of bivocational ministry, in line with some recommendations made to the General Assembly in the 1990s, and utilizing recently developed denominational Ministry Schemes that are ideally suited to bivocationals.

For Gwen

*whose primary callings as a child of God, wife, and soul mate are lived out in a context
saturated daily with grace;*

*and whose multi-vocational life as professional declutterer, administrator, financial
manager, singer, teacher, mentor, counselor, hostess, and chef is a constant inspiration.*

“(Church planting is) to gather, under the hand of God, a body of people committed to Christ, worshipping together and working together to become educated, trained, and equipped to be Christ’s people in the community in which they are set, seeking and pursuing the meanings and purposes of Christ in every part of their lives both personally and corporately.”

Louis Misselbrook

“Freedom from the rigidity of a single, permanent vocation might season with creativity and interrupt with rest the monotonous lives of modern workaholics.”

Miroslav Volf

“We fail the fathers of Presbyterianism... if we fossilize the church they reformed.”

Presbyterian Church in Ireland, General Assembly Reports 1998.

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David Montgomery
Greystones, Co. Wicklow
25 January 2013

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Ireland, Presbyterianism and Church Planting

There has been a burgeoning of evangelical churches in the Republic of Ireland during the last thirty years. From less than one hundred and fifty such churches in 1980, there are now more than four hundred, resulting in an overall membership increase of two hundred percent.¹ However, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI)² has planted only two churches on the whole island during the last fifteen years – both of them founded by full-time personnel.³

Furthermore, between 1960 and 1995, the new churches that were planted by the PCI simply followed demographic change in terms of Presbyterian population migration. For example, of the twenty-one presbyteries in existence when the latest history of Irish Presbyterians, Kirkpatrick's *Presbyterians in Ireland*, was published in 2006,⁴ seven had no new church planted within their bounds since the nineteenth century,⁵ while four

¹ EAI, *National Research Confirms Growth of Evangelical Churches in Ireland*, (Dublin: Evangelical Alliance Ireland, 2006), Report. See also Robert Dunlop, *Evangelicals in Ireland: An Introduction* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2004).

² There are several branches of Presbyterianism in Ireland. Unless otherwise stated, "Presbyterian" refers to the largest denomination, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, in which the author ministers, and which accounts for around ninety-five percent of Irish Presbyterians.

³ Maynooth, Co.Kildare, begun in 2001; and Donabate, Co.Dublin, begun in 2010.

⁴ Laurence Kirkpatrick and Claude Costecalde, *Presbyterians in Ireland: An Illustrated History* (Holywood, Co. Down: Booklink, 2006).

⁵ The presbyteries of Donegal, Down, Iveagh, Monaghan, Newry, Route, and Tyrone.

others⁶ had seen only one new church founded in the twentieth century – often after a gap of more than one hundred years.

In fact, if one looks at the geographical distribution of the twenty-six churches planted throughout the country between 1960 and 2000,⁷ it is significant that all of these have been the result of population movement, rather than missional strategy or a desire to break into new territory with the message of the gospel. The vast majority of these plants occurred during the 1970s, when civil strife was at its peak in Northern Ireland.⁸ During that time, the new churches simply followed the migrating Presbyterians away from the inner city – or “flashpoint” areas – to the suburbs and new housing schemes on the outskirts of Belfast, or to the traditional Protestant heartland towns of Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Lisburn, Antrim, Bangor, and Newtownards.⁹

One can actually follow the progress of the demographic change by inspecting the order in which the various churches were planted, with six of the seven Belfast plants

⁶ Armagh, Derry/Strabane, Foyle and Templepatrick. The Presbyteries were realigned in 2009 with Donegal, Monaghan, and Foyle being subsumed into new larger entities.

⁷ In recent Irish Presbyterian practice, a church begins as a “church extension” under the guidance, usually, of a full-time, centrally-financed pastor, but with interim elders from neighboring churches. When numbers and finances are deemed sufficient, they can apply to be “erected to full congregational status,” which allows them to elect and ordain elders from their own membership. The dates given here refer to the date when the work began, as that more accurately reflects the beginning of the plant, rather than the “date of erection” which could be some years or even decades later.

⁸ See Appendix One; Table One.

⁹ See Appendix One: Table Two. The three exceptions are instructive. Craigavon, in the Presbytery of Armagh, was an experimental planned new town, created in 1965. The initial projections for the town were inaccurate and economic, and political factors meant that it never prospered. The church, however, is another example of “church-following-population,” albeit with less success than first anticipated. Similarly, Strathfoyle was built to cater for a projected exodus of Protestants from Derry as a result of political unrest. In the end, the anticipated numbers never came and the church eventually closed after twenty-three years without ever attaining full congregational status. Only Kilfennan, which included the porting of a city center congregation, could be said to have flourished. Again, although the only example of its kind west of the Bann, like the others it owes its strength in large part to population migration from one part of the city to the other because of political unrest, and in 2010 they subsumed the remaining membership of a second city center congregation which closed.

taking place before 1972, the three Ballymena plants happening between 1971-4, the three Coleraine plants occurring between 1973-7, and the two Carrickfergus congregations being planted in 1977. It is also instructive that once this migration settled down, so too did the creation of new congregations, with only three churches planted between 1980 and 2000.¹⁰ (See Appendix 2: Map One)

In contrast to the northern situation, by the year 2000, the last PCI church planted in the Republic of Ireland was Arklow in 1913.¹¹ This twentieth century moratorium on new churches, brought about by the political, social, and constitutional divisions that typified that century, stands in marked contrast to the evangelistic and church planting endeavors of the 1800s.¹² In 1875,¹³ there were five Presbyteries covering the three southern provinces of Connaught, Leinster, and Munster.¹⁴ They consisted of sixty-nine congregations, rising to seventy-three in 1900. That same geographical area today holds

¹⁰ Occasionally a church will “port” to a different part of the town or city, bringing most of the congregation with them. Examples given in these statistics such as Elmwood, Ballyhenry, and Kilfennan were part-ports in that a struggling city-center congregation was incorporated into the new congregation. However, they have been included for the purposes of this analysis in that the new location was markedly different and distant from the original congregation, and the new church was planted primarily to serve the new locality.

¹¹ A new church building was opened in Malahide, Dublin in 1956, but the congregation has always functioned as a single unit with the one in Howth, sharing minister and elders but meeting in two locations. Interestingly, the congregation in Arklow has experienced recent growth, resulting in the opening of a greatly extended building in 2012.

¹² See Keith McCrory, “New Church Development in the Greater Dublin Area” (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001), 14-19; and Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *A History of Congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 1610 – 1982* (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 1982), 429ff.

¹³ Figures taken from the Reports and Directories of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, (Church House, Belfast) for the relevant year.

¹⁴ Admittedly, the Presbytery of Connaught comprised only five churches when it was erected in 1825. Relief work in the area in the aftermath of the 1875 famine and renewed evangelistic activity led to a growth in the late nineteenth century (see John Monteith Barkley, *A Short History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (Belfast: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1959).

only thirty-eight churches, totaling less than five thousand members which, until 2009, were under one single presbytery.¹⁵

In the twenty-six counties of the Republic of Ireland, there are now six counties with no permanent Presbyterian witness,¹⁶ and nine with only one.¹⁷ In total, twenty of the twenty-six counties have less than one hundred Presbyterian families. Kirkpatrick writes:

All statistics indicate that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is in serious decline: in the last half of the 20th century, total membership has dropped by 22%, baptisms have dropped by 68%, new communicants have dropped by 51%. In fact the problem is accelerating. Total PCI membership has dropped by 33% in the past 35 years, baptisms have dropped by 71%, new communicants have dropped by 49% and numbers of children... by 58%. These are shocking statistics by any standard and it is clear that if these trends continue it is a mathematical certainty that some congregations will close.¹⁸

This raises serious questions. How does such a context reflect the mindset of a denomination? Is it even possible for the PCI once again to engage in missionally-motivated church planting without a radical shift in its culture and thinking?

David Bruce, the director of the denomination's Board of Mission in Ireland, believes that the numerical decline and geographical concentration in the north and east is a matter of both history and theology:

Some have argued that, as a plantation church, our self-understanding has always been missionally diffident. That our plantation history has bred an attitude of chaplaincy among us – that our missional theology is more a theology of the plantation bawn or rampart than the door or gate. That our first concern

¹⁵ Five congregations from Connaught and three from Leinster were transferred to a new presbytery in 2009, covering the border and midlands area.

¹⁶ Kerry, Leitrim, and Waterford no longer have any Presbyterian church, while Clare, Galway, and Limerick have only a periodic Presbyterian ministry, alternating with the Methodists.

¹⁷ Roscommon, Longford, Offaly, Laois, Meath, Westmeath, Kilkenny, Carlow and Tipperary.

¹⁸ Kirkpatrick and Costecalde, 82.

has been to look after our own;... maybe after four centuries we need to come out from behind the bawn.

If anything, [statistics] suggest we are becoming a suburban people. During the last century our story as a people has been a massive trek northwards and eastwards. Speaking personally, I would have much more confidence in our future as a missional people on this island, if our pattern had been to move in the other direction – south and west. Such a move would have demonstrated where our hearts lay. What prospect is there for us to reach Ireland for Christ if we, by default, choose to set up home within the bawn, next to our own? We have been running in only one direction as a people for 100 years. What are we running away from?¹⁹

Kirkpatrick notes the “curious fact that although there are more Irish Presbyterian congregations today than in 1840 when the General Assembly was formed, church membership has fallen by about 50% in the same period.”²⁰ It would appear, therefore, that of greater significance than the total number of congregations is the location, spread, and effectiveness of those congregations.

It is possible that in order to be missionally effective and ensure that Presbyterianism is not a ghettoized faith, but rather one that can make a positive contribution to the social and religious landscape of the whole island, the overall number of churches may not initially need to alter significantly. Instead, the denomination would do well to make sure that duplication is eradicated in areas where multiple congregations are doing the work that one combined church could do more effectively, thereby releasing resources so that churches could be planted in the many areas of the island where none currently exist.²¹

¹⁹ David Bruce, "Confident in Christ in the face of social change", address given to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Special Assembly, Coleraine, August 2010.

²⁰ Kirkpatrick and Costecalde, 81.

²¹ See the author's short article, "Before you go...and before you fill those vacancies" *Reachout* (Belfast: Presbyterian Church in Ireland, June 2007). This was successfully modeled in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, where the Oro group of three churches combined to form Trinity, Oro, and subsequently grew. Interestingly, the new church eventually felt it needed to

Since 2000, there has been a small but interesting development. The PCI has planted two churches, both in the Republic of Ireland. Maynooth, in County Kildare, began out of the Lucan congregation in 2001, while Donabate, in County Dublin, sprang from Malahide in 2010 (See Appendix 2: Map Two). The opportunities for planting more reformed churches, especially in the Republic of Ireland, are self-evident.

However, the church planting model employed by the PCI has always involved the appointment of a full-time, ordained, salaried planter. This is an expensive and slow process. If the population of the island continues to rise, the PCI continues to decline at current rates, and the denomination only engages in church planting with full-time personnel, then its future will be increasingly insecure, as the resources will not exist to sustain the current church-planting model. In addition, the denomination will be ill-equipped to meet the missiological challenges of twenty-first century Ireland.

Chester gives a stark example of this, and although his situation is more extreme than any PCI example, he makes the same point:

[We] know of a church planted by a large evangelical congregation that brought certain assumptions with them. They created a staff team with a minister, assistant minister, student worker, pastoral workers and an administrator. They bought a church building and a home for the minister. As a result they had an annual budget of around £250,000 excluding start-up costs... If every church shares those assumptions then most are not going to plant.²²

leave the PCC because of what it saw as the denomination's restrictive practices in the area of church planting. See <http://www.presbyterianrecord.ca/2007/10/01/oro-votes-to-leave-denomination/> . accessed 8th Jan. 2011.

²² Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2008), 92.

“Tentmaking,” or working for a salary outside of the church while simultaneously engaging in church planting and evangelism,²³ is a common feature of mission in third world contexts.²⁴ In fact, in some countries it is a missiological necessity. It is not as common, however, in Western contexts where the prevalent model is to appoint a fully salaried planter. This is particularly true among the reformed churches. There appear to be few examples of tentmaking church planters within the western reformed tradition, and this is confirmed when one begins to examine the church planting literature.

Problem and Purpose Statements

Problem Statement

The PCI is a denomination in numerical decline. Yet there is evidence of green shoots emerging, particularly through recent church planting initiatives in the Republic of Ireland, and these offer by far the greatest scope for expansion. However, with the denomination struggling to hold on to the membership it already has, and with both parts of the island experiencing economic recession since 2008 (particularly severely in the Republic), many may question the wisdom of spending money on new initiatives. In addition, the only church planting model with which the PCI is familiar is an extremely expensive one.

On the other hand, the church is under a scriptural mandate to go, tell, plant, and grow. God’s people cannot apply that simply to times of economic boom or numerical strength. After all, the apostles were neither rich nor numerous, yet they began the greatest reproductive church planting initiative in history! Neither can the PCI leave it to

²³ See the section below headed “Definition of terms” for further explanation and clarification.

²⁴ See, for example, Tom Steffen & Mike Barnett, *Business as Mission: From Impoverished to Empowered* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2006).

other traditions or denominations, most of which are actually smaller and financially less resourced.

The full-time seminary-trained pastor is an important part of the reformed ecclesiastical *modus operandi* – and with good reason. While Presbyterians may covet the life, zeal, and planting initiatives of smaller, independent non-reformed communities, those communities often covet the Presbyterians’ training, biblical literacy, teaching ministries, and the extent to which they look after their pastors. Nevertheless, serious questions remain – practical but also theological – as to whether this has to be the only model. If it remains the only model, then it is likely that PCI church planting will be rare, and may even grind to a halt altogether. In *Breaking the Missional Code*, Ed Stetzer and David Putman write, “It is amazing but consistent – churches that need to grow think they can do it without change! They think they can break the code by doing the same things they have always done.”²⁵ This is not only true of local churches in the various aspects of their congregational life and witness; it is surely also true of denominations and their approach to church planting.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore how bivocational church planters have operated in Ireland, with the hope that some of the data may be useful in helping the PCI explore new ways of resourcing new church plants, particularly in the Irish Republic.

²⁵ Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 137.

Research Questions

The study explored the church planter's experience in relation to their vocational status and its implications for the development of the plant. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How was the development of the plant impacted by the structures of the denomination?
2. What personal challenges did the church planter face?
3. In what ways was the church's development affected by the planter's vocational status?
4. In what ways did the bivocational planter's experience differ from that of the full-time planter?

Significance of the study

The researcher believes this study may help the PCI to re-evaluate its church planting and mission strategy, especially in the Republic of Ireland. It is hoped that by listening to the experiences of those inside and those outside the denomination who have been involved in planting, both bivocationally and full-time, the denomination may be open to examining a variety of new models of engaging in church planting and creative ways of funding it. The researcher further hopes that, through discussing the research findings with PCI decision-makers, the perceived obstacles to such new models can be articulated and examined, and, as a result, a realistic picture can emerge of what would need to happen if the PCI were to change its church planting methodology.

Ireland is a rapidly changing society. Secularism and the devastating impact of clergy sex abuse within the Roman Catholic church,²⁶ have left many either spiritually diffident or disillusioned. As a denomination that has always been *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, there is a developing role for the PCI to play, alongside other reformed and evangelical bodies, in bringing a message of salvation, hope, and grace to this new Ireland, and modeling new types of ecclesial communities to a culture that is increasingly hurting and cynical concerning all things religious.

In summary, this study will join an emerging body of data which could be used to help the church be creative and courageous in its missionary vision, not only for the purposes of extending the reach and influence of the PCI, but also for the continued reformation of the church catholic, and above all for the glory of God and the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the sole king and head of the church.

Definition of Terms

Church Planter – someone who, alone or as part of a team, is sent to start a new congregation in a place, or among a people, where no congregation of similar ethos or denominational affiliation exists. It does not include those who are sent to revive moribund churches, nor does it make any distinction in terms of age, gender, or ordination status.

Bivocational – refers to those known commonly in the Christian community as “tentmakers.”²⁷ It covers all those who hold a recognized primary leadership position

²⁶ See: Department of Justice and Law Reform: Report by Commission of Investigation into Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin, Dublin: July 2009 (commonly referred to as the Murphy Report); The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, Dublin: May 2009 (Ryan Report).

²⁷ The literature reveals an important debate on the extent to which “bivocational” and “tentmaking” are synonymous. The researcher gives an indication of his conclusion here, but the debate is examined in detail in chapter two.

within the church – pastor, teacher, or head elder – but who do not draw their full salary from the church or from a denomination, earning their living or subsidizing their income through work in some other trade or profession. Bivocational is a term of convenience and is in no way meant to imply a hierarchy of vocations or a rigid separation of vocations. Nor does it deny that for the believer the only true vocation is to live as a child of God.

Ireland – refers to the island of Ireland. With the exception of the interviewee working in the denominational secretariat, all Irish interviewees worked within the Republic of Ireland. However, since the PCI is an all-Ireland denomination, and the decision-making bodies reside in Belfast, the research was undertaken with an all-Ireland perspective, whilst remaining aware of the clear cultural and contextual differences between north and south.

In addition there are several terms that appear throughout the body of the study which may require defining:

Ecclesiology: one's fundamental beliefs pertaining to the doctrine of the church, its nature, purpose, form and diverse forms of expression.

Missiology: one's understanding of the mission of God and the mission of the people of God (the church). Missiology may also encompass such sub-disciplines as evangelism (spreading the message of Christianity, largely through the spoken word; social action (living out the message of Christianity, largely through acts of justice and mercy, publicly and privately); apologetics (defending the Christian worldview through debate, dialogue and conversation); global witness (evangelism cross-culturally and internationally); as well as church planting.

Church Growth Movement (CGM): a missiological Movement emanating from Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, and strongly influenced by writers such as C. Peter Wagner and Donald McGavran, which emphasized models of church planting, church growth and international evangelism, which relied heavily on strategies based on statistical surveys, demographical trends and target markets and which often resulted in a formulaic approach to numerical growth.

Unchurched: those who have had little or no previous contact with a worshipping Christian community and whose knowledge of the Christian story is non-existent or seriously misinformed.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The literature consulted is arranged broadly in the following sections: theological (concentrating on areas of ecclesiology and missiology), church planting, vocation and ministry (looking at bivocationalism in particular) and some selected works dealing with denominational issues and the Irish Presbyterian context.

Theological Framework: Ecclesiology and Missiology

Church planting is the place where ecclesiology and missiology meet.

Contemporary English missiologists Tim Chester and Steve Timmis argue against any separation of the two in evangelistic thinking. They claim there can be no single focus, whether on the church – seeing mission as the best way to grow communities; or on mission – seeing the church as the best way to achieve our missiological goals. Rather, “church planting is the outworking of mission and community. It is the point where mission and community intersect.”²⁸

Ecclesiology

Any drive to plant more churches must be born out of the deep conviction that the church is not just a useful, much less a comfortable, sociological phenomenon, but that it is central to God’s purposes for the world. Chester writes: “We are not saved individually and then choose to join the church as if it were some club or support group. Christ died

²⁸ Chester and Timmis, 89.

for his people and we are saved when, by faith, we become part of the people for whom Christ died.”²⁹ John Stott expounds this in terms of God’s purpose for humanity:

The church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history. On the contrary, the church is God’s new community. For his purpose, conceived in a past eternity, being worked out in history, and to be perfected in a future eternity, is not just to save isolated individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to build his church, that is, to call out of the world a people for his own glory.³⁰

Church planting, therefore, is nothing less than facilitating the creation of places where this divine purpose can be expressed in tangible form and in local contexts.

Systematic theologian, Wayne Grudem, drawing on Ephesians 1:22-23, affirms this big picture, the grand purpose and design of God: “So great is God’s plan for the church that he has exalted Christ to a position of highest authority for the sake of the church.”³¹ But it is a plan that has local, as well as universal, implications:

In the New Testament the word *church* may be applied to a group of believers at any level, ranging from a very small group meeting in a private home all the way to the group of all true believers in the universal church... We may conclude that the group of God’s people considered at any level from local to universal may rightly be called a church.³²

Lesslie Newbigin, one of the twentieth century’s foremost ecumenical mission thinkers, wryly comments that “Jesus.... did not write a book but formed a community.” He then lays down this powerful challenge: “I believe the only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”³³

²⁹ Ibid., 37.

³⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2007), 19-20.

³¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1999), 363.

³² Ibid., 365-366.

³³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), 227.

The church, therefore, dare not be seen as a theological abstraction. Christians cannot, if they are to be true to both the biblical witness and to their own calling as believers, affirm the truth of the universal church while denying that they have any responsibility for, or need have any commitment to, its local manifestation. As theologian Alister McGrath notes: “Local churches and particular denominations are to be seen as the manifestations, representations, or embodiments of the one universal church.”³⁴ The local church is the primary agent for mission. Richard Yates Hibbert, in a helpful article, expresses this explicitly:

The church is at the heart of God’s purposes, and is the primary agent and sign of the kingdom of God. Transformation of societies in God’s desired direction occurs through the agency of God’s people, and it is local churches which are designed to be the central expression of the values and life of the kingdom.³⁵

Chester goes as far as to say: “There can be no sustainable Christian mission without sustainable local Christian communities.”³⁶ What, then, are the challenges facing the church as it seeks this sustainability?

The creation of such communities is demanding because it is both counter-intuitive to fallen selfish humanity and because it has always been counter-cultural, even within the Christian culture. Hibbert lists some examples of where evangelical methodology has actually militated against community:

The strong individualism of western culture, of Pietism in the early missionary movement, of revivalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, and of crusade evangelism in the twentieth century has deeply influenced the

³⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 425.

³⁵ Richard Yates Hibbert, "The Place of Church Planting in Mission: Towards a Theological Framework," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33 (2009): 331.

³⁶ Chester and Timmis, 86.

worldview of the church and the theology of much of the northern hemisphere.³⁷

Scottish Presbyterian theologian Donald Macleod applies this directly to the reformed community: “There is sustained emphasis in both the Old and New Testaments on this corporate dimension of Christianity. We in the Reformed churches need to listen to this particularly carefully because the Reformation brought in a marked individualism.”³⁸

Hibbert agrees, and says that this explains the lack of theological thinking behind most Protestant missions. Although church planting has always been part of missions, he writes: “in practice, however, the salvation of individuals has often taken priority, and Protestants have done little to develop a theology of church planting.”³⁹

So the challenges facing those seeking to plant gospel-oriented, grace-centered communities in the twenty-first century West come not just from the potential hostility of a secularized culture, but also from centuries of individualistic Christian practice which, at least undermines, and at most actively opposes, the formation of true Christian community. Chester warns: “Church planting cannot involve an uncritical replication of existing models. Church planting should be at the forefront of new ecclesiological thinking.”⁴⁰ This has indeed proved to be the case as successive reports of the two main British national churches examine “fresh expressions of church” or “new ways of doing church.”⁴¹ These are examined in greater detail later in this section.

³⁷ Hibbert, “The Place of Church Planting in Mission: Towards a Theological Framework,” 328.

³⁸ Donald Macleod, *A Faith to Live By: Studies in Christian Doctrine* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 1998), 222.

³⁹ Hibbert, “The Place of Church Planting in Mission: Towards a Theological Framework,” 331.

⁴⁰ Chester and Timmis, 93.

⁴¹ See Church of England, *Breaking New Ground: Church Planting in the Church of England: A Report*, ed. House of Bishops (London: Church House Publishing, 1994); Church of

Missiology

In his seminal work, *Transforming Mission*, South African missiologist David Bosch beautifully encapsulates the divine origin of Christian mission:

Mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It [is] thus put in the context of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the *missio dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another “movement:” Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.⁴²

Keeping this divine perspective in mind should prevent one from defining mission too narrowly, as has often been the case in the evangelical world. If Christians are to have a truly biblical mandate for mission, it must embrace more than cross-cultural evangelism. This is largely the theme of another key missiological tome – Christopher Wright’s *The Mission of God*. In it he writes: “it would be a distorted and exaggerated hermeneutic, in my view, that tried to argue that the whole Bible was “about” mission in the narrowly defined sense of human missionary activities.”⁴³ He continues:

Just as “salvation belongs to our God” (Rev.7:10), so does mission. The Bible renders and reveals to us the God whose creative and redemptive work is permeated from beginning to end with God’s own great mission, his powerful, sovereign intentionality. All mission or missions which we initiate or into which we invest our own vocation, gifts and energies, flow from the prior and larger reality of the mission of God.⁴⁴

Where, then, does the church fit in this framework? What does its mission look like?

Wright turns the questions on their head: “We argue about what can legitimately be

England, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, ed. Mission and Public Affairs Council, 2nd ed. (London: Church House Publishing, 2004); Church of Scotland, *Church without Walls: Report to the General Assembly 2001 by the Special Commission* (Edinburgh: Parish Education Publications, 2001).

⁴² David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 389-390.

⁴³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), 531.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

included in the mission God expects from the church, when we should ask what kind of church God expects for his mission.”⁴⁵ This is a much more demanding question. Instead of looking at what Christians are to do, it forces them to an even more radical exploration: namely, who are they called to be?

Hibbert combines these two strands of ecclesiology and missiology in a way that applies Wright’s understanding of the *Missio Dei* to the work of local fellowships:

Although the importance of church planting was only gradually unfolded through the book of Acts, a reading of the whole Bible makes it clear that God’s plan— his mission—is to draw people from all nations into the new people he is creating and to use each local church to display his wisdom and character to their communities.⁴⁶

How has the church sought to do this through its strategy of reproduction, particularly in the last one hundred years? For that answer, one must look to how the frantic reproductivity of the early church fell into decline and then was revived through the (relatively) modern discipline of “church planting.”

Church Planting

A name that has been associated with church growth and church planting movements over the last three decades is missiologist C. Peter Wagner, whose writings, along with those of his predecessor at Fuller Theological Seminary, Donald McGavran, stimulated the development of the Church Growth Movement (CGM).⁴⁷ At the beginning of Wagner’s influential work *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, he famously commented that “the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is

⁴⁵ Ibid., 534.

⁴⁶ Hibbert, "The Place of Church Planting in Mission: Towards a Theological Framework," 331.

⁴⁷ On McGavran and the impact of the Church Growth Movement on church planting, see the comments of David Snapper, "Unfulfilled Expectations of Church Planting," *Calvin Theological Journal* 31 (1996): 464-486.

planting new churches.”⁴⁸ Hibbert agrees, but not on the basis of evangelistic strategy.

Rather, he focuses on the nature of the church: “The activity of starting new churches is part of God’s in-built design for churches. The image of the body of Christ expresses that the church is a living organism, and, as such, it has been designed to reproduce.”⁴⁹

Hibbert’s main concern is that church planters and their sending organizations employ more theological thinking in their plans and practices:

The biblical and theological foundation for the planting of churches has generally been assumed rather than explicitly articulated...[but] while insights from the history of mission and the social sciences are extremely helpful in shaping church planting practice, a biblical and theological foundation is essential if church planting is to fulfill God’s purposes for it.⁵⁰

This is an important caveat. The Achilles heel of many church planters and planting movements is an almost semi-Pelagian tendency whereby the creation of congregations is seen as an end in itself – one that may be relatively easily achieved – but with little understanding or interest in how this may fit into the bigger picture of God’s work in his world. While much church planting literature on this subject could be classed as methodological, even formulaic, a number of writers, such as Steve Timmis, have sought to encourage practitioners towards greater theological and biblical reflection on their practice.⁵¹

⁴⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest: A Comprehensive Guide* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1990), 10. Stuart Murray wryly comments that no book on church planting seemed complete without this quote. He also seems to hold Wagner partly responsible for some of the disillusionment and cynicism that befell unsuccessful planters, especially in Britain. See Stuart Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2010), 20-21.

⁴⁹ Hibbert, “The Place of Church Planting in Mission: Towards a Theological Framework,” 330.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁵¹ Stephen Timmis (ed.), *Multiplying Churches: Reaching Today's Communities through Church Planting* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000). In his concluding chapter, “Key

Scriptural Precedent and Its Implications

Such biblical reflection, unsurprisingly, concentrates on the book of Acts. Harry Weatherley admits, “We will not find a blueprint for church planting in the Acts of the Apostles, but we will find some guiding principles.”⁵² These include cycles of growth and the importance of local leadership for the communities.⁵³ Each of these phases resulted in new plants as a result of missionary activity.

Martin Robinson and Stuart Christine, two of the early church planting authors in Britain, give a good biblical and theological context to the discipline by showing what was happening as the early Jewish church suddenly had to make space for Gentile believers. They explain, “For Paul, his work among the Gentiles is much more than just the exploration of a new and potentially vast mission field, it is the means by which the very purpose of God can be worked out for the people of Israel themselves.”⁵⁴ So the establishment of these new communities was not just the way of bringing in more before the end times. It was actually “part of the process by which the end times would be fulfilled.” They go on to assert, “The establishing of churches among the Gentiles is, therefore, an inseparable part of the plan and purpose of God for his world. Church planting is not an optional extra for Christians, it is an intrinsic expression of the redemptive action of God in his world.”⁵⁵

Principles,” Timmis pleads for “a framework for church planting that is theologically informed, biblically literate, historically sensitive and culturally appropriate.” (Page 102).

⁵² Harry Weatherley, *Gaining the Ground: A Study Guide on Church Planting* (Didcot, U.K.: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1994), 15.

⁵³ Acts chs.2-9; 10-11 [esp.11:21]; 12-14 [esp.14:22-23]; 15-16; 17-19.

⁵⁴ Martin Robinson and Stuart Christine, *Church Planting* (Tunbridge Wells, U.K.: Monarch, 1992), 22.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

While church planting does have these eschatological and redemptive dimensions, it is also the most basic expression of the communal implications of the gospel.

Reflecting on Acts 13:1-14:23, another British church planter, Graham Beynon, writes:

“The task of evangelization and seeing people converted doesn’t result in individual believers but the gathering of those believers into new churches....Spreading the Gospel message should result in churches being planted.”⁵⁶ He also notes that, in the New Testament, “A church is known much more for its *functions* than its *form*. Hence when thinking about church planting we must not necessarily think of replicating what we know of as a church... rather we can think very flexibly of any group committed to praying, learning, and growing together.”⁵⁷ This caution against cloning, which became a familiar refrain throughout much of the later literature,⁵⁸ had also been mooted by

Robinson and Christine:

All too often what is planted is actually a replication of older failed structures... It would seem to us to be largely pointless to plant yet more churches of the type that have already failed if we are to come to grips with the missionary context in which we are working... How is it that we have arrived at a situation which is so serious that even though we have some 45,000 congregations in Britain, we have to think in terms of planting yet more congregations in order to produce missionary congregations?⁵⁹

In all of the literature, one of the strongest criticisms of cloning comes from Michael

Moynagh:

⁵⁶ Graham Beynon, *Planting for the Gospel: A Hands-on Guide to Church Planting* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2011), 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁸ See Timmis, “Key Principles”: “Too many assumptions are carried into the plant, so that church planting all too easily degenerates into church cloning.” (Page 108). Anglican bishop Graham Cray says: “One in ten of the Church of England’s church plants has failed, the major reason being that they were not plants but clones.” Quoted by Paul Bayes, *Mission-Shaped Church: Missionary Values, Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church*, Grove Evangelism Series (Cambridge, U.K.: Grove, 2004), 16. See also Murray, 13ff.

⁵⁹ Robinson and Christine, 31.

Instead of molding the plant around the people it was designed to attract, newcomers have been expected to fit into a model that suited the Christians setting it up. The core either copied what they already had or sought to create what was missing from their home “church”. The new congregation was not built *with*, let alone *by* the people it was seeking to reach: it was designed *for* them. And very often the design did not fit.⁶⁰

Aubrey Malphurs, author of a very influential planting guide in the United States, defines church planting as “a planned process of beginning and growing new local churches.”⁶¹ While this was a clear apostolic strategy and activity throughout the book of Acts and the New Testament period in general, Murray warns that “there is a tendency to idealize first century churches in a way that might astound, amuse, or outrage a time-traveling Peter or Paul.”⁶² The challenge for contemporary planters is not to replicate the early churches, which were just as messy, complex, and sin-infected as today’s Christian communities, in all aspects of their life and witness. Rather, it is to recapture the apostolic understanding of the church’s identity and centrality to the purposes of God in history.

Church Planting Literature: A Trickle Turns Into A Flood

Church planting is a relatively recent field of study in its own right. Timmis claims that even the term was virtually unknown before the 1960s,⁶³ and a Church of England Report claims it was virtually non-existent in England in the 1970s.⁶⁴ A search of the catalogue of the National Library of Scotland offers only two titles on church planting

⁶⁰ Michael Moynagh, *Changing World, Changing Church: New Forms of Church, out-of-the-Pew Thinking, Initiatives That Work* (London: Monarch Books, 2001), 108.

⁶¹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the Twenty-First Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992), 21.

⁶² Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1998), 82.

⁶³ Steve Timmis, “Setting the Scene,” in *Multiplying Churches: Reaching Today's Communities through Church Planting*, ed. Steve Timmis (Fearn, Ross-shire, 2000), 15.

⁶⁴ Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, 16.

published in Britain between 1889-1986, both of them dealing with third world situations. The British Library catalogue for the same period yields nineteen titles, and all but two are concerned exclusively with the third world context or historical accounts of planting in the American colonies.

The three exceptions are a 1942 work on church planting in Miami Beach,⁶⁵ Charles Brock's important book from 1981 entitled *Indigenous Church Planting*⁶⁶ which, although dealing primarily with third world missions, did have some clear application to first world contexts, and Monica Hill's 1984 book where she states: "Church planting has been thought irrelevant in most part of Britain during the past sixty years or so. Church planting was done overseas, not at home."⁶⁷ It wasn't until the 1991 publication, a year after Wagner's work, of Charlie Cleverly's appropriately – even prophetically – named *Church Planting, Our Future Hope*,⁶⁸ that new literature on church planting in European situations started emerging.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Elisha Alonzo King, *Planting a Church in a National Playground, Miami Beach, Florida, 1920-1940. [with Plates.]* (Miami: Personal Help Library, 1942).

⁶⁶ Charles Brock, *The Principles and Practice of Indigenous Church Planting* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1981).

⁶⁷ Monica Hill (ed.), *How to Plant Churches* (Bromley, U.K.: MARC Europe, 1984), 9.

⁶⁸ Charlie Cleverly, *Church Planting: Our Future Hope* (London: Scripture Union, 1991). Cleverly charts the genesis of the British movement back to 1989, when Spurgeon's College offered a course in evangelism and church planting – the first in the country – and believes "it is precisely such initiatives from denominations that are needed if the decline in church membership is to be halted." (Page 43). Around the same time, the house church movement (HCM) started to experience real growth as churches were planted "on the hoof." The HCM can be traced back at least as far as 1974 with Roger Forster's Ichthus Fellowship, although one wonders just how a congregation who by 1991 had over seventeen hundred members in thirty-three congregations can be termed a "house church" rather than a multi-site church, quasi-network, or even a denomination.

⁶⁹ Bob Hopkins of the Church Army did produce two small booklets in the Grove series in the late 1980s. Bob Hopkins, *Church Planting 1, Models for Mission in the Church of England*, Grove Booklets on Evangelism, No. 4. (Bramcote, Notts.: Grove Books, 1988); Bob Hopkins, *Church Planting 2, Some Experiences and Challenges*, Grove Booklets on Evangelism, No. 8. (Bramcote, Notts.: Grove Books, 1989).

The influence of Wagner and the Church Growth Movement looms large over the early works that emerged at the start of the 1990s. Lyle Schaller, for example, advises planters to start with a couple of hundred people to avoid the church getting trapped into “a small-church syndrome.”⁷⁰ Samuel Faircloth,⁷¹ is clearly influenced by Wagner and is strong on management theory,⁷² although he has some helpful things to say regarding sustainability, building, and finance. For example, he believes it is dangerous to model fledgling churches that they need to support large expensive churches and structures in order to have a viable church planting operation. He argues, “The fact is that we do not need such a facade any more than Paul did. It is a blind alley.”⁷³ However, in spite of his focus on easily reproducible models and his appreciation of the work of Roland Allen⁷⁴ he doesn’t develop this to the extent of considering bivocational planting.

The other significant American author from this period onwards was Aubrey Malphurs. His *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century* has been revised and

⁷⁰ Lyle E. Schaller, *44 Questions for Church Planters* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1991), 68. It is interesting that over a decade later Steve Sjogren and Rob Lewin (who do promote bivocationalism in planting) still seem governed by traditional CGM principles and refer to a church that, over a number of years, has less than two hundred, as “a toxic situation.” Steve Sjogren and Rob Lewin, *Community of Kindness* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2003), 170.

⁷¹ Samuel D. Faircloth, *Church Planting for Reproduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991).

⁷² Particularly in his use of the PERT planning tool defined and expounded in his second chapter.

⁷³ Faircloth, 133.

⁷⁴ Roland Allen’s pioneering work is discussed in greater detail below in the section “Vocation, Work and Ministry”. Faircloth speaks of Allen’s “strong stand against financing property and other large investments.” He also quotes approvingly David Hesselgrave’s reflection on the thought of Roland Allen: “the planting of churches early becomes a basically ‘secular business’ [Allen’s phrase] involving negotiations for real estate, agreements with contractor, and supervision of construction as well as the raising of funds for the entire operation. In this we are as far removed from apostolic practice in action as we are in time... When church planters become first ‘ministers of finance’ and only secondarily ‘ministers of the Word’, we have strayed from New Testament principles and have jeopardized the future of our mission in the world.” David J. Hesselgrave and Earl J. Blomberg, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980). Quoted by Faircloth, 134.

updated several times since it came out in 1992. Malphurs wrote this comprehensive book because not many have the type of planting vision he believes is necessary to reach the unchurched, and “a significant number of those who have caught this vision are implementing it the wrong way and experiencing failure and disillusionment.”⁷⁵ He cites cloning as the most common cause of this and instead advocates a biblical strategy that takes seriously the planter’s unique identity, unique location and unique community. His foundational principles, however, are deeply rooted in the assumptions of the church growth movement, and he has an important section defending the importance of numerical growth.⁷⁶ The first edition of the book takes the prospective planter through seven vital characteristics of the plant (covering areas of vision, leadership, equipping, worship, and cultural relevance), and goes on to outline the six stages of a plant, which are analogous to the process of human reproduction. Bivocationalism is acknowledged, but only as a last resort.⁷⁷

As previously mentioned, Cleverley blazed the trail in Britain. Since he was essentially speaking about virgin territory for the British churches, much of the book sought to justify the need for planting and to answer objections. Although he is Anglican, he displays a principled inter-denominationalism: “Church planting is not a strategy that is the property of any particular denomination or movement. Things are too urgent for that and the dynamic is too big for any group to claim ownership of it.”⁷⁸ He particularly points the finger at elements of mainline church polity that actively hinder planting. For example, instead of wondering about whether or not a plant preserves the tradition of the

⁷⁵ Malphurs, 16.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 60-64.

⁷⁷ See section below on “Bivocationalism.”

⁷⁸ Cleverly, 26.

denomination, he believes that the Church of England “must not only drop its concern for style and ethos but also for parish boundaries.”⁷⁹ In this, he is a little gentler than two other noteworthy Anglican commentators: Bob Hopkins who caricatures parish boundaries as “a line drawn round thousands of people to protect them from hearing the Gospel,”⁸⁰ and David Pytches, who refers to parish boundaries as “the condom of the Anglican Church, impeding natural reproduction.”⁸¹ Cleverley concludes that the Church of England “...must recognize and rejoice that many of its clergy and thousands of its members are Christians first and Anglicans second. They are more concerned with the lost and how best to win them than with maintaining traditions.”⁸²

Of the books which took up the baton passed on by Cleverley, *Radical Church Planting*, edited by Roger Ellis and Roger Mitchell,⁸³ did mention bivocational planting. Roger Forster’s chapter is significant in that it appears to be one of the first to classify the different options of church plant available to the planter.⁸⁴ Martin Robinson and Stuart Christine’s *Church Planting* also came from this period. Robinson was to become a leading planting advocate and thinker on the British scene. In the much later follow-up

⁷⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁰ Hopkins, *Church Planting 2., Some Experiences and Challenges*, 21.

⁸¹ Quoted by Robinson and Christine, 134. Alistair Kennedy makes the same point about parish boundaries within Irish Presbyterianism, regarding them as “inflexible and a barrier to mission.” Alistair Kennedy, “Through a glass darkly: a look at the future of church planting” (Part 2), *Presbyterian Herald*, April 1993, 23.

⁸² Cleverley, 70. See also Sjogren and Lewin. These American authors warn that worrying whether or not something is the denomination’s style will “handcuff you and keep you from church planting effectiveness.” (Page 26). Robinson and Christine remark that while planting can revive an ailing denomination, the motivation should be the cure of souls: “the salvation of our denominations cannot be an adequate motive for the establishing of new churches.” (Page 45)

⁸³ Roger Ellis and Roger Mitchell, *Radical Church Planting* (Cambridge, U.K.: Crossway Books, 1992).

⁸⁴ Ibid., 65-85. His eight alliterative models are: mass-evangelism, mega church, “maybe” church, mushroom church, mobile church, mini-mission, mother church and multi-cell church.

book, *Planting Mission-shaped Churches Today*, he critiques this earlier work as too mechanistic, preferring a more organic approach.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, *Church Planting* did raise some important issues. In line with the Presbyterian statistics quoted in chapter one of this dissertation, they showed historically how new churches established in Britain over previous centuries were not so much missionary endeavors, but rather “the provision of worship centers for those who already believed.”⁸⁶ This heart-cry for missionary congregations is a seam that runs through the book. They believe that because the pastor-teacher model has dominated ecclesiological thinking, there has not been ample opportunity for the development of those with the gifts of a pioneer/apostle or an evangelist:

Such people have either become overseas missionaries, or they have had significant involvement in parachurch structures, or they have begun new denominations!... If the West is ever to have significant numbers of local missionary churches, then church planting needs to take place on a scale that most mainline denominations have not yet considered possible.⁸⁷

They also maintain, quoting Clay Price and Phil Jones, that newer, smaller churches are more evangelistically effective:

Newer churches are, as a rule, more effective than older, larger ones.... in bringing new people into the active life of the church.... Churches less than 10 years of age with fewer than 100 in average attendance are twice as efficient in reaching new people as churches more than 10 years of age with more than 100 in average attendance.⁸⁸

This statistic will recur in future literature as the planting movement gathers momentum on both sides of the Atlantic.

⁸⁵ Martin Robinson, *Planting Mission-Shaped Churches Today* (Oxford, U.K.: Monarch Books, 2006), 8.

⁸⁶ Robinson and Christine, 25.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 32-33.

⁸⁸ From Clay L Price and Phil Jones, *A Study of the Relationship of Church Size and Church Age to Number of Baptisms and the Baptism Rate* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1978), 8-9. Quoted by Robinson and Christine, 45.

Robinson and Christine's book introduced to a British audience many of the materials and methodologies which would be *de rigueur* for planters over the next two decades: demographic research, prophetic strategic planning, personnel choice, cultural contextualization, and consideration of different models. They also answered the objections that regularly surfaced in those early days, and which are still not unknown especially in mainline contexts such as PCI where a planting movement has not yet taken root. Of particular note is how they deal with the "planting versus revitalization" option, seeing revitalization as laudable but difficult to achieve:

It is a sad fact that many such congregations are unwilling to let go of ways that though they might have served the kingdom well in the past, no longer do so. It must be asked if it is good stewardship of kingdom resources to perpetuate ineffective activity. Sometimes a cure is not possible and there must be death before resurrection can take place!⁸⁹

During the rest of the 1990s, the literature essentially built on or adapted the methodologies of these earlier works. In the United States, Kevin Mannoia sought to take it to the next level and outline how an agency or denomination could become, in essence, a church planting movement.⁹⁰ Firmly believing that denominations have a future,⁹¹ and

⁸⁹ Robinson and Christine, 142.

⁹⁰ For documentary evidence on how such movements have led to the rapid expansion of the church in non-Western settings, see V. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, Va: Office of Overseas Operations, International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1999).

⁹¹ Kevin W. Mannoia, *Church Planting: The Next Generation: Introducing the Century 21 Church Planting System* (Indianapolis: Light and Life Press, 1994). "I do not support the oft-repeated statement that the church is moving into a post-denominational era. Conversely, more and more people, pastors and churches are asking for the kind of support, accountability and multi-generational stability available only through some type of denominational connection." Ibid., 146. See also Moynagh who proposes that his "fragmented but connected" paradigm "...addresses questions of church organization by affirming denominations, but resisting the domination of local church by them; by embracing both neighborhood and network churches, not choosing between them, and by enabling 'congregation' and 'church' to become empowering labels that emphasize interdependence, not independence." Moynagh, 100-106, 155.

noting the need for a new genre of leader, the “strategic mobilizer,”⁹² he advocated an alliance between pioneers and administrators. He explained, “Bureaucrats without entrepreneurs will wind up in a vicious cycle of self-preservation and protectionism. Entrepreneurs without bureaucrats will find themselves with shallow, disorganized, flash-in-the-pan programs. We really are one body with many parts.”⁹³

Harvie Conn⁹⁴ became a strong advocate for a rigorous and theologically reasoned urban planting movement, fearing that much of what was happening was restricted to “Middle America.” In this, he was an acknowledged influence on fellow-reformed urban spokesman Tim Keller,⁹⁵ who succeeded in putting planting firmly on the agenda of many Presbyterian communities.

In the 1990s, a number of practical handbooks or toolkits emerged, similar to the one published by Logan & Ogne⁹⁶ in 1991, with outlines, checklists and action planning lists. Peter Nodding⁹⁷ and Harry Weatherley were both writing within the British Baptist scene, while Martin Robinson produced one in conjunction with David Spriggs.⁹⁸ Weatherley’s book begins with a quote from Lewis Misslebrook that is as clear and comprehensive a definition of planting as one is likely to find in the literature:

To gather, under the hand of God, a body of people committed to Christ, worshipping together and working together to become educated, trained, and

⁹² Mannoia, 32.

⁹³ Ibid., 39-40.

⁹⁴ Harvie M. Conn, *Planting and Growing Urban Churches: From Dream to Reality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997).

⁹⁵ See Tim Keller and Allen Thompson, *Church Planter Manual* (New York: Redeemer Church Planting Network, n.d.).

⁹⁶ Robert E. Logan and Steven L. Ogne, *The Church Planter's Toolkit: A Self-Study Resource Kit for Church Planters and Those Who Supervise Them* (Anaheim, Calif.: CRM Publishing, 1994).

⁹⁷ Peter Nodding, *Local Church Planting: A Practical Handbook* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994).

⁹⁸ Martin Robinson and David Spriggs, *Church Planting: The Training Manual* (Oxford, U.K.: Lion Hudson, 1995).

equipped to be Christ's people in the community in which they are set, seeking and pursuing the meanings and purposes of Christ in every part of their lives both personally and corporately.⁹⁹

Nodding's book is full of wisdom on how this might be realized and is helpful in that it majors on the relational aspects more than the methodological minutiae. He emphasizes the relational qualities needed in the planter, particularly with regard to others in the congregation,¹⁰⁰ and gives good advice on how good relationships with neighboring churches can be maintained.¹⁰¹ While discouraging a competitive independency in attitude, he still favors one group taking responsibility for the plant, in that ecumenical experiments often come at the expense of clarity and fruitfulness. He shares, "Although an ecumenical approach appears to be right, because it demonstrates our unity in diversity, I remain to be convinced that it encourages the most fruitful evangelism... Indeed, often the emphasis is firmly placed on the unity of Christians and not on reaching those who are unchurched."¹⁰²

Stuart Murray – missiologist, planter, author, and founder of a church planting network in Britain – has been one of the foremost influences in this field over the past two decades. In 1998 he published the first of his major works on the subject: *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*. Tim Chester, who challenges Murray on a few of his major themes, nevertheless describes the theological, non-mechanistic approach of this book as "a breath of fresh air."¹⁰³ The early part of the book looks at the theological and biblical framework for planting, and progresses to look at the type of Christian

⁹⁹ Quoted by Weatherley, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 25-31.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰² Ibid., 137.

¹⁰³ See <http://timchester.wordpress.com/2009/12/10/thursday-review-stuart-murray-on-planting-churches/>, part of a review of Murray's later book, accessed 14th February 2012.

community envisaged (an omission from many American books which often assume a given model) and the structures and leadership required for each (including bivocational leadership), before outlining the multitude of options and models open to a planter at the turn of the twenty-first century.

He proposes that the surest way that churches can be encouraged to reproduce is to work with the cultural mindset of whole communities rather than resourcing a few activists:

The determination to plant so many churches so quickly may be at the expense of seemingly less exciting, but potentially more fruitful, attempts to transform the mentality of churches and denominations, so that church planting is recovered as a natural activity of all churches, rather than the hobby of enthusiasts.¹⁰⁴

Although Murray believes that radical rethinking is inevitable before real growth can occur, he recognizes that it is the process of re-evaluation and asking the fundamental questions that is valuable in itself, rather than change for its own sake. He explains, “Asking radical structural questions does not always result in the rejection of tried and tested answers.”¹⁰⁵

Murray asks a lot of questions, rather than being prescriptive, and this shows that there are numerous options available, not just in terms of how the plant begins (mother/daughter, ecumenical, colonization, team, satellite) – which is actually his final section – but more importantly what is being planted (a missionary community, mega-church, multi-site church, postmodern church). His seventh chapter on the ethos of the

¹⁰⁴ Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*, 102.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 204. Elsewhere, he writes: “The problem with cloning is not that many features of church continue unchanged, but that the opportunity to assess these and explore alternatives is squandered.” Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 137.

church draws a lot on his oft-repeated convictions regarding “post-Christendom,”¹⁰⁶ and as such offers for consideration various types of communities from the fringes who would not sit easily with the general evangelical milieu presupposed by most church planting literature.

However, regardless of the churchmanship of those involved, Murray is adamant that the denomination and planter must clarify their objectives and expectations. Competing or conflicting expectations can lead to friction and a real or apparent sense of failure. This has been documented by David Snapper in an analysis of new church developments (NCDs) in the Christian Reformed Church USA (CRC). He critiques the imposition of inappropriate church-growth paradigms to all new church developments regardless of context and laments the “untested, reductionistic theology of Church Growth based on what I believe is an Arminian soteriology and failed sociology.”¹⁰⁷

He argued that the Church Growth Movement’s tendency to define success narrowly led to unrealistic expectations of planters: “American church planting began to focus on quantifiability (numbers) and accountability (technique),” while the words of Donald McGavran and others “ignited the tinder of American pragmatism.”¹⁰⁸

For the purposes of this study, Snapper’s research is important in that the CRC and the PCI share more similarities in terms of theology and organization than the Anabaptist or Pentecostal communities which constitute the majority of modern church planting examples. Like the PCI, the CRC is experiencing an overall membership slump at the time of this dissertation’s writing, and yet they invested over nine million dollars in

¹⁰⁶ See Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ Snapper, "Unfulfilled Expectations of Church Planting," 486.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 466.

church planting in one year alone in the mid 1990s.¹⁰⁹ In spite of Snapper's mixed report on their success, their commitment to planting is worth noting.

The church planting literature often differentiates between "cold plants" (those planted from outside through denominational or other funding, where no similar church previously existed nearby) and "sponsored plants" (those planted from a nearby congregation). Snapper shows how virtually all of the plants supervised from a central mission board struggled, while many that were planted and supervised by a stronger local church fared better. He also shows how geographical proximity to denominational headquarters increased the statistical likelihood of the NCD's success. He concludes that rarely can NCDs be "established successfully without the nurture of a nearby CRC community."¹¹⁰ These are findings that may have application in the Irish context.

The New Millennium: A Change In Perspective?

Laying Foundations was somewhat of a watershed, in that it paved the way for a new strand of planting literature that was less formulaic and more reflective on what planters and denominations were trying to achieve. In 2000, Steve Timmis, future co-author of the influential *Total Church*, edited *Multiplying Churches*, in which one can discern a similar move away from some of the presuppositions of the Church Growth Movement and towards smaller, more relational models. He maintains that the gospel opportunity should determine the timing and place of a plant rather than adequate funding for what earlier writers would have seen as pre-requisites before launching. He argues, "Church planting does not have to wait until there are sufficient funds to rent a large school hall, or support a full-time minister. Neither is it vital that a constitution be

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 464.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 486.

written, a pulpit purchased, hymnbooks acquired, nor quality musicians found to lead the first ‘public’ meeting.”¹¹¹

A much simpler approach to planting, says Tim Chester in his essay, presents “an opportunity to re-invent church along radical biblical lines”¹¹² in much the same way that the apostles did in the light of the Gentile conversions, as recorded in Acts 10-15. He writes: “Good church planting forces us to re-ask questions about the gospel and church; to re-invent churches that are both biblical without religious tradition and relevant without worldly conformity.”¹¹³ Throughout this book, the contributors emphasize the need to keep the gospel message central, to revisit the biblical story, and to realize that less is often more. Timmis continues:

To many people, church is synonymous with buildings, Sunday meetings, constitutions, officers, printed programs, music groups, PA systems etc. But this is far from the truth. As Luke has shown us... church is a group of God’s people gathered together committed to apostolic doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. All criteria that can be fulfilled by the smallest of groups.¹¹⁴

Tim Thornborough notes the sheer variety of ways in which true gospel communities can emerge in contrast to the rather monochrome templates provided by the CGM. He believes an unthinking adoption of CGM methods could not only be unwise and inappropriate, but also theologically and spiritually dangerous. He explains:

The impression given by much church growth literature...is that there is a magic formula which will cure all ills and lead to revival. Such promises are attractive, as are the mega-churches that tantalizingly model them. But perhaps their real attraction lies in the way they offer growth without risk, or even, dare I say it, without faith in the living God who gives the growth.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Steve Timmis, “Setting the Scene,” in *Multiplying Churches*, 18-19.

¹¹² Tim Chester, “A Theological Perspective,” in *Multiplying Churches*, 27.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹¹⁴ Steve Timmis, “Key Principles,” in *Multiplying Churches*, 109.

¹¹⁵ Tim Thornborough, “Contemporary initiatives from around the world,” in *Multiplying Churches*, 101.

Tim Chester sets out the biblical basis for having smaller congregational expressions:

The household model of New Testament practice embodies key apostolic principles. The apostolic church chose to divide, rather than grow beyond what could be accommodated in a home, to safeguard apostolic principles of church life. Household determines a *size* in which mutual discipleship and care can realistically take place....The church in the New Testament grew by dividing, not by building larger auditoriums.¹¹⁶

These convictions are shared by Moynagh. In contrast to much of the North American literature, especially in the 1990s, which advocated starting with over a hundred and presupposed an exponential increase in numbers,¹¹⁷ he sets out to encourage leaders of small churches to have planting in mind from the outset: “No church need be too small to help spawn a new congregation.”¹¹⁸ Although “many small church leaders are frantically busy just keeping their heads above water...(and) new forms of church, it seems, may never get a look in,” he encourages them with the statistic that there is “a clear link between congregational size and the probability of growth;” namely, the smaller the church, the higher percentage chance of growth in ten years.¹¹⁹

So, for these authors, the size of the church does matter: the very apostolic principles of congregational life demand that it be small enough for everyone to be adequately cared for, equipped, and sent out. The fact that these emerging communities should not become ends in themselves, but rather have further future multiplication as part of their DNA, is seen from Chester’s hard-hitting comment: “It may be that a fiftieth

¹¹⁶ Chester, “A Theological Perspective,” in *Multiplying Churches*, 41-42.

¹¹⁷ See especially Sjogren and Lewin, Malphurs, Schaller. “Although it is easier to begin with a couple dozen enthusiastic pioneers who enjoy being together, it may be wiser to plan that a) the first worship service will exceed two hundred people and b) the attendance will not drop below two hundred in that first formative year. This may mean an attendance of three or four or five hundred on that first Sunday.” Schaller, 69.

¹¹⁸ Moynagh, 179.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

church anniversary is not an occasion to celebrate the faithfulness of God, but one to lament the stagnation of his people.”¹²⁰

Chester, particularly, challenges some of the theological conclusions Murray makes in *Laying Foundations*, especially in the area of the relationship between ecclesiology and missiology. He maintains that, in places, Murray confuses church planting with denominational expansion and dichotomizes church planting and social justice. The result is that he does not see planting as an end in itself but as an agent of mission. “But,” writes Chester, “what sense does that statement make if at the heart of God’s mission is the saving for himself of a people?”¹²¹ “Surely,” he argues, “it is the church that makes manifest the eternal reconciling purposes of God.”¹²² He has a similar problem with Bosch’s accusation that the Christendom church had ceased to point to God, but pointed instead at itself. Chester says this is: “deceptively attractive, but runs contrary to biblical missiology. The heart of Old Testament mission is precisely the fact that by pointing to themselves as they embody life under the rule of God, the people of God draw attention to God himself.”¹²³

In *Total Church*, co-authored with Timmis, Chester summarizes two different views of the interplay between missiology and ecclesiology, before pointing out their *media res*:

It is sometimes said that those committed to church planting fall into two camps. The first camp are those whose primary concern is with mission and who see church (in the form of church planting) as the most biblical or most convenient way to pursue their commitment to mission. The primary concern of the second camp is the church. They see mission (in the form of church planting) as the best way to pursue their radical vision of the church... There is a third camp: those

¹²⁰ Chester, “A Theological Perspective,” in *Multiplying Churches*, 26.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

whose primary concern is gospel-centered communities, whose priority is the gospel and who see Christian community as the natural expression of the gospel.¹²⁴

It is this over-riding, almost symbiotic unity of missiology and ecclesiology that characterizes the thought of writers such as Chester and Timmis, enabling them to advocate a rigorous church planting strategy without being bound to one particular model.

Meeting the Cultural Challenge: Has Church Planting Had Its Day?

While the motivation for this shift away from a church growth model to smaller more relational models may have been mainly theological, there were undoubtedly major cultural and intellectual changes taking place in wider society that, if not prompting a re-examination of church planting practice and expectations, certainly facilitated the change. The well-documented transition from modernism to post-modernism is reflected in titles and sub-titles such as Ed Stetzer's *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch's, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Michael Moynagh's *Changing World, Changing Church: New Forms of Church, Out-Of-The-Pew Thinking, Initiatives That Work*, and Stuart Murray's *Planting Churches in the 21st Century : A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*.

Stetzer recognises that things are not what they once were. He writes that many of the earlier methods "no longer work as well as they once did. The rapidly changing cultural landscape (requires) that we use different methods to be successful."¹²⁵ While the book offers useful challenges regarding denominational strategy and considers the

¹²⁴ Chester and Timmis, 94.

¹²⁵ Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 4.

bivocational option,¹²⁶ it is not evident that his definition of “success” is any different from that of the CGM,¹²⁷ and the rest of the book offers little by way of an alternative methodology. He writes well of the changing world of postmoderns and how many “feel as if they are entering an alien culture when encountering evangelical Christianity. It is not the job of the unchurched postmodern to enter our culture,” he says; rather, “it is our job to invade theirs.”¹²⁸ However, the later sections, especially the fifth, on “starting off right,” are weighted heavily towards the programmatic and familiar worlds of direct mail, telemarketing, e-mail blitzes and “big launches.”¹²⁹

Similarly Sjogren and Lewin’s book is presented like a postmodern reader on church planting, with its almost random collection of over one hundred principles and its claim to be approaching the subject from a much more relational and community-based perspective. However, notwithstanding its style, it still reflects many of the presuppositions of the earlier period in terms of the birthing process and the size of the plant. So, for example, although they do have a section entitled: “Be willing to start small,” in which they assert that “part of the reason size becomes an issue, is arrogance and pride,”¹³⁰ nevertheless, as noted earlier, they do seem to be bound to a paradigm

¹²⁶ See notes 348, 350 below.

¹²⁷ Contrast Murray’s comment that until the turn of the century, there were certain expectations and a clear idea of what was meant by success, and if expectations were met, no one asked any questions about effectiveness, methodology, relevance, or indigenous leadership, yet “these are precisely the questions we need to ask about church planting.” Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 21.

¹²⁸ Stetzer, 140.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, 258ff. See also: “Statistical evidence supports that new churches utilizing a big-launch method are larger than those that do not.” (Page 263).

¹³⁰ Sjogren and Lewin, 77-79.

where two hundred plus attendees, while not necessary at the beginning, should be the aspiration, or, they claim, the church will struggle.¹³¹

Much more radical in its assessment of how churches may need to interact with postmodern culture is Hirsch and Frost's analysis. In line with Murray's post-Christendom thesis, they regard their "missional model" to be "the hope of the post-Christendom era. Many of the new Protestant church movements of recent years" they claim, "are simply variations on the old Christendom mode."¹³² Likewise, "the heart of the problem is that we have been planting churches that are (smaller) carbon copies of the already beleaguered, failing Christendom-style church."¹³³ While they subscribe to Murray's dichotomy (contra Chester/Timmis) "Don't think church, think mission,"¹³⁴ they maintain a rigorous commitment to theological orthodoxy and the necessary future of the church,¹³⁵ while being prepared to go to whatever lengths are necessary to engage with a fragmented and searching culture, encouraging postmodern planters to "hold fast to the core but experiment like wild with the expression."¹³⁶

They draw attention to analysis conducted by Murray and Wilkinson-Hayes, who suggested reasons why "church planting has gone bust;" not least the fact that "the

¹³¹ Ibid., 169-171.

¹³² Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 17.

¹³³ Ibid., 18. That a Church Growth outlook, with an overt reliance on secular business methodology, is not completely dead, can be seen from a book published as recently as 2010 and with the bold (ironic?) title *Church Planting with Paul*, but which contains chapters entitled: "look for opportunities for success;" "find your market;" "write that successful business plan;" "work the plan;" and "controlling the campaign and evaluation results." See Larry Waltman, *Church Planting with Paul: 7 Ancient Concepts, 7 Successful Marketing Techniques to Use for Church Planting Today* (New York: iUniverse, 2010).

¹³⁴ Frost and Hirsch, 81.

¹³⁵ "In Paul's writings he employed the term *ekklesia* in a way that can only refer to an actual gathering of people, not to some ethereal theological concept." Ibid., 77. They also speak of communities having the freedom to "self-theologize," but deny that this means that doctrine is negotiable. (Page 74).

¹³⁶ Frost and Hirsch, 80.

dominance of personnel-intensive models of church planting have discouraged smaller churches from becoming involved.”¹³⁷ Elsewhere, Murray has complained: “How does a small church planting team draw on training material that assumes far more resources and personnel than they have?”¹³⁸ There is, he believes, a need radically to reconfigure the expectations of planters and sending agencies/ denominations: “The formation of a distinct congregation that meets regularly in a designated place may be much further down the track than church planters have often assumed. It may also look very different from the expectations of those who deploy and support them.”¹³⁹ Murray asserts that a close look at so-called “successful” plants will show that much growth was transfer, and that the new churches were often little more than clones of the sending churches. He continues, “Few seized the opportunity to engage in serious theological reflection on the culture in which they were planting and how to contextualize the gospel in the local community.”¹⁴⁰ Moynagh is also critical of the parasitic tendencies of mega-churches in relation to the wider Christian community and the disillusionment this can cause to pastors attempting to replicate an inappropriate model in their local situation. He laments, “They ignore how different their circumstances are, or how beacon churches often achieve growth by drawing Christians away from smaller churches.” He then asks the

¹³⁷ Stuart Murray and Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, *Hope from the Margins* (Cambridge, U.K.: Grove, 2000). Quoted by Frost and Hirsch, 18.

¹³⁸ Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 26.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 25. He also remarks: “Expectations of the planting agency may be expressed in terms of measurable outcomes within a specified time frame.” He recounts stories of those who are planting a new contextualized community, but “their funding is under threat because their mission agency operates with attractional and short-term expectations.” (Page 148).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

searching question: “What will happen to these ‘successful’ churches when their small-church feeder-systems dry up?”¹⁴¹

However, Murray discerns a new wave of planters who “are not operating within a ‘church growth’ paradigm but a ‘cross-cultural mission’ paradigm.” Nor are they “in thrall to imposed success criteria, goals and time frames.” This is especially important for those seeking to plant in “marginalized subcultures and networks” or “in neighborhoods suffering the effects of multiple forms of poverty and deprivation.”¹⁴²

The disillusionment arising from unrealized expectations as outlined by Murray, Snapper and others, led to a noticeable antipathy towards church planting in many denominational circles around the turn of the century.¹⁴³ Murray begins *Planting Churches* by recognising this suspicion.¹⁴⁴ He observes a degree of opposition to any renewed planting initiative from across the ecclesiastical spectrum: disillusioned ex-church planters, denominational leaders unconvinced about its worth and wary of investing limited budgets, leaders whose sacramental or mega-church ideology revolted

¹⁴¹ Moynagh, 13.

¹⁴² Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 13-14.

¹⁴³ In English circles this was due in part to the apparent failure of the DAWN initiative. See also Robinson, 20-29. Murray claims the focus was on “speed and quantity rather than quality”—on how many churches to plant, rather than what kind of church to plant: “Many did not think it necessary to spend much time wondering what kind of church to plant. They assumed they knew what church was and concentrated on the planting process. Those who did ask questions about what kind of church to plant were generally interested in making adjustments to familiar models rather than exploring radically different possibilities.” (Page 133). *Mission Shaped Church* names “poor planning, leadership issues, inward-looking focus, cultural blindness, part-time leadership and lack of resources.” Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, 22. Murray also observes how, after a glut in the early 1990s, there were no significant inter-agency church-planting conferences in Britain from 1995 to 2006. See also <http://www.encountersontheedge.org.uk> (accessed 2nd January, 2012), for stories of church planting failures and an analysis of the reasons.

¹⁴⁴ For a more positive take on Anglican planting during this period see Bayes, 6. He concentrates on the activism that led to a ninety percent success rate.

against anything informal or amateurish, and emergent pioneers with no desire to perpetuate the traditional and failed methodologies of yesterday.¹⁴⁵ Countering such disillusionment wasn't helped by the fact that "Most books on church planting are out of print, out of date, or written for a different context than... post-Christendom Europe."¹⁴⁶ Even British books on the subject "were published during the first half of the 1990s and are out of print and rather dated."¹⁴⁷

However, Murray remains convinced that churches and agencies need to learn from the mistakes of the past, and that "church planting is a crucial component in any mission strategy in our post-Christendom Western societies."¹⁴⁸ Among the main failures he identifies are: superficial or non-existent research, inadequate training, serious leadership deficiencies, launching too early, relying on attractional evangelistic methods, unrealistic expectations, cultural insensitivity and lack of contextualization, plus (Chester's particular concern) putting church before mission.¹⁴⁹

Murray's threefold vision is that leaders begin to discern forms of church planting that are "contextually sensitive, missionally attuned, and ecclesially imaginative."¹⁵⁰ While recognizing that the church planting language fell out of favour for a while because some found it imperialistic and precluded reflection on what sort of churches today's culture needs, he feels it is necessary to rehabilitate the language of church

¹⁴⁵ Murray suggests the reason behind British church planting decreasing in the 1990s was "that many planting churches had not anticipated the pain involved in the process." (Page 112).

¹⁴⁶ Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 13. See also George Lings and Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Past, Present and Future*, Grove Evangelism Series (Cambridge, U.K.: Grove Books, 2003).

¹⁵⁰ Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 16.

planting if the term is “again to convey images of adventure, exploration, provisionality, creativity, gentleness, and humility rather than imperialism, imposition, colonization, insensitivity, and marketing.”¹⁵¹

Furthermore, cultural change will necessitate a complete reassessment of the contemporary usefulness of some of the treasured methodologies of the earlier literature, especially if the trans-Atlantic differences are ignored. As Murray notes, “In British society, goals do not motivate people; in postmodern culture, goals seem modernistic and pretentious; in the cross-cultural planting context that predominates today and means each situation is different, goals often appear arbitrary.”¹⁵² While planning and having aims is important, goals should not become prescriptive or burdensome. Instead “a clear statement of purpose” should suffice.

Murray’s book engages robustly and critically with both traditional church planting thinking and emergent post-modern culture. He does not let the latter “off the hook,”¹⁵³ exhorting, “Dogmatic iconoclasm is no more attractive than dogmatic traditionalism...Church planters need a more nuanced, self-aware, and humble stance, courageously pioneering creative possibilities without denigrating what has gone before

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 17-18. Interestingly, “colonization” is the actual term used throughout the literature for one particular model of planting, and is even discussed by Murray himself in his earlier book. See Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*; Robinson and Spriggs; Hopkins, *Church Planting 2., Some Experiences and Challenges*; Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006); Wagner.

¹⁵² Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 149.

¹⁵³ For example, he argues that if evangelicals were criticized for not having a holistic view of mission, the emergents could equally be criticized for having an irrational (and unbiblical) antipathy towards evangelism. As a result, “This opposite missional imbalance will mean they are parasitic on the evangelizing churches they criticize and may eventually lead to their demise.” (Page 21).

or depriving themselves of potent resources.”¹⁵⁴ The body of the book deals with the usual issues of motivation to plant, models of planting, location,¹⁵⁵ and time frame,¹⁵⁶ but with a real sensitivity to the changing context outlined above.

This feeling of potential dislocation which the church could so easily feel amidst such change is taken up by Alan Roxburgh in a seminal essay “Reframing Denominations from a Missional Perspective.”¹⁵⁷ He refers to the beginning of the twenty-first century as a period of “liminality” and says that even the vocabulary of “postmodernism” and “emergent” displays “a tentative language for a liminal time.”¹⁵⁸ He observes how much denominational energy is directed at structural reorganization, policy and procedure, programs to address growth, evangelism or new church development, leadership development and role redefinition, and personnel reductions because of falling budgets. He concludes, “Such responses simply do not address the issues of legitimacy, identity, and transformation in an environment of discontinuous

¹⁵⁴ Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 137-138. He also warns of the self-indulgence that can be a danger in a micro-analysis of church and culture: “I know of situations where a beautiful, radical, and culturally cool church never got off the drawing board because there was no energy left actually to plant it.” (Page 136).

¹⁵⁵ Murray (Page 105) has an interesting take on the post-modern tendency to reuse old defunct buildings because of an understanding of “sacred space,” what some have poignantly called “reopening the old wells.” At one level, he says, this may be a “rejection of the functionality of modernity and sensitivity to the emerging spirituality of a postmodern culture” (i.e. such people will not be attracted to plastic chairs in soul-less community centers). On the other hand, it may also be “a return to Christendom or even to pagan notions that designate holy places.”

¹⁵⁶ Murray is convinced that most plants fail because they are launched too quickly rather than too slowly: “church-planting ventures are damaged or jeopardized by precipitate action, rushing ahead without adequate preparation or consultation.” (Page 109).

¹⁵⁷ In Craig Van Gelder, *The Missional Church and Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity*, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 75-103.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

change.”¹⁵⁹ But the situation is not without hope. Following David Bosch, he believes, “The Spirit continually disrupts the settled assumptions and structures of God’s people when these assumptions and structures come to define the extent and shape of God’s kingdom.”¹⁶⁰ Ian Coffey and Eddie Gibbs similarly believe that the church at the beginning of this century is at what they call a “strategic inflection point” or, more theologically, “a kairos moment, which is a special God-appointed time when significant factors converge to provoke the need for decisive action.”¹⁶¹ Like Roxburgh, they refer to the liminality of the current era, but see it positively as “a state not of limbo but of dynamic transition.”¹⁶²

Of the cultural changes presented to the church by postmodernity, Moynagh isolates three for consideration as “epoch-making.” These include a new consumerism, option paralysis (a world typified by “hyper-choice”), and the contradictory worlds of work and leisure. This last one, he feels, offers particular opportunities to the church – ones which Christians could find themselves well-equipped to meet:

Becoming sensitive to the different mindsets of work and leisure would be a step away from a one-size-fits-all approach to evangelism....Instead of dragging people at work to us, church would start going to them. It would be church that fits – not just those who’ve come in, but those who are currently outside.¹⁶³

Moynagh believes that the worlds of faith and work have been pulled apart in the minds of Christians because the concerns of full-time ministers, which are inevitably church-based, take precedence over lay concerns. He also sees how the church has become “trapped by the domestic agenda” because “organized church has been left to minister to

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 92.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 98.

¹⁶¹ Ian Coffey and Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Leicester, U.K.: Inter-Varsity, 2001), 37-38.

¹⁶² Ibid., 219.

¹⁶³ Moynagh, 64.

people at home but not at work, and so inevitably family-type issues dominate its thinking.”¹⁶⁴

Moynagh paints a picture of a “fragmented but connected” church which he believes to be not too different from the church in Acts: “connected fragments were the essence of the New Testament church.”¹⁶⁵ Unlike most current church models, which are based on where people live rather than where they work, Moynagh proposes smaller networks based on work and leisure, with a hub acting as a central resource and “doing traditional church” for those for whom that is still a valid and preferred expression.¹⁶⁶ This is in part inspired by his conviction that “people have not abandoned groups, they have fled particular types of group – and church is one of those groups.”¹⁶⁷ The transience of some of the networks¹⁶⁸ (which Moynagh deliberately sees as churches, not ministry groups) displays a lack of permanence which is beyond the imagination of many traditional churchgoers, whose families perhaps have had an affiliation with a parish for centuries. However, it fits well with a postmodern context and need not be a threat.

Fresh Expressions

Moynagh’s vision (which is actually a hypothetical scenario, rather than a report of an existing model) did begin to experience something of a tentative incarnation in the first decade of this century with the advent of, in some contexts, the emergent church,¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 72-73.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 100ff.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 71.

¹⁶⁸ “A number of the congregations are small, some are quite large, and several are transient. The congregation for single parents, for instance, tends to be a staging post.” Ibid. 101.

¹⁶⁹ See Frost and Hirsch, chapter 1; D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005). Also, John Drane, “What does maturity in the Emergent Church look like?” in

and in others, what became known as Fresh Expressions of church. The former carries with it a degree of postmodern theological baggage; the latter is a term applied purely to methodological experimentations where the theology could be as diverse as the forms. Murray gives numerous examples of these, including café churches, table churches, and virtual churches.¹⁷⁰ The “mainstreaming” of some of these new and innovative models in Britain can be traced back to an influential 2009 report of the Church of England.

Mission-Shaped Church: Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context (MSC) built on an earlier report of 1994 *Breaking New Ground* (BNG), which was published at the beginning of the boom of interest in planting. In between these two reports, from a Presbyterian Perspective, the Church of Scotland produced its *Church Without Walls* (CWW) report in 2001.¹⁷¹

Breaking New Ground put church planting firmly onto the agenda of the established church¹⁷² and categorised and analysed the relative success of the different models (runner plants, graft plants, transplants, and seed plants) employed in the early 1990s.¹⁷³ It also acknowledged how the problems presented by parish boundaries were already being overcome.¹⁷⁴ It named other key obstacles to possible bivocational leadership: the tendency for clergy-dependence, institutional regulations, diocesan

Steven Croft (ed.), *Mission-Shaped Questions: Defining Issues for Today's Church* (London: Seabury Books, 2010), 90-101. Drane refers to Carson's book as “intemperate”, 205 n.2.

¹⁷⁰ Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, passim.

¹⁷¹ See note 41 above.

¹⁷² Paul Bayes regarded it as “one of the first Anglican documents to grapple positively with the impact of postmodernity.” Bayes, 7.

¹⁷³ Church of England, *Breaking New Ground: Church Planting in the Church of England: A Report*, 6-14.

¹⁷⁴ “Church planting across parish and diocesan boundaries has happened under the pressure of an evangelistic imperative that has assumed precedence over loyalty to the institution and its territorial contract.” Ibid., 2-3.

requirements and congregational expectations.¹⁷⁵ There was, too, an awareness at this stage that “community exists in networks of relationship and not just in territorial closeness.”¹⁷⁶ George Lings’ follow-up booklet fleshed out many of these ideas with practical suggestions and illustrations.¹⁷⁷

Nigel Scotland’s book *Recovering the Ground* was published in 1995 and comprised a selection of essays around the theme of “Radical Church Planting for the Church of England.”¹⁷⁸ The authors expressed frustration that: “Anglican church structures were not designed with the primary purpose of extending the Kingdom of God,”¹⁷⁹ and sought to look for ways in which plants could be facilitated within the current structures. Unsurprisingly, the parish system received much attention, and in one article with Roger Beckwith, the editor looked at historic models where flexibility was permitted in this area.¹⁸⁰

Mission-Shaped Church begins by acknowledging the cultural changes in Britain¹⁸¹ within a generation – even in the decade since *Breaking New Ground* first came out. While paragraph 8.2 of the report explained that planting normally involved “the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 93.93. The later report quoted Ulrich Bech: “to live in one place no longer means to live together, and living together no longer means living in the same place.” Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, 6.

¹⁷⁷ George Lings, *New Ground in Church Planting: A Personal Commentary on Breaking New Ground the Report Commissioned by the House of Bishops on Church Planting*, Grove Evangelism Series (Nottingham, U.K.: Grove Books, 1994).

¹⁷⁸ Nigel Scotland (ed.), *Recovering the Ground: Towards Radical Church Planting for the Church of England* (Chorleywood, U.K.: Kingdom Power Trust Publications, 1995).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 71.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 63-68.

¹⁸¹ It should be said that most of the cultural analysis mentioned here with regard to Britain would also hold true for modern Ireland. For an excellent survey of the economics and worldview of the “New Irish,” including similarities and differences to other European countries, see David McWilliams, *The Pope’s Children: Ireland’s New Elite* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005).

establishing of a new congregation or worship center and is to be encouraged as an important part of Church Growth,” the authors of *Mission-Shaped Church* admit that “virtually every concept in that sentence is now challenged by the variety that has emerged.”¹⁸² They now prefer to speak of the evolving of a Christian community rather than the establishment of a congregation. Instead of encouraging a longer-term strategy, they find that:

Practitioners working at the edge of the Church...prefer to talk of sowing the gospel and seeing what results...It is more like a process of discerning the prior action of God.... Planning for predetermined outcomes is legitimate but no longer primary. A mission-informed response, rather than a structural initiative, is now seen as authentic.¹⁸³

As for cultural changes, the report mentions changes in living patterns, sport and entertainment, the nuclear family, and increased mobility and employment, explaining how they have all contributed to the traditional church’s experience of a rapid marginalization from mainstream society.¹⁸⁴ Their survey essentially echoed Moynagh’s earlier findings, noting, “One key conclusion from these snapshots of British society is that we are living increasingly fragmented lives.”¹⁸⁵ While this resulted in a loss of traditional neighborhood, a new social structure and a redefinition of community, the authors of the report, understandably given the Anglican context in which they were writing, did not want to dispense altogether with the concept of parish. They did agree, though, it needed to be more flexible: “Networks have not replaced neighborhoods, but they change them... It is not that locality, place and territory have no significance. It is

¹⁸² Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, 22.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-14. For example, the increase in professional, amateur, and school sports on a Sunday, and Sunday also being “dad access day” in families with separated parents.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

simply that they are now just one layer of the complex shape of society.”¹⁸⁶ This recognition of the need for structural flexibility was made by no less than the Archbishop of Canterbury the previous year:

Tearing up the rule book and trying to replace the parochial system is a recipe for disaster and wasted energy. In all kinds of places, the parochial system is working remarkably. It’s just that we are increasingly aware of the contexts where it simply isn’t capable of making an impact, where something has to grow out of it or alongside it... as an attempt to answer questions that the parish system was never meant to answer.¹⁸⁷

Bayes recognizes that four of the plants that occurred back in 1991 did more or less “tear up the rule book.” However, although the plants happened “without obtaining the necessary permissions, both the catching-on and the law-breaking caused the church to think.”¹⁸⁸ So from the earliest days of planting there was recognition in activist quarters that sometimes it was better to do than to ask, and then to wait for the structures to catch up.

The fragmentation and independence that are characteristic of so much of the emergent and postmodern expression of church, however, are a double-edged sword. As well as offering interesting new challenges and opportunities for creativity, this has obvious negative implications that had earlier been highlighted by Chester, among others. The report says: “A network society can both connect and fragment. It can include and exclude at local, national and global levels. Mobility can provide freedom and opportunity, but it is also a force that destabilizes society by undermining long-term

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁸⁷ Rowan Williams, *Presidential Address to the Synod of the Church of England*, 2003. Quoted by Bayes, 10.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 6.

commitments.”¹⁸⁹ Chester agrees: “While those of a postmodern generation talk a lot about relationships, they are usually reluctant to make long-term commitments, especially to inter-generational relationships.”¹⁹⁰

This was also highlighted by the Church of Scotland in CWW:

A church that can trace 40 years of declining youth statistics must ask if all the excellent youth work of two generations has been frozen out of church life because we have failed to build relationships of friendship across the generations. We are a covenant community. By baptism we welcome children into that covenant community, but too often our congregations fail to be the covenanting community needed for children and families to flourish in faith and life... Communication with the next generation will require many creative youth ministry skills and pioneering work to develop new patterns of church, but communication without community will be sterile. The church culture of formality, regulations, expectations and conformity sends out a corporate “vibe” that makes today’s generation instinctively uncomfortable.¹⁹¹

A feature of the CWW report was how, in its summary statement, it brought to the foreground the clear transitions the church needed to make (although they do begin with a variation on the Christian church/ Christian mission dichotomy challenged by Chester).¹⁹²

In this it was paralleling the findings of Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey. Their book *Church Next*, published the same year as CWW, is also structured around several key

¹⁸⁹ Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, 11.

¹⁹⁰ Tim Chester, “A Theological Perspective,” 27.

¹⁹¹ Church of Scotland, 23. For theological reflection on the *Church Without Walls* report see James S. Dewar, *Reflections on Ministry in a 'Church without Walls'* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2003); Jared W. Hay, *Reflections on the Theology of the Church in 'Church without Walls'* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2003).

¹⁹² 2. The nine transitions are: i) From church focus to Christ focus; following Jesus to see what church forms round him. ii) From settled church to church as a movement; going where people are rather than waiting for people to come. iii) From a culture of guilt to a culture of grace; freeing people to love and be loved while not counting the cost. iv) From running congregations to building communities; working towards a relational reformation. v) From isolation to interdependence; encouraging churches to work together. vi) From individualism to teamwork; seeing teamwork as essential to all ministry. vii) From top down church to upside down church; putting the local church at the center of the agenda. viii) From centralized resources to development resources; releasing funds to encourage local vision. ix) From faith as security to faith as risk; looking for new courage to break out of old routines.

transitions.¹⁹³ They warn the church against reacting to this marginalization by trying to reclaim the center: “If the church found itself marginalized under modernism, it must not now expect that it can return to the position it once held under the Constantinian model. A fragmented world means that there is no longer either a center or a circumference.”¹⁹⁴ Instead, the authors advise that the church should work inwards from the margins, making connections and infiltrating all sorts of mini-cultures that form the individual fragments of the broken culture. This conscious move to the margins is significant given that Gibbs and Coffey would previously have been strongly involved in the CGM. In fact, Gibbs, an Englishman working at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California (the erstwhile CGM headquarters), has described himself as “a recovering Church Growth Specialist.”¹⁹⁵

In North America, in 2004, Tom Jones of the Church Planting Assessment Center assembled and edited a book of articles by various practitioners seeking to relate church planting theory to the rapidly changing culture. Of note is a chapter co-authored by four self-styled post-moderns, Buffington, Emmert, McDade, and Smith. They are unambiguous in critiquing much post-modern theory and practice, including its failure to deal adequately with the unfulfilled angst of a generation. Yet, they are equally unambiguous in critiquing the church for its tardiness in listening to, understanding, or offering hope to intelligently seeking post-moderns. On the one hand they speak of the

¹⁹³ They are: i) From living in the past to engaging with the present. ii) From market-driven to mission-oriented. iii) From bureaucratic hierarchies to apostolic networks. iv) From schooling professionals to mentoring leaders. v) From following celebrities to encountering saints. vi) From dead orthodoxy to living faith. vii) From attracting a crowd to seeking the lost. viii) From belonging to believing. ix) From generic congregations to incarnational communities.

¹⁹⁴ Coffey and Gibbs, 218.

¹⁹⁵ Eddie Gibbs, “*Church in the Midst of Change*”, Public Lecture given at Belfast Bible College, February, 2007.

generation's "communal loneliness,"¹⁹⁶ explaining, "The proximity of information, strangers, and entertainment forces us to absorb bits and pieces of the world around us. In theory this puts us in touch and keeps us connected. But the reality is this: at the end of the day, we go to bed alone."¹⁹⁷ On the other hand they are frustrated with a church that seems to be answering the wrong questions:

The Church is under tremendous pressure to change with the times and to adjust in ways that will not compromise the integrity of God's kingdom. Issues of style, strategy, and survival consume us....But postmodernism stands outside of the simple notion of "change"...What matters to us is how old or new is lived out from day to day. Our culture...demands new paradigms consistent with eternal truths and an ancient identity.¹⁹⁸

Later they claim that while "change for change's sake" is actually more of a modernist phenomenon, "postmodernism does not demand innovation as much as renovation."¹⁹⁹

Although they sometimes exhibit the very common but questionable post-modern trait of dichotomizing propositional and relational truth, they do grasp the timeless uniqueness of the church and their *cri de coeur* is one all planters would do well to heed:

We write because we are in the church...we plead to the Church to respond to our deep desire for a place to roost - and a place to which we can invite our hurting friends to roost.... In a world where truth is difficult to pin down, the church plant offers truth a place to land - that is, in lives carefully lived. In a world where people are increasingly isolated from one another, the church plant has an opportunity to remind people of a call to live alongside one another. In a world where uncertainty seems to prevail, the church plant can offer stability and security.²⁰⁰

The willingness of some denominations to adjust how they understand church life by giving a degree of recognition to quite marginal manifestations of Christian

¹⁹⁶ Laura Buffington, John Emmert, Erin McDade and Chris Smith, "Postmodern Issues in Church Planting", in Tom Jones, *Church Planting from the Ground Up* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 2004), 89.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 83.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 84.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 91.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 84-85.

community can be seen in the emergence of what has become known as the “fresh expressions” movement. The phrase is actually in the title of the MSC report and is later taken up by a number of authors and practitioners such as Paul Bayes, George Lings, Angela Schier-Jones, Stephen Croft, and Martin Robinson, as well as in a host of pamphlets, books, websites, and other media.²⁰¹ Fresh expressions may include café churches, pub churches, dining-room table churches, virtual churches, skater churches, or messy churches (a children and parent fellowship centered around craft and paint-based activities).²⁰²

Naturally, there are significant ecclesiological and theological questions raised by such developments. Schier-Jones is careful to insist that these expressions should still be fresh expressions of church:²⁰³

There is more to a fresh expression of church than experiments in sound, lighting, space, or even ways of being community... Fresh expressions of church should still be church. No matter how alternative their worship is or how specific or tightly focused they are as a community, they should still be characteristically and recognizably “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” in nature... The invitation to live and work within the faith and unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church should not be understood in any restrictive or prescriptive way but in a way that is liberating, even surprising.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Stephen Croft, “Fresh expressions in a mixed economy church”, in Steven J. L. Croft et al., *Moving on in a Mission-Shaped Church* (London: Church House, 2005), 1-15. Also, George Lings, *Leading Fresh Expressions: Lessons from Hindsight* Encounters on the Edge 36 (Sheffield, U.K.: Church Army, 2007); Robinson; Angela Shier-Jones, *Pioneer Ministry and Fresh Expressions of Church* (London: SPCK, 2009). <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk>

²⁰² See George Lings, *Cafe Church 1: Caffeine, Croissants and Christ* Encounters on the Edge 33 (Sheffield, U.K.: Church Army, 2007); George Lings, *Cafe Church 2: Double Jesus, with Cream and Sugar?*, Encounters on the Edge 34 (Sheffield, U.K.: Church Army, 2007); Lucy Moore and Bible Reading Fellowship., *Messy Church: Fresh Ideas for Building a Christ-Centred Community* (Oxford, U.K.: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2006); Murray and Wilkinson-Hayes, passim; Shier-Jones, 28.

²⁰³ Croft also makes the point that “the establishing of fresh expressions of church is not being done at the expense of or in competition with existing or traditional congregations.” Croft et al., 3.

²⁰⁴ Shier-Jones, 8-9. The “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” paradigm is also expounded by Croft as four movements: “in, up, of and out.” Croft et al., 188ff.

She recognizes that while some fresh expressions may owe their genesis to effective ministry and growth, more than likely they exist because “the gospel is being communicated so badly that only by escaping existing church structures and systems can the kingdom continue to grow.”²⁰⁵ The book is an encouragement to pioneer ministers and planters, as well as a plea for more to enter the field. It is also realistic in raising some of the important ecclesiological issues that fresh expression congregations will have to face as they mature, such as how they define and then exhibit all the marks of a healthy church²⁰⁶ as they move from community-based initiatives to fully nurturing sacramental congregations, and yet still simultaneously maintain their missional edge.²⁰⁷ It also outlines some of the possible pitfalls, most notably that some pioneers “think that they need to demonstrate that they have all the trappings traditionally associated with a successful ministry.”²⁰⁸

Shier-Jones also refers to “mixed economy” churches.²⁰⁹ This is a phrase coined by Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, to describe the inherent heterogeneity that must characterize any contemporary missional church.²¹⁰ Croft utilizes the phrase in two chapters of his book on mission-shaped churches. He begins the collection of essays with the important observation: “It is no longer enough to imagine that the Christian

²⁰⁵ Shier-Jones, 71.

²⁰⁶ In an interesting chapter in Croft’s book, John Drane questions the traditional categories by which people measure maturity, but the article lacks a biblical cohesion and seems to accept the current cultural milieu rather uncritically.

²⁰⁷ See Shier-Jones, 118ff. Croft’s assertion on the ecclesiological issue is also pertinent: “My perspective is that we are at present reasonably good at thinking about mission as a church... However, collectively we remain poor at thinking about the Church.” Croft et al., 187. He goes on to highlight four important aspects of ecclesiology: the called community (the church in relation to God), members of one body (the church in relation to itself), a light to the nations (the church in relation to the world), and pilgrims in progress (the church in relation to time).

²⁰⁸ Shier-Jones, 125.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 71ff.

²¹⁰ See Croft et al., 3.

Church can change in one particular direction...Different parts of our culture are actually moving in different directions.”²¹¹

The presence of large numbers of ethnic groups in all major cities has obviously played a part in this. In an important book which brought the phrase “missional church” to a wider audience, Ed Stetzer and David Putman refer to contemporary culture as being “glocal.”²¹² Commenting on Acts 1:8 they write: “In most cases, our communities consist of various people groups, population segments, and cultural environments. We now live in “JerusaJudeaSamariaEnds” - communities that combine all four targets into one geographical area.”²¹³ However, writers such as Croft, Roxburgh, Schier-Jones, Moynagh, Frost, and Hirsch correctly emphasize that this fragmentation, which has prompted the emergence of fresh expressions, is not merely due to multiethnicity, but to the existence of increasing numbers of subcultures defined by generation, interests, style, geography, work, and countless other boundaries.

Chester and Timmis, though, are anxious to ensure that the discussion of “new models” and “new expressions” is not purely methodological. They are less interested in the location, ambience, style, and reinventions of liturgy than in the theological reasoning and gospel intentionality behind the new fellowships and their effectiveness in truly reaching the unchurched. They want the church experience to be as close to the rest of the participants’ lives as possible, and they advocate “ordinary life with gospel intentionality...you cannot program ordinary life.”²¹⁴

²¹¹ Ibid., 1.

²¹² Stetzer and Putman, 5.

²¹³ Ibid., 155-156.

²¹⁴ Chester and Timmis, 62.

The danger will be to absolutize one particular model, perhaps claiming that a “new expression” or “gospel community” is the only way to go. Al Barth, European director for the Redeemer church planting network, a Presbyterian movement out of Tim Keller’s New York church, reckons that every urban centre will need at least four different types of church models to reach the city. These include churches with a cathedral ethos, a regional resource ethos, a community ethos, and a cell-church/small group ethos.²¹⁵ As well as reflecting the reality of the situation, this gives planters permission to experiment, or even in some cases, if growth occurs unexpectedly, to “go with the flow” and see what type of church they become, reassessing their priorities and structures accordingly.

While church planting literature has undergone quite a journey since its emergence thirty years ago, it is clear that, with one or two blips, and giving cognizance to the contextual differences on each side of the Atlantic, each new generation of church leader is recognizing the importance of establishing and reinventing new gospel communities. New models of leadership (including bivocational leadership) will be critical in securing the viability of such communities. Church planting is here to stay.

Vocation, Work, and Ministry

If then, bearing in mind the new ecclesiological realities of church communities in the twenty-first century, bivocational leadership is being presented as a viable, even desirable, model for planting, it will be important to look at some of the implications of this in terms of calling and ministry.

²¹⁵ Personal conversation with the author as part of an advisory visit to Irish church planters and supervisors, December 2012. Al Barth: alb@redeemercitycity.com

Theological Considerations

A Christian's vocation is primarily to live as a child and servant of the living God.²¹⁶ One of the authors who has written most extensively on the interplay of vocation, work, and ministry is Vancouver professor-pastor-tentmaker Paul Stevens. He writes that vocation should be seen as: "a comprehensive and liberating summons of God...The heart of vocation is not choosing to do something but responding to the Call to belong to Someone and because of that, to serve God and our neighbors wholeheartedly."²¹⁷ In terms of living out a Christian, and indeed human, vocation, one must not imagine that this refers only to certain types of jobs, to certain aspects of those jobs, or to so-called "spiritual" activity.²¹⁸ Following Darrell Cosden,²¹⁹ Stevens believes that "the concept of a theology of work is a fairly recent development, coming into the Western world after the Second World War largely as a result of Roman Catholic theologians."²²⁰ While this may be true in terms of a systematic treatment of the topic, there is no doubt that Reformation theologians did have something to say on the matter.

²¹⁶ Rom. 1:6,7; 1Pet. 2:9.

²¹⁷ R. Paul Stevens, "Vocational Guidance," in Robert J. Banks and R. Paul Stevens, *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1085.

²¹⁸ See especially R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999). This quote is very similar to the argument of Barbara Zikmund, who maintains that there are four options which Christians have traditionally been presented with to live out their vocation: that vocation has nothing to do with our jobs; has little to do with our jobs; has something to do with all jobs; or has everything to do with all of life. She believes that these are "either simplistic and shallow, or they are so demanding that people pale at the task... No wonder good Christians get confused." Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Christian Vocation: In Context," *Theology Today* 36.3 (1979): 330. For a spirituality of work and excellent guide in how to grow spiritually at work, see R. Paul Stevens and Alvin Ung, *Taking Your Soul to Work: Overcoming the Nine Deadly Sins of the Workplace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010). As well as the works by Tom Nelson and Mark Greene referenced below.

²¹⁹ Darrell Cosden and Jurgen Moltmann, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation*, Paternoster Theological Monographs (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004).

²²⁰ R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 6.

Based on the creation mandate of Genesis 1:27-30, and in contrast to the medieval Roman Catholic view that “vocations” are lives devoted to prayer and holy orders, Reformation theologians expounded a more comprehensive theology of work. In Calvin’s words, “There will be no employment so mean and sordid (provided we follow our vocation) as not to appear truly respectable and be deemed highly important in the sight of God.”²²¹ Or, as Alister McGrath summarized, in Calvin’s mind, “One cannot allow the human evaluation of an occupation's importance to be placed above the judgment of God who put you there.”²²² This Reformation perspective was a radical departure from the inherited European tradition. McGrath reminds his readers,

To appreciate the significance of Calvin’s work ethic, it is necessary to understand the intense distaste with which the early Christian tradition, illustrated by the monastic writers, regarded work. For Eusebius of Caesarea, the perfect Christian life was one devoted to serving God, untainted by physical labor. Those who chose to work for a living were second-rate Christians. The early monastic tradition appears to have inherited this attitude.²²³

The magisterial reformers, therefore, sanctified work, and knew nothing of a sacred/secular divide:

The work of believers is thus seen to possess a significance that goes far beyond the visible results of that work. It is the person working, as much as the resulting work, that is significant to God. There is no distinction between spiritual and temporal, sacred and secular work. All human work, however lowly, is capable of glorifying God. Work is, quite simply, an act of praise—a potentially *productive* act of praise.²²⁴

McGrath is therefore arguing that, contrary to some later interpretations of Calvin’s work ethic, his purpose was not – as a type of proto-capitalist – to link work with productivity

²²¹ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics, V. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III.x.6; 725.

²²² Alister E. McGrath, "Calvin and the Christian Calling," *First Things* 94 (June/July 1999): 34.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 33.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

in terms of results or wealth, but rather to link it to productivity in terms of the personal and spiritual development and integrity of the worker.

Stevens unites the creation mandate with the commission of Matthew 28:18-20 and sees their separation as a tragic mistake. He explains, “When so separated, mission becomes disconnected from life and becomes a “discretionary-time” activity...The Christian life is essentially unbalanced and fragmented when God intends it to be unified.”²²⁵ This is in contradistinction to Edmund Clowney (whose work on the call to ministry is considered below). Clowney writes, “God’s first command still stands: man is to replenish the earth and subdue it; but the Great Commission takes priority over it.”²²⁶ Stevens, however, wishes work of all kind to be seen as an application of both the creation mandate and the Great Commission. Ecumenical missiologist Lesslie Newbigin has a similarly redemptive vision for the Christian’s work:

Everything – from our most secret prayers to our most public political acts – is part of that sin-stained human nature that must go down into the valley of death and judgment, and yet knowing that as we offer it up to the Father in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit, it is safe with him and – purged in fire – it will find its place in the holy city at the end.²²⁷

European theologian Miroslav Volf has questioned some aspects of the reformed paradigm of work in his book *Work in the Spirit*.²²⁸ He aims to free his readers’ understanding of work from “the dead hand of vocation” and wishes to re-examine the subject from a pneumatological and eschatological perspective.²²⁹ He has several

²²⁵ Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective*, 89.

²²⁶ Edmund P. Clowney, *Called to the Ministry* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1964), 80.

²²⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), 136.

²²⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, vii.

concerns with how a theology of work had developed within Protestantism: it can lead to an indifference towards alienation in work; it can be misused ideologically to support or cultivate ambivalence towards dehumanizing work; it can become reduced to being equated with gainful employment; it can confuse vocation and occupation; it is furthermore inapplicable to an information culture and one where “a synchronic plurality of employment” is more common.²³⁰

Nevertheless, Volf appreciates how Luther and Calvin gave work a dignity hitherto unexpressed in much of the church. He quotes Luther’s assertion that people were intended to work “without inconvenience...in play and with the greatest delight.”²³¹ He also believes that “A responsible theology of work should seek to preserve Luther’s insight into God’s call to everyday work with its two consequences.”²³² (Those two consequences being the greater value attached to work, and that all work is of equal value – one is no more holy than another). However, says Volf, his “notion of vocation has serious limitations, both in terms of its applicability to modern work, and its theological persuasiveness.”²³³

He wishes to liberate vocation from being seen as something one does, and by definition, therefore, may restrict one to one particular field of work. Rather, he wishes people to see vocation as inextricably tied up with who they are becoming in Christ and by the Spirit. This means that a change of vocation, multi-vocational pursuits, and even Sabbath and rest can all be seen as aspects of one’s overall vocation. In answer to Calvin’s fears that the lack of a single all-embracing understanding of work would lead to

²³⁰ Ibid., 106-107.

²³¹ Ibid., 198.

²³² Ibid., 106.

²³³ Ibid., 107.

either a chaos in self-understanding or idleness, Volf counters intriguingly: “Rather, freedom from the rigidity of a single, permanent vocation might season with creativity and interrupt with rest the monotonous lives of modern workaholics.”²³⁴ In short, Volf feels the Reformers’ theology of work, while a helpful development on the Catholic understanding of vocation, was still too limited and static, time-bound in the economics of their own era, not sufficiently broad or flexible to encompass the vocational challenges of a different time, and, at root, theologically incomplete. Volf’s thesis is relevant in that it would render obsolete a number of the objections raised concerning, and problems associated with, bivocational ministry.

More recently, four books in particular have revisited the interplay of faith and work. In *Work Matters*, Tom Nelson, Kansas pastor and author on vocational issues, states, “The often unsettling truth is that while we shape our work, our work shapes us and the world around us.”²³⁵ This can lead many people to develop unhealthy attitudes about work (workaholism, sloth, or a dualistic sacred/secular divide)²³⁶ and to see the workplace as a space to be endured rather than redeemed and enjoyed. Nelson sees this as spiritually cancerous. He warns that “to not walk in the Spirit in the workplace where God has called you is to live a life of spiritual impotence and carnality.”²³⁷

Such attitudes are often the result of a faulty theology that sees work as an intrinsic part of the fallenness of the world, and therefore one of those things that will be destroyed in the end. Nelson, however, drawing on Jesus’s parable of the talents and other scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 3, makes a case for work being something which is

²³⁴ Ibid., 116-117.

²³⁵ Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2011), 14.

²³⁶ Ibid., 42-46; *ibid.*

²³⁷ Ibid., 113.

intrinsic to who people are and which will continue (albeit in a perfected state) into the eternal kingdom. Seeing it this way will have transforming implications for Christians' daily lives:

When we begin to grasp the transforming truth that the future destiny of our work and our world is not complete annihilation but radical healing, it changes how we view our daily work. If we believe that the earth – everything about it and everything we do on it – is simply going to one day be abolished and disappear, then the logical conclusion is that our work is virtually meaningless....But if our daily work, done for the glory of God and the common good of others, in some way carries over to the new heavens and new earth, then our present work itself is overflowing with immeasurable value and eternal significance.²³⁸

The book aims to close the “Sunday – Monday Gap” by helping believers develop a robust theology of vocation and understand the positive transforming potential of work from a kingdom perspective. Nelson believes that moving people to this level of understanding does not happen overnight, but requires a disciplined intentionality on the part of church leadership; a reorientation of traditional ministry expectations that goes beyond preaching and teaching and “must become a vital part of the spiritual formation pathways” of the local church.²³⁹ Nelson’s book is a helpful primer for pastors to consider issues of vocation and begin to weave a strong “vocational thread into the fabric of [their] local congregation.”²⁴⁰

While Nelson’s book did touch on some of the implications of this for wider society, in *Kingdom Calling*, published the same year, Amy Sherman further develops the wider implications and looks at how “vocational stewardship” can transform not only the local church but cities and cultures. She admits that churches and evangelicalism in general have been remiss in ignoring this challenge: “churches need to take vocation

²³⁸ Ibid., 73.

²³⁹ Ibid., 195.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 194.

much more seriously.”²⁴¹ Drawing on research by David Miller of Princeton’s Faith and Work Initiative, she highlights the dearth of sermons and articles on the subject,²⁴² and the tendency of virtually every existing evangelical workplace ministry to concentrate on individualistic concerns (personal ethical decisions affecting individual conscience, or evangelistic conversations) rather than a more holistic integrated approach. Such an approach would view work as having intrinsic meaning and worth, aim to make the workplace an enriching environment, and help workers deal with the diversity of issues raised by their vocations.²⁴³

While Sherman expresses concern that leaders “do a better job of inspiring [their] members about the role they can play in the mission of God and equipping them to live missionally *through their vocations*,”²⁴⁴ her main burden is not just the transformation of the local church, but the renewal of society as believers follow Christ in the work he came to do in “pushing back the kingdom of darkness and pushing in the kingdom of light...offering foretastes of the coming kingdom’s shalom.”²⁴⁵

Sherman presents a gracious critique, but hers is nonetheless a depressing diagnosis of the problem within traditional evangelicalism, including a too-narrow gospel, inadequate discipleship, and problematic worship music.²⁴⁶ Some of her comments on the *Missio Dei* are reflective of Christopher Wright, as she encourages

²⁴¹ Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2011), 20.

²⁴² Ibid., 91-92.

²⁴³ Ibid., 93ff. Miller and Sherman’s statistics are based on many years of sermons, over two hundred periodical articles, and over twelve hundred workplace ministries. Miller tellingly refers to the less than ten percent of regular churchgoers who ever heard a sermon on work, and those that were preached were “critical and hostile” towards the workplace. (Page 92).

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 21. Italics original.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 18.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 65ff.

individuals and churches to become agents of renewal in a fragmented and broken world. She outlines several healing pathways to a more biblical and rounded gospel-life. Key to this is her understanding of “vocational power”²⁴⁷ – a synthesis of several factors including skills, knowledge, networks and influence – that will enable believers reflect on their vocation and its potential for kingdom effectiveness. One of the most helpful things about such a vocational emphasis within churches is that this need not be extra work for pastors or congregations. Rather, it is a case of harnessing what is already there, where it is already situated: what Sherman calls “blooming where you are planted.”²⁴⁸ This is highlighted most clearly by the other two books to emerge recently.

For years, Tim Keller has preached on how believers can help redeem their cities not just through words and acts of mercy²⁴⁹ (evangelism and social concern), but also in how they work. *Every Good Endeavour* was written to enable Christians not just to make sense of their work, but to chart their way through the various attempts (as noted by Sherman) that Christians have made to give a theological perspective on work. He wants to show how, while many of those theological streams are complementary, there can be an over-arching vision for work which can be gained from the way the Christian gospel changes people.

Having outlined the divine purpose for work, and the curses of fruitlessness, pointlessness, selfishness, and idolatry that occur when work is divorced from this gospel understanding, Keller comes to his transforming vision. He shares, “Becoming a Christian...gives us a new perspective on every culture, every worldview, every field of

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 120ff.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 151ff.

²⁴⁹ See Timothy J. Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub., 1997).

work...but it takes time to grasp and incorporate this new information into how we live and pursue our vocations.”²⁵⁰ Keller wants to give believers what he calls “a new compass for work” that points to the transforming nature of the gospel, even for their work. He writes: “Theological and ethical reflection on our field of work is not easy. It is easier by far to focus on your own job and merely seek to work with personal integrity, skill and a joyful heart.” While this is good, Keller’s vision is broader: “Christians are to think persistently and deeply about the shape of work in their field and whether (in biblical terms) it accords as well as possible with human well-being and with justice.”²⁵¹

He also wants to give readers an alternative conception of work to the dualism that can pervade much Christian reflection on this issue – and which pervades some of the literature on vocation and bivocational ministry in particular:

The integration of faith and work is the opposite of dualism...Our thick view of sin will remind us that even explicitly Christian work and culture will always have some idolatrous discourse within it. Our thick view of common grace will remind us that even explicitly non-Christian work and culture will always have some witness to God’s truth in it...Ultimately, a grasp of the gospel and of biblical teaching on cultural engagement should lead Christians to be the most appreciative of the hands of God behind the work of our colleagues and neighbors.²⁵²

This critique of dualism is also a feature of the fourth book. The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) has for many years sought to train people in “whole-life discipleship” and equip them in vocational faithfulness “on their frontline.”²⁵³ In 2012, they published Neil Hudson’s *Imagine Church* as part of their United Kingdom-

²⁵⁰ Timothy J. Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012), 182.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁵³ See <http://www.licc.org.uk/>

wide *Imagine* project, building on some earlier work by LICC Director Mark Greene.²⁵⁴

Hudson, following Stevens, differentiates between the church gathered and the church scattered and proposes that throughout most of evangelical church history, an imbalance has existed, with most of the money, time, and energy of believers being concentrated on the former. He believes that in order for the church to be truly effective, several subtle changes of emphasis need to be in place. These include a greater understanding of the implications of the lordship of Christ, a focus on the church scattered, a change of church culture, and a series of small but recognizable changes (“one-degree shifts”) in the church’s methodology.²⁵⁵ The gathered church, he believes, has monopolized the minds of members and often reduced their vision to an ABC of Attendance, Buildings, and Cash.²⁵⁶ Leaders need to be challenged about the extent to which they have communicated, by word and action, that the church subscribes to a belief in the sacred/secular divide.

The reality is that many in congregations are sitting uneasily with such a paradigm as they try to make sense of their two worlds of work and faith. Hudson says that whenever his vision of whole-life discipleship is shared in congregations, a “light-bulb moment” occurs. He explains, “It’s not so much that it was a new vision; rather the

²⁵⁴ See Mark Greene, *Thank God It's Monday: Ministry in the Workplace*, 3rd ed. (Bletchley, U.K.: Scripture Union, 2001); Mark Greene, *The Great Divide: Overcoming the Ssd Syndrome* (London: LICC, 2001). Downloadable from http://www.licc.org.uk/uploaded_media/1233749360-The%20Great%20Divide.pdf Accessed 9th July 2012

²⁵⁵ See Neil Hudson, *Imagine Church: Releasing Whole-Life Disciples* (Nottingham, U.K.: IVP, 2012), 20, 85ff. Hudson’s categories echo those of Harvard author John Kotter whose eight steps to implement organizational change include developing a sense of urgency, implementing short-term wins, and anchoring the change in the culture. John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996).

²⁵⁶ Hudson, 87.

ideas were presented in ways that articulated what they had intuitively been thinking.”²⁵⁷

He advocates a variety of strategies whereby leaders can minister to people on their “frontline,” including commuting with them, visiting them at work, sharing their stories in the worship services and through the church’s various media. But the climax of his argument is his final step in the change process. He emphasizes that all this needs to lead to a change in culture, and that, in particular, the contract between pastor and people needs to be renegotiated.

Most churches, he explains, function with a “pastoral care contract” with the accompanying expectations (often unwritten and unspoken) of what the pastor – and only the pastor – can do. There needs to be a move towards a “pastoral equipping contract,” and the psychology of the relationship between pastor and people needs to undergo a profound change. The pastoral care contract means that the pastor’s time is spent disproportionately with people in obvious crisis and with others who have leadership responsibilities in the gathered church. Hudson observes:

It’s not difficult to understand how sermons are shaped, even if subconsciously, by the conversations that have taken most of the preacher’s time during a week. It is therefore no surprise that the application of most reaching or preaching has been either pastorally focused or directed to the internal life of the church. But what about the rest of the people, indeed the majority of the church?...There are a myriad contexts that people are dealing with every day where their discipleship is being tested and stretched and lived out with authenticity. Leaders are missing out on the conversations about these places because they are too busy, and because their people don’t think they are interested.²⁵⁸

Pastor and people must not only talk about partnership in mission; they must also enact it and embed it in the culture of the church. Not just the budget, but everything from the noticeboard to the coffee rota must communicate to members and visitors that what they

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 92.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 124-125.

do for most of their week, remunerated or not, matters to God and matters to the church. Otherwise, churches will revert to the default position of being self-serving and self-perpetuating, and any flirtation with whole-life discipleship will have been nothing but an “interesting interlude.”²⁵⁹ He concludes, “Cultures are notoriously difficult to change, but they can change and they do change. The statement ‘Nothing will ever change here’ is always the mark of a toxic despair.”²⁶⁰

Hudson’s and Greene’s works, emerging as they do out of an ongoing strategy to reach the United Kingdom through frontline discipleship, and based on their experiences of accompanying churches through change, are indicative of an important and significant shift that is currently discernible among an increasing number of congregations, in the United Kingdom at least. They have complemented the reflections of Volf, Stevens, Nelson, Sherman, and Keller, all of whom have contributed helpfully to a growing body of literature on vocation which has implications for ministry, both in terms of the type of churches are planted and developed and the fluidity and interplay of vocations inside and outside the gathered church.

Definitions

There is some ambiguity regarding definition throughout the literature. Drawing on Paul’s experience, the phrase “tentmaking” has entered the Christian vocabulary to refer to bivocational ministry. Of course, the term “bivocational” is itself misleading, since it could be interpreted as advocating two vocations rather than two arenas in which a Christian lives out a single vocation under God.²⁶¹ But since the term “tentmaking” may

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 20.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 164.

²⁶¹ See R. Paul Stevens, “Tentmaking,” in Banks and Stevens, 1028-1034. Here he refers to the term as “misleading and incorrect”, 1029. Also J. R. Rozko on the helpful “Life as

not be as familiar outside the context of Christian missions, the word bivocational is used synonymously for the purposes of this study.

One writer who uses the terms interchangeably is Craig Blomberg in his commentary on 1 Corinthians.²⁶² Similarly, Australian David Jones, in a helpful report, refers to “bivocationalism (formerly known as tentmaking)” and “tentmaker: another name for bivocational,” later concluding, “there is no difference at all. Bivocational is a modern term for what used to be known as tentmaking.”²⁶³

However, the literature is not universally in agreement regarding the synonymity of the terms. Malphurs clearly differentiates between the two, defining tentmaking as when (in church planting contexts) planters “turn to a particular trade or profession only when there aren’t enough funds available for their support. They may work one week and be off the next.” He believes these were the precise circumstances of the apostle. He continues: “Another kind of personal employment is the bivocational minister. In this situation, church planters find regular employment that occupies a certain portion of their time every week. The disadvantage...is that ministry has to be scheduled around the particular job.”²⁶⁴

Al Barth similarly wishes to “distinguish bivocational from tentmaking which is generally temporary in nature.”²⁶⁵ James Lowery also makes a clear distinction: “Bi-

Mission” blog who sees the bivocational terminology as justifiable so long as it refers to vocation as being “a compensated way in which our singular calling gets lived out.”

<http://lifeasmission.com/blog/2009/10/bi-vocational-ministry/> accessed 2nd January 2012.

²⁶² Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The N I V Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 179-181.

²⁶³ David Jones, “Bivocational ministry: the other choice.” *Report to the Baptist Churches of NSW/ACT*, Downloadable resource from http://baptistnsw.asn.au/bi-vocational_ministry.pdf 4, 5, 29. Accessed 2nd January 2012.

²⁶⁴ Malphurs, 51.

²⁶⁵ Al Barth, “RE: Research.” E-mail to the author (29 December 2011).

vocationals [sic] are men and women who simultaneously pursue two endeavors or callings, both of which have value to them. Tentmakers simply have jobs which support religion's ministry."²⁶⁶ He does not substantiate this division of terms however, and then manages to use the terms interchangeably throughout the booklet!

In a paper to the Evangelical Theology Society, J. D. Payne states: "though some have attempted to equate tentmaking with bivocational ministry, I refrain from doing so." He defines tentmaking as "the concept whereby the church planter is supported financially by a non-clergy-type of employment; they rely on a marketable profession, skill, or trade," and a bivocational as "someone who receives a portion of his salary from a church and/or denomination, and a portion of his salary from a non-clergy-type of employment."²⁶⁷

Unsurprisingly, for an author whose work consistently upholds the integrity of all work and who sees vocation, work, and ministry as part of a complex whole, Stevens struggles to differentiate the terms. As mentioned above,²⁶⁸ he dislikes the term bivocational and also views tentmaking as "a 'slippery term' ... best defined as the path of those who are called to a specific ministry...that is unrelated to the job or work by which they maintain themselves." This is in contrast to those for whom work is their primary area of ministry: "sometimes tentmakers will deliberately choose a less fulfilling and less

²⁶⁶ James L Lowery, *Bi-Vocationals: Men and Women Who Enrich the Human Ecology and the World Surrounding* (West Conshohocken, Pa.: Infinity, 2006), iv.

²⁶⁷ J. D. Payne, "Money: The Most Critical Issue in North American Church Planting?" Unpublished paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society, November 15-17, 2006. <http://northamericanmissions.org/files/Money-and-Church-Planting.pdf> accessed 2nd January 2012.

²⁶⁸ Note 261.

demanding job to release time and energy for ministry.”²⁶⁹ Later, he writes: “I define tentmaking as giving oneself *primarily* to ministry while supporting oneself by other work.”²⁷⁰ However, this is Stevens’s earliest book on the subject, and some of the implications of his categories remain undeveloped. His later writings display a more nuanced and holistic approach to work and ministry.²⁷¹

Bob Mills covers bivocationalism and tentmakers under three categories of tentmaker: the intentional tentmaker – one who has an equal call to both vocations, the circumstantial tentmaker – who has no strong call to his area of employment but uses marketable skills to fund ministry and mission with the hope that it will become fully funded some day, and the lay tentmaker – those without any formal theological education who are serving primarily in another vocation but who can use their resources to support service in some ministry capacity.²⁷²

Denis Bickers, who has probably written more extensively than anyone on the subject of bivocationalism, introduces an extra dimension to the definition debate when he defines bivocationalism as “anyone who serves in a paid ministry capacity in a church and has other personal sources of income.”²⁷³ By this definition, he precludes those who “don’t take a penny from the church.” Such a person, he writes, “should not be

²⁶⁹ R. Paul Stevens, *Liberating the Laity: Equipping All the Saints for Ministry* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 83.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁷¹ See especially Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective*; R. Paul Stevens, *Doing God's Business: Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006).

²⁷² Bob Mills, “Tentmaking: A Missiological Paradigm,” in Doran McCarty, *Meeting the Challenge of Bivocational Ministry: A Bivocational Reader* (Nashville, Tenn.: Seminary Extension of the Southern Baptist Seminaries, 1996), 108.

²⁷³ Dennis W. Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister* (Valley Forge, Pa: Judson Press, 2007), 2.

considered bivocational as he or she is not earning the additional income.”²⁷⁴ Terry

Dorsett, a New England practitioner, agrees:

It is important to note that bivocational pastors must actually be working for churches in a vocational way in order to be considered bivocational. Bivocational pastors are not just a higher class of volunteers. They are actually employed by churches to do some type of ministry... Some financial support for the church-related responsibility constitutes bivocational, as distinguished from volunteer.²⁷⁵

However, this raises a number of issues relating to the role of financial remuneration in one’s calling and identity, especially in the light of the more comprehensive understanding of writers such as Volf and Stevens. Is it valid to link vocation and pay so closely? If one’s other vocations – to be a Christian or mother or husband, for example – are not linked to finance, why should one’s ministry or career be so linked before being considered a vocation?

Stevens recognizes that many people are actually trivocational, and that the balancing of these commitments can be enriching, while an over-emphasis on one can be unhealthy. He states, “Work, ministry and family - each of these could be a rewarding full-time job. Yet each is dangerous if it possesses us exclusively and entirely.”²⁷⁶ Elsewhere he writes that there is good reason to rediscover tentmaking in a culture where “church ministry and mission work has become almost totally professionalized.”²⁷⁷ This championing of the harmonization of vocations often evident in the bivocational’s life and ministry counters one of the most quoted and, on a superficial level, most obvious

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 3.

²⁷⁵ Terry Dorsett, *Developing Leadership Teams in the Bivocational Church* (Bloomington, Ind.: CrossBooks, 2010), 2. The final sentence of this quote is actually taken directly from the guidelines of the Southern Baptist Bivocational Ministers’ Association.

²⁷⁶ Stevens, *Liberating the Laity: Equipping All the Saints for Ministry*, 144.

²⁷⁷ Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture*, 96. See also Zikmund on clericalism: “In a world where people are used to leaning on experts and professionals for goods and services, these habits are understandable, but theologically suspect.” Zikmund, “Christian Vocation: In Context,” 336.

disadvantages of bivocationalism found throughout the literature²⁷⁸ – that of potential burn-out.

Bivocationalism

While there is biblical warrant for teaching and shepherding the flock being seen as vocations, and for those who preach the gospel earning a living from the gospel,²⁷⁹ a variety of reasons – lack of financial resources, a desire to continue serving in some capacity within one’s field or profession, a more flexible view of calling – have led many contemporary pastors to work “bivocationally” in both the church context (part-paid or unpaid) and in the non-church context (from which they receive their main salary).

Since Roland Allen published his classic work *The Case for the Voluntary Clergy*²⁸⁰ in 1930, two significant works on the subject have been those by Dorr²⁸¹ and McCarty, and the subject has been taken up more recently by Dorsett and especially by Bickers.²⁸² McCarty’s volume is an anthology of writings from a number of practitioners and comprehensively covers issues such as the benefits and drawbacks of bivocational ministry (whilst concentrating firmly on the former); plus insight into family

²⁷⁸ For synopses of benefits and drawbacks of bivocational ministry, see especially: Dennis W. Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 118-120; Dennis W. Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs, One Ministry* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004), 116; Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister*, 42-44; Luther M. Dorr, *The Bivocational Pastor* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1988), 65-75; Rodney Harrison, *Spin-Off Churches: How One Church Successfully Plants Another*, ed. Tom Cheyney et al. (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2008), 201-202. Also, David Jones, art.cit., 17; David Fitch, <http://www.reclaimingthemission.com/bi-vocational-or-go-on-staff-at-a-large-church-suddenly-bi-vocational-ministry-doesnt-look-so-bad/> October 2009: accessed 2nd January 2012; and Blomberg’s comments on 1 Corinthians 9:14 in Blomberg, 176.

²⁷⁹ 1 Cor. 9:14.

²⁸⁰ Roland Allen, *The Case for Voluntary Clergy* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1930).

²⁸¹ Most of Dorr’s bibliography and illustrations are from the Southern Baptist constituency in the USA in the early 1980s. It is this constituency that has the greatest experience of bivocational pastorates.

²⁸² Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry*; Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs, One Ministry*; Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister*.

relationships, scheduling, financial management, and denominational helps and hindrances. He also has chapters on the New Testament evidence and examples of the historical heritage of bivocationalism. The book, in common with much of the later literature, is written from and into the Southern Baptist constituency.

Luther Dorr's *The Bivocational Pastor* was probably the first book in the modern era that sought to advise individuals and churches for whom bivocationalism might be a real, even a preferred option. Written in 1988, in his preface he says it grew out of three concerns: first, bivocationalism as an increasing fact of life (he claims there were ten thousand bivocational pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention at that time), secondly, "a commitment to the validity and legitimacy of bivocationalism as a needed form of ministry," and thirdly, to give those currently serving as bivocationals the recognition they warrant.²⁸³

Dorr acknowledges his indebtedness to Roland Allen, a pioneer who, some six decades earlier, argued vehemently that denominations (in his case the established Church of England) needed to look seriously at the vital role which "voluntary clergy" could play in meeting the ministry demands of the future. As a missionary, his first booklet²⁸⁴ was written with the needs of the global church in mind,²⁸⁵ but this vision was

²⁸³ Dorr, 3.

²⁸⁴ Roland Allen, *Voluntary Clergy Overseas: An Answer to the Fifth World Call* (Beaconsfield, England: Printed for private circulation, 1928).

²⁸⁵ See especially the work of his biographer David Paton, who reproduces much of Allen's correspondence with bishops and leaders of Third World churches – some of it quite feisty. In a letter to the Anglican bishop of Melanesia who had appealed for priests from England, he wrote: "There is only one alternative... to cut out this sort of appeal altogether, and to plan your work no longer on a foundation of priests from England. When the Apostles went out into the world the converts were before them, the priests before them, the Church before them. They set their faces steadily forward and never looked behind them for supplies of men and money. That way has hope.... It is not only good for us but good for those to whom we go, for it calls out spiritual service, instead of teaching them to rely on others. There is a great difference between going to people with the power of Christ to say to them 'Rise up and walk in the Name of Christ,'

later applied across the board in his influential book *The Case for the Voluntary Clergy*. He believes that even in the rapidly changing West of the early twentieth century, the church was clinging onto outdated models of ministry – models that actually hindered mission. He noted, “The stipendiary system grew up in settled Churches and is only suitable for some settled Churches at some periods: for expansion, for the establishment of new Churches, it is the greatest possible hindrance.”²⁸⁶

Moreover, this is borne out by the evidence from the early church in its centuries of rapid expansion. Stevens argues that “in the first three centuries, tentmaking church leadership was the norm, not the exception,”²⁸⁷ and Allen points to numerous fascinating examples from ancient church history both in terms of individual church leaders who simultaneously plied another trade,²⁸⁸ and in terms of decrees from the early councils.²⁸⁹ Chester and Timmis draw attention to the Moravian missionary movement of the early eighteenth century, which they claim “was a movement distinguished by the ‘ordinariness’ of the people sent out. The first missionaries were a potter named Leonard Dober and a carpenter named David Nitschmann who went to the Caribbean island of St.

and going to them with the message that you hope one day to find a man in England to hold them up, if you have any luck in the next scramble for men.” Letter of June 24, 1925 in David M. Paton and Roland Allen, *Reform of the Ministry: A Study in the Work of Roland Allen* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), 90. He had similar correspondence regarding the work in Tanganyika (102-3), Western Canada (92) and Assam (120).

²⁸⁶ Allen, *The Case for Voluntary Clergy*, 23.

²⁸⁷ R. Paul Stevens, “Tentmaking,” in Banks and Stevens, 1031.

²⁸⁸ Allen mentions Zeno, bishop of Majuma (late 4th C) who pursued “his trade of weaving linen,” and Spyridon the early fourth century shepherd-bishop in Cyprus “who continued to feed his sheep during his incumbency of the bishopric,” Theodorus “presbyter of the saints and silversmith,” and Epiphanius (c.404) who mentioned in general how the priests in the most part “in addition to the preaching of the Word, labored with their hands.” Allen, *Voluntary Clergy Overseas: An Answer to the Fifth World Call*, 134-135.

²⁸⁹ The ante-Nicene *Apostolic Constitution* II.63 says of ministers of the word: “some of us are fishermen, some tentmakers, some husbandmen, that so we may never be idle.” Allen believes that this “certainly represents the mind of the Church in the second and third centuries.” Eusebius also criticized the heretic Montanus for providing his preachers with salaries to promote his doctrine. *Ibid.*, 133.

Thomas.”²⁹⁰ In nineteenth century America, it seems that bivocationalism was indeed the norm amongst the Baptists. McCarty reports that an association in Texas in 1880 sought to redress the inequalities suffered by some pastors and challenge the church to take some financial responsibility.²⁹¹ Their report effectively said that if the farmers could hardly manage to run a farm and attend church once a month, how could they expect their pastor to make a living from the land while preparing, preaching, and pastoring. As a result, it was only early in the twentieth century that more full-time pastors emerged.²⁹² But, of course, the tradition of bivocational ministry does not begin in church history, not even with the post-Apostolic church, but rather in the pages of the New Testament itself.

The First “Tentmaker”

Inevitably, the figure of the Apostle Paul looms large over the discussion, both in terms of his personal practice and his defense of his right both to accept financial support and his equal right to earn his own living. In one of the very few books dealing with

²⁹⁰ Chester and Timmis, 105. There are numerous examples, particularly among the Anabaptists. Jerry P. Smith, “The Bivocational Minister and the Anabaptist Movement,” makes special mention of the Reformation-period examples of Oecolampadius and Hutter. McCarty, 53ff. See also Dorsett. “James Greene reminds churches that ‘ministry in the early days (of America) in the free church was bivocational. The term was not used because the style was the norm. Since bivocational ministry was so common, no one thought to give it a name or define it.’” (Page 9).

²⁹¹ The issue of inequality is still very pertinent. Carol Merritt, in a blog for *The Christian Century*, draws attention to the disproportionate number of women and ethnic minorities in the bivocational fold. In the USA, particularly, this has implications in the area of medical coverage and other benefits, since these are only available to full-timers or near-full-timers. This forces Merritt to ask the probing question: “Will we be setting up a system where the white guys with good teeth and nice hair will be the only ones with a full-time position with benefits?” Merritt writes from the perspective of trying to get those who are bivocational by necessity into a functional full-time system: “Why are we jumping so quickly to bivocational ministry as the answer to everything?” she asks. But her concerns are mainly financial, and the short blog does not deal with wider issues of vocation or missiology – or even the historical reality where bivocational ministry was the norm in many places.
<http://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2012-07/should-bivocational-ministry-be-new-normal> Accessed July 15th 2012.

²⁹² McCarty, 42.

bivocational church planting, Steve Neger and Eric Ramsay claim that tentmaking “was part of (Paul’s) ethos, his ideal, his thought pattern...his theology.”²⁹³

Allen argues that, on the issue of earning a living through being a minister of the gospel, the church has turned a permission into a demand.²⁹⁴ Elsewhere, he wrote that Paul used the maxim in 1 Corinthians 9:14 “not as a law inviolable and immutable, but as a permission which he himself declined to use.”²⁹⁵ New Testament scholar Gordon Fee agrees. Commenting on this passage, he challenges the contemporary church:

The whole reason for the argument is to assert that his giving up of these rights does not mean that he is not entitled to them. In a day like ours such rights usually mean a salary and “benefits.” On the other hand, the reason he feels compelled to make this kind of defense is that he has given up these rights. Contemporary ministers seldom feel compelled so to argue!...All too often one fears the objective of this text is lost in concern over “rights” that reflect bald professionalism rather than a concern for the gospel itself.²⁹⁶

Various reasons are advanced in the literature as to why Paul chose to “work hard with his own hands”²⁹⁷ (although all are agreed that the work in question would have been in tentmaking).²⁹⁸ Dorr mentions five: Jewish boys were expected to learn and practice a trade, rabbis were forbidden to earn from their teaching, it was a natural trade for a Cilician like Paul, Greeks despised manual labour and Paul deliberately set an example of humility to the church, and Jewish priests did earn and were often

²⁹³ Steve Neger and Eric W Ramsey, *Bivocational Church Planters: Uniquely Wired for Kingdom Growth* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board of the SBC, 2007), 16.

²⁹⁴ Allen, *The Case for Voluntary Clergy*, 51. Chrysostom argued that “earning a living” denoted subsistence living rather than the accrual of wealth. See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich./ Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co./ Apollos, 2010), 415.

²⁹⁵ Allen, *Voluntary Clergy Overseas: An Answer to the Fifth World Call*, 132.

²⁹⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987), 414.

²⁹⁷ See 1 Corinthians 4:12.

²⁹⁸ Acts 18:3. There has been debate over the type of tent he would have been making and the exact material Paul would have been working with, although the strong consensus is that he was a leatherworker. See Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

unpopular and satirised as greedy. He continues, “Paul refused church financial support so he would not be classified with institutionally supported religious workers and would hopefully escape any taint on his ministry of the gospel.”²⁹⁹

The validity of some of these suggestions, particularly the relevance of the rabbinic connection, are questioned by Ronald Hock in what is perhaps the most extensive recent treatment of Paul’s tentmaking. His assertion that there is no positive work ethic within Paul is, however, dependent on his division of the Pauline corpus into Pauline and deuterio-Pauline.³⁰⁰ Nevertheless, he emphasizes how tentmaking fit into Paul’s “boasting in weakness” paradigm,³⁰¹ and how he viewed his work as “toil, slavery and humiliation.” He explains,

His life was very much that of the workshop...of leather, knives and awls; of wearying toil; of being bent over a workbench like a slave and of working side by side with slaves; of thereby being perceived by others and by himself as slavish and humiliated; of suffering the artisans’ lack of status and so being reviled and abused.³⁰²

Paul Barnett agrees: “all romantic notions must be dispelled,” he writes. “This was exhausting and stinking work, done at night...It was one of the chief sources of his exhaustion and humiliation in a culture that despised physical labour.”³⁰³ Later, in the same commentary, he notes, “Most likely, Paul’s hands and arms were permanently stained”³⁰⁴ so that “the stained hands of Paul the tentmaker who preached Christ

²⁹⁹ Dorr, 7-9. See also William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, Rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 89-90.

³⁰⁰ Hock, 67.

³⁰¹ See 2 Corinthians 12:5-9: “His boast, it turned out, was his boast in his weakness as an artisan”. Ibid., 67.

³⁰² Ibid., 67.

³⁰³ Paul Barnett, *1 Corinthians*, Focus on the Bible (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000), 69.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 155.

crucified were a 'sacrament' of the generosity of God giving his righteousness by grace, but not cheaply."³⁰⁵

The issue of patronage is also relevant. Barnett points out that "the practice of patronage was deeply embedded in Graeco-Roman society,"³⁰⁶ and that in Corinth especially it would be important to distance himself from that aspect of the culture.³⁰⁷ This is also the position adopted by Ciampa and Rosner, who write that Paul "chooses to demonstrate his pleasure in (preaching) by not accepting support from those to whom he is ministering...The language of vv.13-18... strongly implies Paul's understanding that God is his patron, and he is under obligation to serve his agenda rather than anyone else's."³⁰⁸

Joel Lohr, in one article, recognizes the multiple possible reasons behind Paul's bivocationalism (not all of them mutually exclusive). He acknowledges the patronage issue, and with Hock and Barnett he recognizes that Paul's decision to remain a tentmaker would have caused embarrassment to some of his followers or would-be disciples from the higher social elite.³⁰⁹ As Ralph Martin observes, "The typical Greek 'upper class' sentiment...was to treat manual labour with disdain and insist that no free citizen – certainly no philosopher – should get himself entangled in physical work."³¹⁰

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 159.

³⁰⁶ Paul Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, U.K.: Inter-Varsity, 1999), 167.

³⁰⁷ In an attempt to reconcile Paul's apparently different attitude to financial help in Corinth and Philippi, Barnett makes the interesting observation that "Corinth due to its position and wealth, was plagued with visiting money-hungry prophets and philosophers. In provincial, unsophisticated Macedonia the apostle could perhaps accept support without compromising the Gospel, but not in the regions of Achaia." Ibid., 168.

³⁰⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, 410-411.

³⁰⁹ Joel N. Lohr, "He Identified with the Lowly and Became a Slave to All: Paul's Tentmaking as a Strategy for Mission," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 34 (2007): 181-182.

³¹⁰ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word Pub., 1986), 344.

The thrust of Lohr's argument concentrates on Paul's humility and the issue of identification. Yet, such identification was not a self-deprecating end in itself. There was undoubtedly a missiological dimension:

Although he has the freedom and right to make a living as a missionary worker, he has refused to do so for the sake of the gospel and unity of the body. Paul is free to accept the gift, but he chose not to exercise this right and became a slave, plying his trade and remaining financially free in order to win some to Christ.³¹¹

Hock is actually more explicit in this and draws attention to the peculiar mission opportunities presented by tentmaking. He explains, "His trade also may have served directly in his missionary activities in the sense that workshop conversations with fellow workers, customers, or those who stopped by might easily have turned into occasions for informal evangelism."³¹²

So it appears that the reason for Paul's "non-stipendiary" status was not financial. Paul did receive financial assistance gratefully on other occasions, perhaps most notably from the Philippians.³¹³ Martin says that he adopted "a pragmatic, not doctrinaire approach,"³¹⁴ and Nerger and Ramsay maintain that compared to the modern church's neat divisions of "fully-funded," "partially funded," and "unfunded," Paul seems at various times and in various places to have been in all three camps. They comment, "We find it interesting that the Apostle Paul was just interested in doing whatever it took to plant churches and disciple people."³¹⁵ This is echoed by Rodney Harrison, who says, "At times Paul served as a tentmaker. At other times in his ministry he was supported by

³¹¹ Lohr, "He Identified with the Lowly and Became a Slave to All: Paul's Tentmaking as a Strategy for Mission," 187.

³¹² Hock, 68.

³¹³ Phil.4:14-19.

³¹⁴ Martin, 345.

³¹⁵ Nerger and Ramsey, 22.

churches and individuals. There were likely times when he received support from both sources. At all times he was faithful and obedient to the call.”³¹⁶

What is clear, however, is that he desired that his motives not be misunderstood, and that the gospel not be discredited in the eyes of those he was seeking to reach. Paul insisted, says Martin, that he wasn’t setting aside a duty to get support, but a privilege, “because only in this way would he be able to avoid placing an obstacle in the path of the Gospel.”³¹⁷ In 2 Corinthians 12:13, Paul claims never to have been “a burden” to the church, and this does appear to be related to finance.³¹⁸ However, taken with the 1 Corinthians 9 passage, it seems clear that there were multiple reasons for his tentmaking, and that the financial one was neither the only, nor the main reason that he did not wish to earn his living from the gospel.

In his pastoral epistles, it seems that Paul’s qualifications for office in the church sit much more easily with a bivocational lifestyle. David F. Palmer observes:

(Paul requires) that a man be a good manager and provider for his household (1Tim.3:4-5), have the resources to be a hospitable host (Titus 1:8), be living and working in the community in such a way that his reputation precedes him (1Tim.3:7) and gives evidence of good stewardship (Titus 1:7). Qualifications for the pastorate include supporting one’s family adequately and raising the family in a community of people who can verify one’s conduct.³¹⁹

While one could debate whether these passages were addressed to pastors or elders (as they are understood in the contemporary church) nevertheless, within the reformed tradition, the requirements for teaching elders and ruling elders are the same in terms of personal character, and therefore Palmer’s point is worth considering.

³¹⁶ Harrison, 203.

³¹⁷ Martin, 344.

³¹⁸ 2 Cor.12:14.

³¹⁹ David F. Palmer, “Pastoral Support: Lessons from History,” in McCarty, 72.

Whether Paul was bivocational out of a desire for identification, to clarify misunderstandings, to stifle dissension among the churches, to prevent the perils of patronage, to eschew professionalism, to avoid burdening the churches, or to facilitate evangelistic openings with local citizens, the one thing that is certain is that Paul believed his tentmaking, like that of those he appointed to his churches, was to be “for the sake of the gospel.”

Bivocational Planting?

While bivocational ministry has a long pedigree and is becoming more common in trying to resource smaller and more isolated congregations, what of its potential as a model for the planting of new churches? One of the most commonly articulated reasons for approaching bivocational planting with caution is burn-out due to the inability to cope with conflicting and demanding time constraints.³²⁰ An unattributed blog on a church planting network site goes as far as to say: “It is generally accepted that bi-vocational (sic) church planting is suicidal. Church planting is so demanding and time-consuming that a man (sic) just can’t work a regular job and plant a church at the same time. In general, this is true.”

In an effort to get away from the emotionally draining (and ministry-interrupting) job of deputation fundraising, the writer of this blog admits there is a need to rethink financial support policies. However, in spite of the many safeguards that could be put in place, he advocates being “bi-vocational [only] for a brief time-period, hopefully a year or less.”³²¹ Stevens, however, disagrees:

³²⁰ See Dorsett: “Bivocational pastors are more prone to burnout.” (Page 23-24). Also the personal testimony of Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs, One Ministry*, 141.

³²¹ LA Hope website:

What keeps some people from choosing the tentmaking option is fear of burnout. However, tentmakers seldom experience burnout because they have a natural rhythm in their lives as they move from work to ministry to family. Professional ministers or full-time homemakers are more susceptible to burnout because they tend to invest too many expectations in one commitment.³²²

Or, as J. R. Rozko asserts: “Embracing an ecclesiology which practices bivocationalism probably makes for all-around healthier churches and healthier pastors.”³²³

However, are the particular demands of planting such that bivocationalism is less feasible than in more established congregational ministry? This appears difficult to substantiate, considering that the biblical precedent for tentmaking was a prolific church planter. However, experienced consultant Al Barth, whilst recognizing some benefits, pleads caution on the grounds of sustainability: namely, that bivocational plants can find it difficult to transition to “a normalized pastoral situation.” Furthermore, he writes, “in most professional demographic situations bivocational leaders don’t have time to create ministry at the levels of excellence demanded, often resulting in stymied growth.”³²⁴

It is noteworthy that in spite of the recent plethora of church planting literature, very little has been written or researched on the subject of bivocational planting. While a number of works have been written on bivocational pastoring, this has not been extended to the subject of bivocational planting. A look at the extensive bibliography and research

<http://lahope.wordpress.com/2008/09/15/rethinking-the-possibility-of-bivocational-church-planting/> accessed 2nd January 2012.

³²² Paul Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1999), 143. See also Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture*, 98.

³²³ <http://lifeasmission.com/blog/2009/10/bi-vocational-ministry/> Accessed 2nd January, 2012.

³²⁴ Al Barth, “RE: Research.” E-mail to author (29 December 2011). In terms of the benefits, Barth does list the following: maximizes gifts of the people; pushes priesthood of all believers; makes ministry an option for more people, particularly businessmen; financial viability in early days.

list on the New Churches' website³²⁵ revealed no titles or articles obviously dealing with bivocational church planting. In fact, personal support raising is pre-supposed throughout the literature, traditional and on-line, and is often granted an entire section or chapter. Even Ed Stetzer and David Putman, whose book displayed creative and imaginative thinking in so many areas, still adhere strongly to traditional and expensive methods of support-raising when it comes to staffing a plant. They write, "We are learning that it is generally wise to raise...two or three years of salary support for each full-time member prior to starting the church-planting process."³²⁶ Similarly, Doran McCarty's comprehensive anthology on bivocational ministry has no chapter on planting, although it is mentioned occasionally in passing,³²⁷ while Tom Jones's compendium, forward-thinking in so many areas, acknowledges the increase in bivocational planters, particularly in ethnic churches, but donates only three lines to the concept.³²⁸

The exception is the short work by Nerger and Ramsay. They believe that "the primary place to look when starting churches, especially in the rural and urban contexts, is to bivocational church planters."³²⁹ Reviewing this, J.D. Payne commends it for filling the "gap in church planting literature today. There is a great need for additional writings on bivocational church planting."³³⁰ The authors define a bivocational church planter as, "someone who starts a church and gains a part, if not all, of his personal income from an

³²⁵ <http://www.newchurches.com>; accessed 7th Jan. 2011.

³²⁶ Stetzer and Putman, 162.

³²⁷ See McCarty, 101-103, 249. One contributor baldly asks: "Who ever said you paid people to start churches?" James Nelson, "The Bivocational Issue", 101.

³²⁸ Jones, 158.

³²⁹ Nerger and Ramsey, viii.

³³⁰ J. D. Payne, review of Nerger and Ramsay. <http://northamericanmissions.org/files/BiVoChurchPlantingReview.pdf> accessed 5th Jan. 2011)

outside source other than the church.”³³¹ They note that in the North American context, within the Southern Baptist Convention, although bivocationalism had been part of the fabric of the denomination since its inception in terms of pastoring small and remote churches,³³² only as recently as 2005 had it finally been extended as an option to planters. “Bivocationalism,” they write, “is now seen as a strategy in building the core of a new church, as well as a financial consideration.”³³³

The middle part of Nerger and Ramsay’s book, like Lowery’s booklet,³³⁴ is taken up with first-hand stories, significant for their breadth and diversity of contexts and styles. They do, however, give a robust defense of bivocational planting in Part One. They offer perhaps the most comprehensive list of why planters may choose the bivocational route, and these include not just financially driven reasons but also intentional strategic ones.³³⁵ They agree with Stevens on the issue of burn-out, believing that bivocationalism can just as easily be a cure for stress as a cause of it. They argue, “The life and rhythm of a bivocational church planting pastor are energizing. The daily experiences of ministry alongside people in the community can actually invigorate you and your life.”³³⁶

The authors explode some myths, mainly centered round the need for a seminary degree.³³⁷ Nor do they believe that this is purely a financial argument. They highlight the

³³¹ Nerger and Ramsey, 7.

³³² See notes 281, 290 above.

³³³ Nerger and Ramsey, 18.

³³⁴ Ibid., 33-74.

³³⁵ Ibid., 15.

³³⁶ Ibid., 26-27.

³³⁷ “Our ‘one seminary trained man-one church start’ model, which usually costs the new church 50 percent or more of its budget, is too financially taxing.” Ibid., 21. However it is not only the financial argument that is compelling. They also query whether a formal theological education is the best preparation for a number of contexts where planting is needed.

main problem with those who restrict themselves to seminary-trained full-time leadership, commenting, “Reaching a continent with the gospel and multiplying churches is not possible if the primary paradigm requires individuals to be removed from their cultural contexts for three years to study at theological institutions and only then to return to the fields and serve as missionaries.”³³⁸ In fact, there appears to be historical and contemporary warrant for suggesting that an exclusive focus on full-time ministry has hindered, among other things, church planting and church growth. Finke and Stark show that, in North America at least, this is not a new phenomenon:

In 1776 the Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and the Presbyterians seemed to be *the* colonial denominations...By 1860 there were actually fewer than 500,000 Congregationalists in America, while Baptists numbered nearly two million. What happened?...Other groups depended on a well-educated and well paid clergy...The Baptist farmer-preachers came with the people because they *were* the people. Baptists operated with incredibly low overhead. Baptist clergy received little, if any pay...The average value of local church property was very low for Baptists.³³⁹

David Jones, having cited the examples of Bunyan and Carey in England,³⁴⁰

lists the plethora of bivocational early American Baptist preachers:

(They) made their living in vocations other than preaching. They were bivocational: farmer-preachers, teacher-preachers, doctor-preachers, storeowner-preachers, sheriff-preachers, cowboy-preachers, merchant-preachers, and the list of occupations goes on. There was no policy or program that produced this model of evangelist, church planter and pastor. Within the American context it just happened.³⁴¹

Former Irish Presbyterian Moderator, Stafford Carson, is in agreement. He explains,

³³⁸ Ibid., 9.

³³⁹ See Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 54-82.

³⁴⁰ “Bunyan preached consistently in the Bedford area sustaining life and family by his tinker trade;” “Whether by economic necessity or as part of his philosophy of ministry, Carey fulfilled the many callings on his life with a deep sense that he was merely being obedient to God’s purpose for his life.” David Jones, art.cit, 10.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 15.

“Historically the reason why Baptists and Methodists dominate the midwest of the US is because the Presbyterians were sitting at home getting their theological colleges organized while the others just got on with evangelism at the frontier.”³⁴²

Another Irish Presbyterian pastor, Alistair Kennedy, concludes that beyond the Appalachians many Scots-Irish “found the disciplines and stolidity of Presbyterianism too confining on their practice of what was essentially a lay religion, and moved towards the Baptists and Methodists.”³⁴³ The openness of these other movements to bivocational preacher-planters appears to have been a contributing factor to their growth.

Nerger and Ramsay also deny that it should be the goal of every bivocational planter to eventually become fully funded.³⁴⁴ On this issue, however, they are definitely a minority voice. The paucity of references to bivocationalists in the planting literature has already been noted, but even those who do acknowledge its validity seem to do so

³⁴² Stafford Carson, “RE: Dissertation.” E-mail to the author (21 November, 2011).

³⁴³ Alistair Kennedy, “Through a glass darkly: a look at the future of church planting” (Part 1), *Presbyterian Herald*, March 1993, 24. Church historian Finlay Holmes comments on how this was also true in nineteenth century Gaelic Ireland, except in this case there were few or no evangelical Irish counterparts to the American Baptists: “There was some recognition that the Presbyterian presentation of the gospel was too cerebral and intellectual to appeal to illiterate peasants. ‘Preaching will not do’ reported one missionary ‘for the majority could not understand it,’” and there was seen the need for lay evangelists to communicate “the doctrines of salvation more to the level of their capacities than ministers can accomplish.” He also quotes the interesting observation of American historian David Miller, who claims that “in targeting the poorest of the poor in Catholic Ireland... the Presbyterians were seeking to win from the Catholic community the very stratum which they had already lost within their own community.” Finlay Holmes, *The Presbyterian Church in Ireland: A Popular History* (Blackrock, Co Dublin: Columba Press, 2000), 102. Contemporary nineteenth century Presbyterian historian James Seaton Reid remarked, “It has often been said that Presbyterianism is not a religion for a gentleman, but the statistics of the Ulster workhouses rather seem to indicate that it is not a religion for a beggarman.” James Seaton Reid and William Dool Killen, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Comprising the Civil History of the Province of Ulster, from the Accession of James the First: With a Preliminary Sketch of the Progress of the Reformed Religion in Ireland During the Sixteenth Century*, new ed. (Belfast: W. Mullan, 1867), Vol.3, 590. An exception to this general belief that Protestant mission was more successful among the socially better-off, is Gideon Ouseley, the renowned Irish-speaking Methodist preacher, who gained widespread respect for his work in the South and West. See Dunlop.

³⁴⁴ See Nerger and Ramsey, 80.

reluctantly, and only as an interim measure. Malphurs, for example, is unequivocal, seeming to question the wisdom of long-term bivocationalism per se. He writes, “It should be stressed that any outside employment on the part of the church-planting team must be viewed as temporary. Like most other ministries, church planting is a full-time responsibility. Anything less will hinder the work of this ministry.”³⁴⁵ He goes as far as to say of bivocational planting that “of all the options, this is the least preferable because it limits the time the planter can give to the new ministry. However, in a team context this may be unavoidable initially.”³⁴⁶

In writing on the principles and practices of church planting, Charles Brock advocates the “five selfs” of self-governing, self-supporting, self-expressing, self-teaching, and self-propagating. The emphasis is on sustainability apart from the planter, but although it may appear to be an obvious inference, there is still not an explicit expectation that the planter themselves might or should be bivocational. This is strange, given that he writes,

Some people have the very erroneous idea that only a preacher can start churches. Some would think one must have seminary training in order to plant churches. Also, these would usually think that one must have a public ordination ceremony before being qualified to plant churches. It is amazing how man-made, extra-Biblical tradition can come to the place of being considered sacred. All of the above ideas about who can plant churches have arisen from religious/political sources.³⁴⁷

Could it not be equally true that many think erroneously that one must work in full-time salaried ministry in order to plant churches? May some of the reasons forwarded for this not also be more religious and political than theological?

³⁴⁵ Malphurs, 51.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Quoted by Linda Bergquist and Gary Bulley, “Relational based church planting”, 18. http://www.newchurches.com/mediafiles/Relational_Based_Church_Planting.pdf accessed 7th Jan. 2011.

Ed Stetzer believes there are practical financial considerations that militate against bivocational planting: “during their years of education, seminarians sometimes accumulate significant debt that makes bivocationalism impossible.”³⁴⁸ Yet other writers maintain that one of the advantages of being bivocational is that it can allow the pastor to earn more than he or she would with a full-time stipend, thereby releasing planters and their families from the financial anxiety that may arise from fear of contract termination or possible failure.³⁴⁹ Stetzer, however, goes on to advocate bivocationalism as a vital strategy for planting, precisely because the fragmentation of society and multiplication of “people groups” within previously homogenized cultures means that many will never be reached if the pastorate is limited to full time salaried personnel. He mentions extensive apartment complexes, mobile home villages, marinas, townhouse communities, and sparse rural areas, concluding, “Because of their poverty, transience, size, or support base, many of these areas cannot support a ‘professional’ seminary-trained pastor expecting a full-time salary.”³⁵⁰

The dearth of bivocational planting literature means that the few resources that are available tend to be on-line. The Church Planting Village website has individual pages devoted to contemporary “people-groups,” (including those mentioned by Stetzer), many

³⁴⁸ Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, 8.

³⁴⁹ See Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry*, 41; Harrison, 201; Palmer in McCarty, 64. Palmer highlights the dangers and dilemmas of finding one’s livelihood at the mercy of an economic downturn or worse a church schism, where division over values vision or methodology or even theology could leave the pastor jobless.

³⁵⁰ Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, 8. See also Vernon E. Beachum Jr., “Tentmaker Ministries: an Honorable Calling,” in McCarty, 289. “Reaching the millions of people located in small, isolated rural communities or urban ethnic areas might only be accomplished through indigenous bivocational servants sharing in the ministry with the people.”

of whom will realistically only be reached by bivocationalists.³⁵¹ It also has many downloads of unpublished articles, including some by Steve Nerger.³⁵²

Rodney Harrison goes further than most planting writers in devoting a chapter to bivocationalism – its benefits and challenges; although he also believes that a transition to full-time is likely, especially if a plant experiences unexpected growth.³⁵³ Sjogren and Lewin actively recommend bivocational leadership in the early days of the plant – even if the financial backing is there – for missional reasons. They specifically highlight the benefits of missional contact, giving theological integrity to work, discouraging dependence, and encouraging identification.³⁵⁴ Drawing on Dan Ramsay, they then helpfully point to careers that are particularly suited to bivocationalists.³⁵⁵

It is possibly significant that Harrison's book is one of the more recent publications on the subject, as there does seem to be a developing openness to the subject not least because, as Harrison points out, bivocationalism is increasingly common in society at large. In fact he goes as far as predicting that "this is the way much ministry will be going in the immediate future."³⁵⁶ Frost and Hirsch concur. They believe that the sort of missional thinking and contextualization required for historic third world missions needs to be applied rigorously to more and more first world contexts, not least in this area of support. They write,

Some of our artist-missionary comrades in San Francisco and Los Angeles work similarly on mission support and tentmaking. It is the support system of the

³⁵¹ <http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/> Search, for example: 'Micropolitan'; "Third shift"; "multi-housing".

³⁵² <http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/> Search "bivocational".

³⁵³ Harrison, 204.

³⁵⁴ Sjogren and Lewin, 226-228.

³⁵⁵ See Dan Ramsay, *101 Best Weekend Businesses* (Pompton Plains, N.J.: Career Press, 1996).

³⁵⁶ Harrison, 200.

future. We suggest it is time for church planters and established churches to consider doing the same. Sustainability and organic growth are at stake.³⁵⁷

On the other side of the Atlantic, Scottish Presbyterian minister and missiologist Peter Neilson has published an important series of lectures on the future of the church in Scotland, which is not without relevance to the Irish Presbyterian context. In it he makes a similar point, coining the phrase “portfolio ministry” to describe tentmaking, giving some urban examples of it in practice, and arguing that even if such ministry does result in a lower standard of living, this could be (as in Paul’s day) a powerful counter-cultural and anti-materialistic statement which could play a part in softening the hardened attitudes of skeptical post-moderns. He shares,

We live in the age of “portfolio working” when people can earn a living on two or three part-time jobs....That assumes certain life-style choices about simplicity of living, but part of the Generation X critique of church life is that we have become too sophisticated and ministers have priced themselves out of the mission-field.³⁵⁸

In England, Chester and Timmis, regard the issue in a straightforward way:

The challenge for us is to make the gospel the center of our lives not just on Sunday mornings, but on Monday mornings. This means ending distinctions between “full-timers,” “part-timers” and people with secular employment in our team and leadership structures. We need non-full-time leaders who can model whole-life gospel-centered missional living. It means thinking of our workplaces, homes and neighbourhoods as the location of mission.³⁵⁹

It is not yet clear why established “mainline” denominations such as the Presbyterians have not tended to adopt bivocational leadership as an option. It is undoubtedly related in some measure to the importance attached to the understanding and preaching of the word of God, and the consequent emphasis on “an educated ministry.”

³⁵⁷ Frost and Hirsch, 218.

³⁵⁸ Peter Neilson, *Church on the Move: New Church, New Generation, New Scotland: An Emerging Profile*, Chalmers Lectures (Glasgow and Edinburgh: Covenanters; Scottish Christian Press, 2005), 144.

³⁵⁹ Chester and Timmis, 36.

Carson who, as well as being a pastor, spent time as academic dean at Westminster

Theological Seminary, writes:

[It is right to highlight] the issue of quality of education provided [and] the understanding of the importance of educated ministry. The ministry-based guys get very annoyed when the academic side insists on doing everything according to their standards. Great tensions are created, not just in terms of the integrity of the program of study, but with regard to finances, relevance to ministry, and time taken to complete a standard MDiv program...The Presbyterian commitment to a learned ministry is cumbersome, middle-class, and financially draining. But there are benefits.³⁶⁰

Nevertheless, it is difficult to find anything in the literature that explains why an educated ministry need be incompatible with bivocationalism. Beynon reminds his readers that, in many situations, a full-time pastor is not primarily needed. Rather, “What there is, is a need for leadership, teaching and pastoral oversight.”³⁶¹ Doran McCarty sees the key issue being not the vocational status of the planter but the needs of the church. This is, he argues, how it was in New Testament times: “Appointment to the ministry is primarily determined by the situation and the needs of the missionary task and of the congregation...At the end of the New Testament you have mixed strands: official, unofficial. The essential issue is, how does the ministry meet the needs that the early church faced?”³⁶²

One recent advocate of bivocational planting has been planter, author, missional-church advocate, and blogger David Fitch. On his “Reclaiming the Mission” site in 2011, he published an article entitled “Stop funding church plants and start funding missionaries: a plea to denominations.” Referring to the three to four hundred thousand dollars required to plant under older traditional models, he writes:

³⁶⁰ Stafford Carson, “RE: Dissertation.” E-mail to the author (21 November 2011).

³⁶¹ Beynon, 56.

³⁶² McCarty, 23.

Today, in the changing environments of N American post Christendom, this approach to church planting is insane. For it not only assumes an already Christianized population to draw on, it puts enormous pressure on the church planter to secure already well-heeled Christians as bodies for the seats on Sunday morning.³⁶³

He presents the alternative: “Instead of funding one entrepreneurial pastor, preacher and organizer to go in and organize a center for Christian goods and services, let us fund three or four leader/leader-couples to go in as a team to an under-churched context.” The goal, he says, should not be to establish a self-sustaining church organization, but rather to give them time and space to:

...get to know and listen to the neighborhood and the neighbors; establish rhythms of life together which include worship, prayer, community, discipleship and presence among the neighbors; discern God working in and among the neighbors and neighborhood, bring the gospel to these places wherever God is working; and develop a way of bringing those coming into faith in Christ into a way of growth and discipleship.³⁶⁴

Fitch also believes that the realities of a bivocational plant are such that more time is released to be actively involved in day-to-day mission. In line with the thinking of Chester and Timmis, and taking seriously the new models of church community that are being advocated as most suited to the post-modern generation, Fitch warns against “building big” and shows how bivocational planting can work if the planter is released from traditional expectations. Bivocationalism, says Fitch, breeds congregational participation and works against the passivity that can so easily set in when there is a professional in charge. It also guards against excessive programming because it “cultivates organic forms of life that arise from within the rhythms of the congregation

³⁶³ David Fitch, “Stop Funding Church Plants and Start Funding Missionaries: a plea to Denominations,” 28 June, 2011. <http://www.reclaimingthemission.com/stop-funding-church-plants-and-start-funding-missionaries-a-plea-to-denominations/comment-page-2/#> Accessed 26th March 2012.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

and its surrounding neighborhoods.” It encourages other leaders and staff to be more integrated and less ghettoized:

When we no longer see the Sunday morning gathering as attractional, we are not forced to spend 40 hours on music and programming, 40 hours on sermon prep etc. to make it “the Thing.” The gathering on Sunday instead must become an organic, living, liturgically driven encounter with the living God and His mission sending us outward. It must become something done out of the regular rhythms of our lives. This kind of gathering takes less work because the “slick” factor is off the table. All these gifts can now be used in the surrounding context. Think of how we can support a musician to play in local contexts and engage the community instead of perfecting a performance for the Sunday “event.”³⁶⁵

Retired Irish bivocational planter Fergus Ryan, who was not interviewed for this study given that he (ahead of his time) was planting several decades ago and the churches springing from his movement are now well established themselves, emphasizes that the team dimension was part of his church’s DNA from the beginning, and that this should never depart in any future reshuffling or transition. He says, “In larger and more developed churches bivocationalism continues to be a necessary, even critical, element of building church leadership teams.”³⁶⁶ However, he does suggest that some type of transition to full-funding may be inevitable. He shares, “It is probably necessary in the larger contexts that the team leader is full-time with church.” For him, it was this team emphasis – as well as the financial savings –which was of clear benefit to the plant at the beginning:

For the early years of the church plant when the traditional notions of corporate stewardship were unfamiliar to most of the new members, and the numbers were relatively small, it meant that there was no financial burden associated with maintaining one or more families. In respect of those we were seeking to reach

³⁶⁵ David Fitch, <http://www.reclaimingthemission.com/bi-vocational-or-go-on-staff-at-a-large-church-suddenly-bi-vocational-ministry-doesnt-look-so-bad/> October 7th 2009. Accessed 2nd January 2012.

³⁶⁶ All quotes from Fergus Ryan, “Research” (brief initial message); “A Few Typo Corrections – Use This Version” (subsequent expanded and corrected message). E-mails to the author (1 October 2012).

with the Gospel, our financial independence meant that we had the large home and monetary resources necessary to minister to others in some ways that would not have been possible if the group was supporting us.

Although Ryan remained bivocational, the ministry ethos developed by his church did not preclude others being fully-funded. He explained, “I took [a pension package] as an opportunity to work full-time with church while at the same time continuing to be financially independent. I estimated that the church’s resources would be better used in releasing another team member into part- or full-time ministry.”

So, the question remains that, given that there will likely be various context-specific advantages and disadvantages to bivocational planting, is anything lost theologically, or are any biblical boundaries transgressed or scriptural principles ignored by pursuing the bivocational route?

Calling to Ministry?

One key element to this discussion is the place of one’s call to pastor, lead, plant, or preach and teach in the context of one’s wider calling as a Christian. Some of the opposition to bivocational ministry may arise from the conviction, however poorly articulated, that a calling to church ministry is a higher and therefore exclusive calling. “No-one can serve two masters,”³⁶⁷ it might be said. Or (more exegetically valid in terms of context), “No soldier gets involved in civilian affairs.”³⁶⁸ So is there a sense in which a calling to preach and teach necessarily excludes the pursuit of any other career?

A couple of books which seek to help potential students for ordained ministry discern their calling are Edmund Clowney’s *Called to the Ministry* and Michael Milton’s

³⁶⁷ Matthew 6:24.

³⁶⁸ 2 Timothy 2:4

*Leaving a Career to Follow a Call.*³⁶⁹ Both are written from a conservative reformed position, and Clowney's book, as well as directly influencing Milton,³⁷⁰ has been a big influence on a number of Irish Presbyterian colleagues over the years.³⁷¹

In addition, Scottish Presbyterian pastor and professor Dr. Iain Campbell wrote an online article specifically in response to an emerging debate on the nature of the call to ministry.³⁷² "It seems that the concept of a call to the ministry has fallen on hard times" he writes, noting that in one recent survey of evangelical ministers, less than half of those interviewed "said that they had felt a special call to the ministry." Campbell's concern is obvious. Such uncertainty would not have been the case, he believes, in previous years. Indeed, "so high an office was the ministry considered to be, that a sense of calling was both assumed and required." Campbell briefly catalogues the various biblical calls to individuals in both testaments and references C. H. Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, amongst others, before concluding with the rather provocative sound bite: "Having been called to the greatest office in the world, how can a man stoop to become a king?"

Campbell's main concern is to ensure that those who embark upon the ministry of preaching and teaching do so at God's bidding, and that such a call is then verified by the church. He believes that only the presence of a call "which was more than an internal feeling" could give the preacher's words authority and the preachers themselves encouragement. However, why a call to preach and teach should be regarded as the apex of a hierarchy of callings is assumed rather than defended. Therefore, the exclusivity of

³⁶⁹ Michael A. Milton, *Leaving a Career to Follow a Call: A Vocational Guide to the Ordained Ministry* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000).

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 12, 111, 131.

³⁷¹ At the time of writing it was the only book on the subject to be found in the library of the theological college of the PCI.

³⁷² All quotes are from Iain Campbell, "The Call to the Ministry", http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/articles/article_detail.php?1106 Accessed 22nd March 2012.

such a call and the implications of all of this for the validity of bivocational ministry are still unclear.

Similarly Clowney, in one illustration, tells of young manager who found himself concerned for the spiritual state of an employee. He ponders, “How could he reach him with the gospel? The young manager was alarmed. What was happening to him since his conversion? His fears were well grounded. Today he is a minister of the gospel.”³⁷³ But was it really the case that the best way for this young man to share the gospel with his employee was for him to leave and become a pastor elsewhere?

Milton differentiates between the “General Call” (to live as a Christian), the “Effectual Call” (of the Holy Spirit into new life in Christ), and the “Technical Call” (our daily vocation). The call to ordained ministry would be one technical call and would consist of both an “Inward Call,” which he describes as “that stirring of God in our hearts, in our deepest persons,” and the “Outward Call,” which is the church’s confirmation of that.³⁷⁴ Writing out of a slightly broader churchmanship, Michael Cox differentiates slightly differently. He combines the General and the Effectual into the Call to be a Christian, and then outlines the “Secret Call” (Milton’s Inward), adds the “Providential Call” (circumstances and abilities) and the “Ecclesiastical Call” (Milton’s Outward).³⁷⁵

Of the Inward/Secret Call, Cox writes: “The inner sense of call may come as a...growing awareness or....in a highly dramatic calling... The one thing you can say for

³⁷³ Clowney, 80-81.

³⁷⁴ Milton, 12-15. See also Calvin, III.10.9.

³⁷⁵ Robert G. Cox, *Do You Mean Me, Lord? The Call to the Ordained Ministry*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 12-21. Of the Providential Call he says: “your inner sense of call must be balanced against the abilities you possess.” (Page 18).

certain about all secret calls is that each one is unique.”³⁷⁶ Both Milton and Cox are following Calvin quite closely in terms of his understanding of the inner call. In his *Institutes*, Calvin discusses “the good witness of our heart that we receive the proffered office not with ambition or avarice, not with any other selfish desire, but with a sincere fear of God and desire to build up the church.”³⁷⁷

According to Clowney, there should be a discernible compulsion in the hearts of those called to ministry. Although he comes close to viewing the pastoral and preaching call as superior, he does so only in the context of those who are gifted for this ministry. His comment regarding the precedence of the Great Commission over the creation mandate has been referenced earlier. The full quote, in context, is:

Men (sic) with the gifts for the ministry have the capacity for success in other fields, but they are not free to choose them. God’s first command still stands: man is to replenish the earth and subdue it; but the Great Commission takes priority over it. The Christian is a citizen of heaven, given the Word of life in a world of death. Peter left his fishing boat, Matthew left the tax business, and you must leave any calling that keeps you from exercising the gifts of the herald of Christ, if these gifts are yours.³⁷⁸

The counter-argument, of course, is that Paul did not leave his tentmaking. So which, if any, of the Apostles’ circumstances or callings are to be seen as normative for today? One struggles to find in any of these books a clearly articulated argument for why a ministry of word and sacrament, a preaching ministry, a planting ministry, or anything connected to the exercise of the office of teaching elder, need be incompatible with simultaneously following another trade or profession. In some cases it is merely presumed that, because of the nature of the work, it must be given all of one’s time and energy.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 15.

³⁷⁷ Calvin, IV.3.10.

³⁷⁸ Clowney, 80.

Milton, for example, makes various comments at different stages in his book that impinge on this issue. On each occasion, he says he has dealt with the objections at some other point in his book, yet on closer inspection, it is not clear that he has. For example, on the transition from one calling to another, he says: "...you are called to the Ordained Ministry. You are also, probably, a successful salesman, manager, teacher, computer programmer, or craftsman. So, how do you make the move with integrity?"³⁷⁹ He claims that this is dealt with in the next chapter, but that chapter merely deals with the mechanics of leaving, not with the vocational issues that the question raises.

Similarly, when he raises the common objection: "Can't you serve God at the Firm?" he says that he covered this in his chapter on vocation. But that chapter did not deal with work as vocation, and the substance of Milton's argument is simply: "But you have been called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament."³⁸⁰ Further, on the "priesthood of all believers" and the promotion of lay ministry, he fears that this involves "denying the place of ordained ministry in the order of the Church... The Scriptures declare that only some are called to ruling and teaching offices in the Church."³⁸¹ Once more he refers back to his chapter on vocation, which did not actually mention this issue. Nor did it deal with whether or not scripture speaks of "a call to office," as opposed to a general "call to ministry."

Milton refers to this promotion of lay ministry as "egalitarianism," and he maintains that: "egalitarianism denies the ordained role of the preacher and turns preaching into Bible Studies.... The problem is that preaching is connected to a preacher.

³⁷⁹ Milton, 39.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 42.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 107-108.

Someone is called to preach and others are called to heed and practice.”³⁸² This is similar to Campbell’s differentiation (following R. L. Dabney) between a sermon and a speech: “Any topic might be the subject of a speech. But a sermon comes with the authority of the God of the Bible in order to make men [sic] do something in response to God.”³⁸³

However, Milton’s strong association between the person and the ministry would seem to be at variance with the reformed understanding that the effectiveness of ministry is not in any way linked to the worthiness of the person.³⁸⁴ Commenting on the reformed understanding of the sacraments, G. I. Williamson writes:

The Reformed faith subordinates the sacramental means of grace to the divine source of grace, thus making the validity and efficacy of the sacraments independent of men. The sacrament is valid and efficacious because it is appointed by Christ, and is made effectual when and where he is pleased to confer saving grace by his Holy Spirit.³⁸⁵

If this is true of the sacraments, is it not also true of preaching? And if God can choose to use unfit or even unregenerate people as channels for his word (as he did in parts of scripture), how much more can he use fit and godly disciples who may not be called exclusively to preach or administrate the sacraments, but may yet be equipped, gifted and called to do so in conjunction with their other callings? Taken to its logical conclusion,

³⁸² Ibid., 108.

³⁸³ Campbell, art. cit.

³⁸⁴ See the statement regarding the efficacy of the sacraments in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*: “The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither does the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that does administer it.” XXVII. 3. Cited from G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub., 2004).

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 264. It should be noted that the *Confession* does stress that the sacraments should only be dispensed “by a minister of the Word, lawfully ordained” (XXVII. 4) and Williamson concurs with this, in spite of the lack of exegetically strong scriptural support for this position within the *Confession* itself. It is likely therefore that Williamson and Milton would agree on the strong connection between preaching and the call of the preacher. The researcher’s point here is simply to expose some of the tensions inherent in the reformed position with regard to call, office, ministry, word, and sacrament.

one must question whether Milton's position would preclude not only bivocational ministry but also any bivocational preaching.

This confusion is recognized by Edward Hayes in an insightful article where, having mentioned the emergence of multi-staffed megachurches and the growing confusion in theological education regarding how best to prepare people for ministry, he sounds this note of caution: "Developments within evangelicalism today point to the need for taking a fresh look at the subject of a call. Deemphasizing 'call' to ministry in a context that promotes a utilitarian concept of ministerial service may ultimately be detrimental to evangelicalism."³⁸⁶

Following Bromiley,³⁸⁷ Hayes mentions that the validity of some of the distinctions in calling generally accepted in the reformed and evangelical world, and noted above, are now being widely questioned. "Exegetical and dogmatic theology," he writes, "have combined to bring the biblical nature of this distinction under suspicion."³⁸⁸ He believes that the Reformers' focus was always on an integrated call – a continuum between the call to salvation and a call to serve. While he admits that Calvin sometimes "seemed to sanction a special calling for those who direct the church of God," for example by applying passages such as Jeremiah 1, he concludes that "it is not clear, however, whether Calvin made a definite distinction between two separate calls."³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ Edward L. Hayes, "The Call to Ministry," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (January - March 2000): 84.

³⁸⁷ Regarding the calls to salvation, service, and sanctification, Bromiley urges his readers not "to separate what God has joined together." G. W. Bromiley, "Call; Calling," in *ISBE* I.580-581.

³⁸⁸ Hayes, "The Call to Ministry," 93.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

Hayes warns against sacerdotalism: “call” and “calling” can be used justifiably of any ministry, indeed any vocation,³⁹⁰ and “human ordination, dedication or consecration to ministry do not carry with them special privileges or unique powers and preferments.”³⁹¹ The nearest the article comes to a definition for any special call is this: “A special call of God to ministry may be understood as divine intervention in the life and work of an individual, pointing in some specific direction consistent with his will.”³⁹² However, this definition comes after a survey of biblical evidence simply on the call to salvation and Christian discipleship and before a treatment of a specific call to the early apostles.

In 2012, a book by Vaughan Roberts and Tim Thornborough appeared, aimed at recruiting new preachers and planters for “gospel ministry.” *Workers for the Harvest Field* was aimed at those who would be willing to “give up their present jobs and offer themselves as workers to churches and missionary organizations.”³⁹³ While the target audience can account for the book’s emphasis on full-time paid ministry, some chapters fail to promote this without simultaneously undervaluing other forms of employment. Richard Coekin, for example, writes: “God plainly doesn’t want everyone to leave regular employment for gospel ministry employment, because most people will not have the gifts or opportunity to be able to be paid for gospel ministry.”³⁹⁴ However, there are two suppositions behind this statement that are at variance with the theology of work

³⁹⁰ Hayes quotes Ayres: “(‘Calling’) can be used in exactly the same sense of a salesman, a lawyer, a teacher or an actor.” Francis O. Ayres, *The Ministry of the Laity: A Biblical Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 37.

³⁹¹ Hayes, “The Call to Ministry,” 98.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁹³ Vaughan Roberts and Tim Thornborough, *Workers for the Harvest Field* (Epsom, U.K.: The Good Book Company, 2012), 6.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

outlined above and championed by Keller et al: namely, that regular employment is not “gospel ministry,” and that someone with gifts for gospel ministry must be paid for it.

Coekin appears, at times, to universalize his own experience: “For me to maximize gospel ministry, I had to give up my work as a solicitor so I could devote myself full-time to becoming a pastor-teacher.”³⁹⁵ It is only fair to recognize, however, that the authors’ purpose was to prompt suitable people to consider full-time ministry, and that the fact that Coekin was working as a solicitor probably made it less likely that his profession would be practically compatible with the demands of bivocationalism. Nevertheless, it should be possible to present the virtues of one type of gospel ministry without implicitly devaluing other types.

Notwithstanding this, there is little in the literature to suggest that a call to minister as pastor-teacher (and therefore as planter-leader) is so significantly different or superior to other calls that it necessitates forsaking all other vocations and devoting oneself exclusively to church ministry.

The Irish Presbyterian Context

Denominations in a Changing World

A number of writers (Mannoia, Murray, Stetzer, Roxburgh, van Gelder) have recognized that denominations have a role to play in church renewal and planting, but that the challenges faced are different and often more complex than those faced in independent planting movements. Yet Stuart Murray reminds his readers: “Most denominations started as church-planting movements, even if some forgot this heritage

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 42-43.

and allowed church planting to become exceptional rather than normal after a couple of generations.”³⁹⁶ Gibbs and Coffey see the main issue as one of identity, arguing:

If denominational structures are in place primarily as instruments of control, then the identity problem is probably insurmountable. But if these vertical structures can be dismantled to provide financial and personnel resources by which local churches can be effectively serviced, their diversity celebrated and a variety of models assessed, then structures can play an important role.³⁹⁷

Van Gelder’s compendium *The Missional Church and Denominations* is a collection of essays from a variety of theorists and theologians across the denominational spectrum. It is useful in that it takes seriously the contextual realities of working with larger organizations – realities that are often simplistically ignored in much of the church planting literature. In one of the essays, entitled “Reframing Denominations from a Missional Perspective,”³⁹⁸ Alan Roxburgh suggests that many denominations are going through what he calls “a crisis of legitimacy” due to “discontinuous change” in the culture that “is not matched by corresponding responses within the organization. The identity of the organization is then called into question by both its constituency and the wider culture.”³⁹⁹ He goes on to write: “Denominations no longer have legitimacy for most people because denominations have based their legitimacy on forms of social and organizational life that have become increasingly obsolete.”⁴⁰⁰ But, in an attempt to recover legitimacy, pre-packaged solutions cannot simply be imported from elsewhere without any feeling for context or the history or traditions of the denomination in question. Van Gelder writes that: “One cannot bring a missional imagination to

³⁹⁶ Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 208.

³⁹⁷ Coffey and Gibbs, 71.

³⁹⁸ In Van Gelder, 75-103.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

denominations in general and then hope to be able to help congregations develop a missional identity. We must take the particulars of each denomination's history and traditions seriously."⁴⁰¹

This key issue of identity and self-understanding is taken up by Roxburgh: "There are multiple indicators of the loss of coherence in denominations today... The question of identity is at the center of this malaise, and it will not be addressed merely with more tactics, money, or visionary programs."⁴⁰² Drawing on the work of Heifetz and Linsky,⁴⁰³ he writes: "The challenge for the reframing of denominational systems is...complex; it requires more than a technical change. It requires an adaptive change."⁴⁰⁴

Roxburgh uses one of the largest Presbyterian denominations in the world – the PCUSA – as an example of the ineffectiveness of non-adaptive change in a denomination. He regards the PCUSA as a test case of the "corporate denomination" characterized by centralized planning, with managers and executives producing and distributing resources and programs, assured that brand loyalty would guarantee success. He elaborates, "This corporate denomination was a highly successful organizational culture for much of the twentieth century, and it enjoyed a high social legitimacy among its members. But now this very form of denomination has become a barrier to innovating missional life."⁴⁰⁵ He notes that while organizational change has characterized the denomination over the twentieth century, these have not been revolutionary but rather

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 76.

⁴⁰³ Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 13ff. See also Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

⁴⁰⁴ Van Gelder, 77.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 89.

“variations on the basic paradigm of the centralized corporate organization and in fact never questioned the assumptions of the paradigm.”⁴⁰⁶

Russell Crabtree has written a helpful book aimed primarily at national and regional leaders,⁴⁰⁷ highlighting how transitioning from regular local pastorates into these administrative positions requires not just a shift in leadership values,⁴⁰⁸ but a significant shift in skills and time allocation. He perceives part of the problem behind the common disconnection between denominations and personnel on the ground (a common complaint particularly among planters)⁴⁰⁹ is because those operating at a denominational level “do not understand organizational level dynamics and are functioning with values, skills and time management that are inappropriate to the regional level.”⁴¹⁰

Another important volume of essays on this subject is the one edited by David Roozen and James Nieman, experts in organizational change. *Church, Identity and Change: theology and denominational structures in unsettled times* examines how organizational identity has developed and survived through a changing culture in denominations as diverse as the Episcopalians and the Vineyard Christian Fellowship. At

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 89, n.14. I am also grateful to Guillermo Mackenzie for letting me see his in-process dissertation: “Denominational Efforts to Enhance the ministry of Church Planters: Blessings or Hindrances?” (D.Min. diss., Covenant Theological Seminary, forthcoming). Mackenzie wishes to open a conversation between planters and denominational leaders and assessors. He believes that “many denominations are well intentioned in trying to enhance the church-planting programs but fail to listen to the church-planters’ opinions.” Like van Gelder et al, he has observed that, because of rapidly shifting paradigms, denominations are having to review their church planting strategies.

⁴⁰⁷ J. Russell Crabtree, *The Fly in the Ointment: Why Denominations Aren't Helping Their Churches-- and How They Can* (New York: Church Pub., 2008).

⁴⁰⁸ Crabtree says: “I am using the word *value* as a verb rather than a noun... I am speaking of a personal attribute, a description of how a person is emotionally and intellectually wired.” (Page 37).

⁴⁰⁹ See the DMin dissertations of Mackenzie and L. Corbett Heimburger, “Presbytery Mobilization: A Method of Stimulating Church Planting and Growth in a Presbyterian System” (D.Min. diss., Covenant Theological Seminary, 1998).

⁴¹⁰ Crabtree, 34.

the end of the book, they seek, with the help of some organizational theorists, to integrate the various findings and assess how denominations have coped with postmodernity in their respective contexts. Roozen makes this point regarding the effect of cultural change on identity:

The most significant long-term effect of postmodernity on religious institutions is the emerging and evolving de-traditionalization and pluralization within the broader society that seeps down into denominational systems. Once inside, it challenges the cohesion and strength of denominational identities, of authority and power in national denominational structures, and of the loyalty and commitment of constituent congregations and members.⁴¹¹

Later he draws this conclusion – of relevance to those working within the reformed milieu: “Liturgical and Pentecostal traditions appear to be more adaptive than more Calvinist or cognitive traditions, at least at the scale of national structures, to the conditions of the emerging postmodern period.”⁴¹² It is worth examining whether or not this is a fair synopsis.⁴¹³

It is noticeable that in all the British church planting literature, Presbyterianism is conspicuous by its absence. This is not only due to the fact that there is no significant Presbyterian presence in England, but also because in Scotland and Ireland, where Presbyterianism is strong, church planting appears to belong to previous centuries, with little or no evidence of it happening in the last hundred years other than through the porting of existing congregations (usually) from the inner cities. Certainly nothing akin to a church planting movement can be said to exist. In America, while the statistics may be

⁴¹¹ David A. Roozen, “National Denominational structures’ engagement with Postmodernity: an integrated summary from an Organizational Perspective,” in David A. Roozen and James R. Nieman, *Church, Identity, and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005), 589.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 592.

⁴¹³ For the very modest results achieved in an attempt to increase denominational church planting through presbytery mobilization, see Heimburger.

different, Presbyterians have never been to the forefront of either the planting movement or the bivocational resurgence.

In terms of bivocational planting, although David Jones does include Presbyterians in his survey of denominations that have used bivocationalists in church planting,⁴¹⁴ he acknowledges that independents and Baptists, by their ecclesiology, have an easier route:

Baptist ecclesiology means we face less difficulties than other denominations in the use of bivocational ministry. Those denominations with a sacramental view of the ministry are compelled to restrict ministry function to those trained, ordained and authorized by their respective synods and councils. Baptists face no such restrictions and are free to develop a range of ministry models, including the use of bivocational pastors.⁴¹⁵

Of course, Presbyterians' sacramental theology should not be as restrictive in this regard as, say, Episcopalians, but one must consider whether there are still perhaps structural or theological barriers which prevent Presbyterians from enthusiastically pursuing the avenue of bivocational ministry and planting.

Van Gelder believes that the inability of denominations to adapt may be due to unconscious theological presuppositions. He queries whether a Christological rather than Trinitarian emphasis, for example, may lead to an underplaying of the vital relational dimension essential to healthy community life, particularly in large denominations. He alleges that this theological imbalance:

...also overplays authority and hierarchy in developing organization and structures in the church...(too often) denominations and congregations have drawn on secular organizational and leadership models without thinking them through from biblical and theological perspectives...a missional identity can redemptively reframe (a denomination's) polity.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ David Jones, art.cit., 4.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁴¹⁶ Van Gelder, 132.

If denominations can have the imagination, courage, and resources to adapt, these writers maintain that there could yet be what Dwight Zscheile refers to as “a valid, though reconfigured, role for the denomination.”⁴¹⁷ David Forney believes it is vital that we don’t abandon denominations, but rather address the challenges facing them: “Not because denominations need saving, but because they provide us with opportunities to participate in and anticipate God’s mission. Sadly, though, we proceed as if there are really only two polity options to consider - entrenchment or evacuation.”⁴¹⁸

Roozen similarly believes that the appropriate language to use of the larger denominations is not the vocabulary of death but rather words that explain “how they are trying to faithfully and effectively carry their particular legacies into a changing future.”⁴¹⁹ If this is the case, then there will be specific and unique challenges ahead for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as they seek to learn from their history and apply their theology to the rapidly changing culture of post-modern Ireland.

The Irish Presbyterian Challenge

The PCI, like all denominations, was originally a plant. Irish Presbyterian church historian Finlay Holmes notes that the PCI is essentially an immigrant church, albeit one that is 370 years old. Its first Presbytery and fledgling congregations in the early 1640s were organized to minister to immigrant Scots. This continued into the early eighteenth century, when the strength of Presbyterianism in the North East can be attributed to the influx of Scottish immigrants post-1690, while the establishment of quite successful Presbyterian congregations in Dublin and other Southern towns, similarly can be traced

⁴¹⁷ Dwight Zscheile, “A More True ‘Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society,’” in Van Gelder, 153.

⁴¹⁸ David G Forney, “Living in the City - Journeying outside the Gate: A Missional Approach to Polity,” in Van Gelder, 73.

⁴¹⁹ Roozen and Nieman, 589.

to the immigration of English Independents.⁴²⁰ However, there is evidence of an early attraction of the native Irish to Presbyterianism, particularly around Templepatrick where many Irish names are found on the earliest church records, and one member Jeremy O’Cuinn became the first native Irishman to be ordained to Presbyterian ministry. One Anglican observer reported that “Presbyterians were having some success in converting Roman Catholics through preaching to them in Irish” and warned that “if the established Church does not use the same methods then there will be a great increase of converts to Presbyterianism.”⁴²¹ Holmes believes that this success was exaggerated, although preaching in the Irish language was not uncommon in the seventeenth century. Efforts to revive it, however, in the first decades of the eighteenth century proved unsuccessful. Nevertheless, here we see the first signs of a Presbyterian heart to reach out to the neighboring people rather than to simply minister to their own tribe.

Notwithstanding, the PCI began as a church for Scottish immigrants, and this has had implications for how the denomination has struggled to conceive of planting as a missional activity. It has been noted in an earlier chapter how new churches within the PCI in Northern Ireland have almost always followed population shift. This is also noted by John Dunlop in one of the few books published about the contemporary Presbyterian experience in Ireland. He writes: “It has always been the custom for the Presbyterian Church to follow the people. First it was to the country, then to the urban centers, and

⁴²⁰ Holmes, 53.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 54. It should be mentioned that PCI missionary enterprise tended to elicit far greater condemnation from the Protestant establishment than from the Catholics, at this stage. Holmes comments that “outreach of Presbyterianism into the south and west of Ireland was particularly resented by the Church of Ireland.” (Page 52). One Anglican clergyman referred to Presbyterians “enlarging their borders” and sending out missionaries “into several places of this kingdom where they have had no call, nor any congregation.” (Page 52). The irony is not lost that this remark emanates from a church that had just sought to establish itself as “an English church” by legal and military coercion throughout Ireland.

then to the suburbs of those cities. In this sense, the Presbyterian Church is a predominantly ethnic church, mainly of the Scots-Irish.”⁴²² In the majority Roman Catholic Republic of Ireland, the situation is historically not as different as might initially appear. In a 2001 dissertation looking at potential new church developments in the greater Dublin area, Presbyterian planter Keith McCrory notes:

Few of our modern day congregations in the greater Dublin area were formed in response to the spiritual needs of those in the indigenous local population. Most were formed in response to the needs of Scottish or Northern Presbyterians who had moved into the area wishing to worship in their usual Presbyterian form.⁴²³

Respected Irish historian Desmond Bowen makes a similar point regarding the Presbyterian mindset:

Although Presbyterians of Ulster were willing to help Roman Catholics during the famine years, they were not urgently concerned about converting their traditional foes. Wherever the Presbyterians founded churches they were more apt to compete with the local parson for the allegiance of the local Protestant population than they were to preach to the papists.... An extension of the mission beyond Ulster’s borders had comparatively little appeal to Presbyterians.⁴²⁴

This quote is all the more significant when one considers the accusations, still prevalent, of “souperism” – an Irish version of “rice Christians” – whereby it is alleged that famine

⁴²² John Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging: Presbyterians and the Conflict in Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995), 23.

⁴²³ Keith McCrory, “New Church Development in the Greater Dublin Area” (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001), 18. McCrory mentions the “Scots churches” in Abbey Street, Dublin; Carlow; and Kingstown/Dun Laoghaire. The last of these is instructive in terms of Scots-Irish identity in that, post-independence – long after the town had officially changed its name to Dun Laoghaire – the congregation continued to call itself ‘Kingstown’: a dispute that went as far as the floor of the National Parliament in 1944. See <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1944/04/18/00028.asp> accessed 28th December, 2011.

⁴²⁴ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland, 1800-70: A Study of Protestant-Catholic Relations between the Act of Union and Disestablishment* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 34. Methodists were actually much more successful; see pages 34-37. Holmes agrees: “Presbyterians were not in the vanguard of the crusade, but were more concerned at first to support or revive Presbyterian congregations in the south and west of Ireland.” Finlay Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian Heritage* (Belfast: Publications Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 1985), 111. This changed somewhat soon afterwards due to the evangelistic work in the West undertaken by John Edgar, whose call for personnel and funds in the pamphlet *The Cry from Connaught* was particularly influential. See pages 112-113.

relief was either dependent on or, at least expected to result in, conversions from Catholicism to Protestantism.⁴²⁵ However, R. J. Rodgers has highlighted how, regardless of popular perception, this was never the official policy of the Presbyterian missions in the nineteenth century. In fact, the church's Irish Mission "...repeatedly condemned as 'offensive,' 'sinister,' 'mean and immoral' and 'dastardly in the extreme' any ambition that was fixed by merely proselytizing intentions, sustained often with corrupt inducements and satisfied with a mere increase in nominal adherents."⁴²⁶

As early as 1835, a Presbyterian publication acknowledged that some previous mission to Roman Catholics had been "...abusive and irritating, and had pleaded for the adoption of a more sympathetic and understanding attitude."⁴²⁷ Indeed one finds around this time, in internal documents, acknowledgements of the church's ineffectiveness in their engagement with the majority population. In a fascinating piece of correspondence with the American Presbyterians on the issue of slavery (in the year, incidentally, that the renowned theologian, Charles Hodge, was Moderator), the Americans wondered if the Irish church, in questioning their American brothers' adequate opposition of slavery, had done enough themselves to exercise their responsibilities towards their Catholic neighbors. The Irish in reply thanked them "for their remonstrance" and said that they

⁴²⁵ See Holmes, *The Presbyterian Church in Ireland: A Popular History*. Also Bowen. Accusations and counter-accusations continue to this day regarding the extent to which famine relief undertaken by Protestants, including Presbyterians, was linked with proselytism and an expectation that the recipients would change their religion. In his seminal biography of the famous famine-time conservative Roman Catholic Cardinal Paul Cullen, Bowen attributes the Irish counter-reformation to Cullen's disgust at proselytism ["jumping"] in the West; saying of one Galway parish that it was "no longer a parish of Catholics, it has literally become a parish of Jumpers and Bible Readers." Desmond Bowen, *Paul Cardinal Cullen and the Shaping of Modern Irish Catholicism* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), 170.

⁴²⁶ R. J. Rodgers, "Vision unrealized: the Presbyterian mission to Irish Roman Catholics in the nineteenth century," *Bulletin of the Irish Presbyterian Historical Society* 20 (March 1991): 24.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*: 13.

wished “to be humbled before God for our culpable remissness in the work of evangelizing the Roman Catholic population of Ireland.”⁴²⁸

This negligence had been noted some years earlier by a contributor to a debate at the 1833 Synod of Dublin. He asked: “What have the Protestant churches been doing during the last two centuries, for the benefit of the vast population amongst which the Providence of God has placed them?” He bemoaned that there was a belief that their evangelism was “...to be confined to the people of their own denomination exclusively and that any effort on behalf of the hundreds and thousands perishing for lack of knowledge, outside their own pale, was not to be attempted.”⁴²⁹ In more recent years, former Presbyterian Moderator Trevor Morrow, who pastored in the Republic of Ireland for more than thirty years, set out in a Catholic journal his vision for reformed witness in Ireland, which included his understanding of what it meant for him as reformed minister to seek the “reformation of the church Catholic.”⁴³⁰

Nevertheless, due to the complex and troubled history of Ireland, denominational labels can carry negative connotations, so that any move by the PCI to become truly missional and break new ground in terms of planting is not only going to have to deal with issues of self-identity, but also issues of perception from within the majority population. Referring to the Plantation and Cromwellian periods of the seventeenth century, McCrory reminds his readers: “These early associations with what were regarded as hostile occupational forces have influenced, and continue to influence, how

⁴²⁸ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Minutes of the General Assembly* (Belfast: Church House, 1847), 625. Letter dated 12th July 1847.

⁴²⁹ Holmes, *The Presbyterian Church in Ireland: A Popular History*, 98.

⁴³⁰ See Trevor W. J. Morrow, “Mission Ireland: a Reformed Perspective,” *The Furrow* 38.8 (August 1987): 493-503.

our denomination's ministry is received within the indigenous population today.”⁴³¹

Dunlop, however, sees signs of hope that attitudes are softening in this regard: “Irish Catholicism is changing. It is becoming more open and more friendly to Presbyterians....A Presbyterian church is not any longer a place to be shunned at all costs. No longer do Catholics stand outside a Protestant church for a funeral.”⁴³²

Perhaps the best summary of the PCI's attitude toward planting and mission throughout its history is in a series of short articles by Alistair Kennedy, who also co-chaired the denomination's Strategy for Mission Committee in the mid-1990s. He acknowledges that while the denomination's “default mode” has tended to be to work among its own people, there have been significant moments when the vision has broadened, and church planting has always been a part of this. He explains that church planting “...has been aimed mainly at making disciples of the Ulster Scots in their wanderings but also at times has represented significant mission amongst the other people of Ireland. Mission in Ireland has for Presbyterians almost always meant the planting of new congregations.”⁴³³

In charting the planting of the rival Secession synod in the eighteenth century, Kennedy challenges some traditional interpretations. The Seceders capitalized on doctrinal uncertainty and unpopular political moves within the main Synod, and yet

⁴³¹ McCrory, 18.

⁴³² Dunlop, 140-141. It is interesting to observe even regional differences with regard to the perception of the Presbyterian name. Of the two recent Presbyterian plants in the Republic of Ireland, the one in Maynooth (a historical bastion of Catholicism and the site of the world-famous training college for Catholic priests) chose to call itself Maynooth Community Church, while the one in Donabate (a newly developed north Dublin suburb with a religiously and ethnically mixed population) chose to retain the name Presbyterian, as they believed it carried greater credibility than more generic titles.

⁴³³ Alistair Kennedy, “Church Planting in Irish Presbyterianism: 1600-1992 and into the Third Millennium” (Part 1), *Presbyterian Herald*, November 1992, 16.

extended Presbyterian coverage in areas of rapid population growth. Kennedy suggests that the popular idea of the Seceders unnecessarily duplicating and planting on their neighbors' doorstep is in reality much more nuanced. "What in today's much reduced rural population seems to be duplication may well in the eighteenth century have been a correct response to the steady increase in population." Particularly when one bears in mind that for internal and financial reasons, planting by the existing church had reduced to almost a trickle – what he refers to as "75 years of inaction." He refers to the Seceder period as "a free market" for Presbyterianism, and looking at the plethora of new churches today, he observes: "Today there is a much more powerful 'free market for churches' causing a hemorrhage of people from the Presbyterian Church. We have much to learn from the flexibility of the Seceder period in Church planting."⁴³⁴

The Union of the two synods in 1840 led to "Presbyterianism's greatest period of advancement outside Ulster,"⁴³⁵ which he attributes to "the impact of the Missionary Synod in Dublin (1833),⁴³⁶ the home mission efforts of the (newly) united Church and the vision amongst the Divinity students."⁴³⁷ Sadly, however, of the sixteen congregations mentioned by Kennedy as examples, only four are still in existence. Two of these are united with the Methodists, and two number less than a dozen families.

Nevertheless, Kennedy's articles illustrate that there was flexibility in previous Presbyterian planting practice that could have implications for the very different situation today. Rather than congregations always being planted by the denomination:

⁴³⁴ Alistair Kennedy, "Church Planting in Irish Presbyterianism: 1600-1992 and into the Third Millennium" (Part 2), *Presbyterian Herald*, December 1992 / January 1993, 18.

⁴³⁵ 40% of those planted in the 1850s were outside Ulster.

⁴³⁶ See note 429 above.

⁴³⁷ Alistair Kennedy, "Church Planting in Irish Presbyterianism: 1600-1992 and into the Third Millennium" (Part 3), *Presbyterian Herald*, February 1993, 17.

Previously, new congregations had arisen from local activity. Sometimes it happened spontaneously as people began to meet together in a home or barn and then applied to the local Presbytery. At other times it was through the initiative of wealthy Presbyterians, individual Ministers, congregations or Presbyteries. However, from 1928 onwards the process was institutionalized.⁴³⁸

He urges the contemporary PCI to recover some of this flexibility:

The gathered Church fellowship is going to succeed the traditional Presbyterian model of the baptized community...Church planting is not optional, rather it is fundamental to Presbyterian mission...There may not be much geographic space uncovered by Presbyterian congregations in the Province of Ulster today but there is much “social space” where we are not present and unparalleled opportunities in other areas of Ireland where there are awakened people in search of a reformed church.⁴³⁹

The church’s vision must, he says, continue to spread beyond its traditional base: “We must be impressed by the sense of mission our forefathers had in their dogged and successful work of following the Ulster Scots and their descendants, even to the remotest parts, to disciple them for Christ.” However, he points out, present trends would suggest that today’s congregations will need to “survive and adapt to meet the needs of newly converted pagans rather than provide rites for degenerate Puritans.”⁴⁴⁰

It is not surprising then that in urging such creativity, Kennedy concludes his series with a call for the church to examine alternative means of funding and personnel to resource these new communities – including the need to look seriously at bivocational planters. We need, he writes in his final article, “an outburst of evangelism and social witness in the many areas of social space that we fail to see because we have the geographic space so neatly sewn up in our parish system.” This may mean “...the planting of new Church fellowships. Such fellowships would begin as very small units

⁴³⁸ Ibid.: 18.

⁴³⁹ Kennedy, “Through a glass darkly: a look at the future of church planting” (Part 1), 24.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

which will need less than fully ordained ministries to establish and shepherd them.”⁴⁴¹

Although the great Presbyterian population shifts are gone, that cannot mean an end to church planting. Rather, he urges, “What is needed is a different kind of church planting in which we encourage growth from the grass roots rather than drop massive resources from the top. We must empower local people by partnership rather than turn them into clients, perhaps by use of tentmaking missionary elders.”⁴⁴² Nor should the denomination be afraid of failure, or heap unrealistic expectations on those who are merely trying to find new ways of being faithful to the gospel in a new context. He states:

Some of these new starts will fail, some will stagger along and a few will grow like wildfire. We need within our denominational structures to learn to live with small units as normal and not expect each “congregation” to be of the size to support the full panoply of salaried Minister, Manse, Church buildings, central assessments, etc.... Their reception as full congregations will necessitate the Assembly giving them space to be different... We will have to recognize that inside our overall Presbyterian family and within the same theological system there are different ways of being Reformed, some of which do not descend directly from the Ulster-Scots tradition. This is particularly important if we are to take on board the reality that to be a Scots-Irish ethnic Church is no longer a sufficient ecclesiological base for mission – if we take our God given mission seriously in this island. The possibility of a real growth of new fellowships consisting of people coming from an ‘Irish’ base is a reality today. If we are serious about being the Church of Christ in Ireland than we can no more expect such people to become Ulster-Scots type Presbyterians than Paul expected Gentiles to become Jews.⁴⁴³

So, Kennedy argues, this is not just a practical consideration but also a theological one – “to be a Scots-Irish ethnic Church is no longer a sufficient ecclesiological base for mission.” Have the Presbyterians diminished the understanding of what it means to be

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.: 23.

⁴⁴² Ibid.: 25.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.: 23. On freedom to fail, see also Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Reports to the General Assembly* (Belfast: Church House, 1998), 253. “Mistakes will no doubt be made... but we need the freedom to make mistakes so that we may discover what God honors with success.”

Reformed, and even diminished the gospel itself by holding too tightly to structures and politics from a bygone era?

Simultaneous to these articles being printed, the denomination's Strategy for Mission Committee was beginning a process of looking at, among other things, what church planting might look like within the PCI. In their 1994 Report, one can see Kennedy's thinking clearly reflected in several paragraphs: "We fail the fathers of Presbyterianism, who were exceptionally creative people in enabling their own generation to find and follow Christ, if we fossilize the church they reformed." Adequate alternatives will require "more subtle and tentative methods than, for example, putting in a traditional Church Extension plant with the full panoply of Minister, interim Kirk Session and expensive property."⁴⁴⁴ Looking to the past, says the Report:

We discovered that the normal means by which Presbyterian congregations were planted included a great variety of methods in which official Presbytery initiative is not the norm. Most congregations grew from the initiative of local people who formed themselves into a worshipping fellowship in a home or barn and grew into a congregation.⁴⁴⁵

Appended to this report were two significant resolutions, pertinent to the current study:

That the General Assembly recognize that there are major areas of opportunity for mission in Ireland which are not presently being addressed adequately by this Church and which may not be amenable to the traditional models of Presbyterian mission.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Reports to the General Assembly* (Belfast: Church House, 1994), 314. The extent of institutional resistance present at that time can be seen from what happened as a result of these reports. In correspondence, Kennedy shares: "I confess to having come away from Strategy for Mission somewhat disillusioned. [A senior church administrator] told me that he saw his task as 'to conserve what was there.' Surely an inadequate vision for a leader of PCI in an age of burning change and challenge! He buried the work we did and the Panel he appointed to continue it did not even meet once!" Alistair Kennedy, "Re: Planting," E-mail to the author (22 August 2012).

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 315.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 318.

That the General Assembly therefore wish to extend the use of short-term volunteers, tent making communities, people on career breaks, non-stipendiary ministry, early retired people, etc. as agents for mission in the name and with the backing of the whole Church.⁴⁴⁷

It was two years before the subject was revisited, although the 1996 Report added little that was new. While the earlier report may have been implicitly directed towards the opportunities in the Republic of Ireland, the writers of the 1996 Report were anxious to emphasize the relevance of the issue to all parts of the island. It remarked that to say the denomination has the ground in Northern Ireland covered well enough is to misunderstand “the nature of how modern society functions; the fragmentation of society into many groupings and the cultural chasm between many of today’s people and the traditional congregation.”⁴⁴⁸

The Report also sought to define what constituted a church plant, in terms that were not so loose that they couldn’t warrant the name Presbyterian, nor so tight that they hindered the establishment of real contemporary relevant reformed fellowships. They defined the type of plant they were advocating as “a new fellowship of Christians with an independent life, witness and worship.” In terms of ecclesiology, they suggested that, “To be considered a Church plant of the PCI a fellowship should be in sympathy with the standards of this Church though with considerable liberty from usual congregational norms as to form.”⁴⁴⁹

It was the 1998 Report, at the end of the Committee’s lifespan, that brought a lot of these strands together, drew the attention of the denomination to the possibilities and

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 319.

⁴⁴⁸ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Reports to the General Assembly* (Belfast: Church House, 1996), 321.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 334. The Report also had useful proposals in terms of how unordained leadership of these plants could develop their pastoral and evangelistic training and, while on the job, be recognized and accepted for ordained ministry. See also 1998 Report, 258.

benefits of bivocational church planting, and put it on the agenda of the denomination. It began by reiterating the need, “Unprecedented change in society demands that we be flexible in applying the basic biblical models and indeed rediscover the freedom for mission which our Church knew in the past.”⁴⁵⁰ It then continued by outlining the reason why traditional models would be inadequate to meet the need:

A Church plant is the establishment of a new or renewed fellowship of Christians with a distinct life, witness and worship. It may, or may not, possess property or a paid ministry and it may, or may not, grow sufficiently to acquire the status of a fully constituted congregation... (It may exist within) a social space with similar need such as unevangelised young people, a student population, transient evening or weekend population, people of different culture or race etc... The nature of mission work may require considerable flexibility to create forms of life, witness and worship in Church planting which are faithful both to the contemporary context and to Scripture.⁴⁵¹

Bivocationalism, therefore, is one obvious option for the future:

A congregation/Church plant has the right to exist without a duly installed/ordained minister... a greater freedom needs to be possible and consideration needs to be given to a new category. As Church Planting is ideally suited to “tent-making” ministries and non-stipendiary ministry, the Union Commission should draw up suitable rules to make it possible for ministers or licentiates of the PCI, who volunteer to work without official salary, to be called and installed to such work. It should be made possible, similarly, for lay missionaries to be appointed to such work on a voluntary basis.⁴⁵²

The recommendations of the Strategy for Mission Committee, accepted by the General Assembly, were passed on to the missional boards of the church, particularly the soon to be formed Board of Mission in Ireland. Although, sadly, no further resolutions on this subject had come before the Assembly by 2011, the 1998 Report has shown that there is nothing in Irish Presbyterian polity to preclude bivocational church planting. Pioneering

⁴⁵⁰ 1998 Report, 53.

⁴⁵¹ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Reports to the General Assembly*, 257. The Report also acknowledges that existing categories of Home Mission or Church Extension were inappropriate for the “delicate situation of planting.”

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 258.

such a movement, however, may require much work, and implementing the sort of planting initiatives imagined in the report may involve overcoming significant institutional inertia.

Although nothing else has been published on the subject of Irish Presbyterian church planting, a number of dissertations have been written by pastors. That of McCrory has already been mentioned. At the end of his work, he offered ten recommendations for the denomination, ranging from the potential of the Greater Dublin area for planting, the need to build on “islands of strength,” leadership skills, teamwork, accountability, and finance. He concluded by affirming the necessity of church planting for the PCI as the denomination moves into the twenty-first century: “Our greatest need is to re-develop our denominational vision for new church development in the Greater Dublin area (and beyond) and to put in place the resources and flexibility of approach that will encourage and facilitate new and varied endeavors for the kingdom of God within this area.”⁴⁵³ His comments on financing are particularly relevant with regard to the various options before church planters:

New church development projects should be financed from central funds whenever possible. However, if we are to adequately respond to the spiritual needs of this and other areas, we will need to develop and encourage new models of financing that are not dependent upon central resources.⁴⁵⁴

Bivocational ministry would be an obvious option here, and McCrory does mention it in the section “Financing Ministry Team Members,” alongside support-raising and financial independence, as something worth examining. But what about it as an option for planters themselves? Some of those he surveyed seemed favorable to the idea:

⁴⁵³ McCrory, 101.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 100.

Whilst (tentmaking) does limit the time available for organized missionary endeavor, it has the major advantage of giving the team members an easy way to start building relationships with those in the target community...A few of the churches contacted through our research felt strongly that new church developers themselves would be best advised to start their ministry by getting a job in the local community.⁴⁵⁵

Although this is as much as McCrory says explicitly about the feasibility or desirability of bivocational planting, some of his other conclusions would naturally lead in that direction. For example, his comments on personnel:

Many of our churches have the potential to release enormous resources into the area of new church development, if they are envisioned and permitted to do so. Likewise, whilst there seems to be a serious shortfall in candidates for the full-time ordained ministry, within our congregations there are huge numbers of highly gifted people who, if challenged and commissioned, could transform our ability to reach out with the Gospel in locations currently in great need of renewed evangelism.⁴⁵⁶

Lee Eagleson's doctoral thesis⁴⁵⁷ examines the continued influence of the Church Growth Movement on contemporary planting theory. He wonders whether traditional church planting models have not over-relied on the relocation of Christians from established churches, something he perceives as potentially damaging to catholicity. He appeals for a more robust Calvinist ecclesiology and the development of missional/gospel community models akin to those proposed by Timmis and others.⁴⁵⁸ It is a comprehensive examination of the church planting movement in the USA but, significantly, does not mention bivocationalism.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 180.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 225.

⁴⁵⁷ Lee Eagleson, "An initial assessment of the US Evangelical church planting movement from 2000 to 2010" (Ph.D. Thesis, Queen's University, Belfast, forthcoming).

⁴⁵⁸ Lee Eagleson, "RE: Thesis." E-mail to the author (12 May 2012).

Dave Clawson's Masters dissertation⁴⁵⁹ sought to look at how the PCI was institutionally suited to a missional planting approach. David Moore⁴⁶⁰ takes an ecclesiological approach, with specific reference to the Republic of Ireland. Clawson adopts the "mixed economy" vocabulary of Croft and others, writing, "Contemporary life occurs in a variety of diverse cultures, contexts, locations and networks. Planting fresh churches permits us to contextualize and incarnate the gospel rather than impose a single culture or style."⁴⁶¹ He outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the Presbyterian system for planting,⁴⁶² and while he recognizes the usefulness of bivocational ministry in certain types of planting models (particularly the "colonization," "founding pastor," and "pioneer" models), he mentions it purely as an initial cost-cutting measure.⁴⁶³ He concludes, "Because the amount of time taken to plant is protracted, in some cases a founding pastor can be bi-vocational (sic), this helps to cut costs for the denomination or organization. Once the church is in a viable situation the pastor will commit full time to the congregation."⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁹ David Clawson, "Presbyterian Churches Are Well Suited For Missional Church Planting in Belfast: A Comparative Study" (M.Div. diss., Queen's University, Belfast, 2007).

⁴⁶⁰ David Moore, "What significance does the ecclesiology of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have for mission in contemporary Ireland?" (M.A. diss., Irish Bible Institute, Dublin, 2010).

⁴⁶¹ Clawson, 65.

⁴⁶² Ibid. For strengths, he lists its connectional nature, current examples of mission within congregations, leadership and every member ministry developments, existing buildings and finance, and recognized brand name. "Although PCI has been one thing for a long time, at least it has been there for a long time" (Pages 59-61). The most significant weaknesses were the difficulty in culturally engaging with the Irish Catholic, particularly in the North, and central control. He quotes Peter Neilson: "The bureaucratic church of the 19th and 20th centuries will not survive as it is into the 21st century. It must become local and relational, with regional support and minimum central servicing." (Pages 61ff.).

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 36-7.

Moore's dissertation focuses on the strength of PCI's ecclesiology for ministry and mission in the Republic of Ireland.⁴⁶⁵ He particularly focuses on catholicity, confessionalism, and covenant, and, like Chester, Timmis, and others, wants to avoid separating ecclesiology and missiology. He states, "The centrality of the call of God's people to be his agents of mission mean that we cannot separate ecclesiology from missiology in the purposes of God for Ireland."⁴⁶⁶ His conclusions are that the very strengths of the PCI's polity and practice may also prove to be its greatest challenges as it seeks to adjust to a rapidly changing society. The "glacial speed of change"⁴⁶⁷ at which the church moves and its, at times, cumbersome polity and structures "...tend to lead to lengthy bureaucratic delays, militating against quick decisions, slowing down action and occasionally stifling innovation."⁴⁶⁸ He concludes: "The very factors which give PCI its stability, such as its accountability and management structures, appear to be those which make it part of a settled and regulated culture, rather than a dynamic counter cultural force."⁴⁶⁹ In any such context, untested initiatives and creative solutions (and bivocational planting may well be considered under both those categories) may be regarded as not worth the risk.

⁴⁶⁵ Moore, 32-35.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 78.

Conclusion

The literature then would seem to indicate a number of developments: a growing understanding of the inextricable link between ecclesiology and missiology; a move away from earlier Church Growth Models in planting and an emphasis on smaller, relational models; a recognition that new models, especially of funding and personnel, are going to be needed as the culture continues to change; a certain ambiguity about bivocationalism and its suitability to planting, but a recognition that it might work in some contexts, at least initially; a rediscovery of a theology of work and vocation and a reaffirmation of earlier insights regarding every-member ministry; a belief that denominations, as networks, do have a role in this future, but will need to adapt to a far greater extent than they have done hitherto; the recognition that church planting has always been at the heart of Presbyterianism in Ireland, though not always for missional reasons, and an understanding that there is nothing within the polity of the PCI which should prevent bivocational planting being attempted.

It remains now to look at the work of some Irish practitioners both within and outside the Presbyterian family to discern how their experience coheres or differs from these findings.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Methodology

Overview of Methodology

The study was conducted using qualitative research methodology, where the emphasis is on interpreting the data collected during research interviews. Sharon Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, describes qualitative research as being “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”⁴⁷⁰ Merriam identifies four key characteristics to understand the nature of qualitative research: the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive.⁴⁷¹

Design of the Study

Since bivocational planting has not been part of the Irish Presbyterian tradition, and since examples are rare within the Presbyterian family throughout the West, the selection criteria for interviewees was, of necessity, broad. In order to ensure that Irish Presbyterian pastors contributed to the data, full-time planters, including one from outside Ireland, were included in the survey. Of the eight bivocational interviewees, all but one were from non-Presbyterian denominations.

⁴⁷⁰ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 6.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

Again, because of the smallness of the sample group, no restrictions were set in terms of how long the plants had been in operation. The hope was that useful data would emerge concerning planters' respective experiences at different stages of the plant's development. As a result, interviewees ranged from one year's experience to over twenty years' experience. Three interviewees alternated between full-time and bivocational planting as circumstances dictated: one beginning fully funded and moving to bivocationalism; one going bivocational at a particularly difficult time in the plant's development; one beginning bivocational and moving to fully funded.

Since the study looked mainly at the planters' own experiences, the data was gleaned predominantly from the planters themselves. However, there were two other groups who it was believed could contribute to the study. Church-plant members will obviously have been impacted by the planters' ministries, and denominational leaders, through policy and supervision, will have shaped a significant part of the context in which the planters operated, granting or refusing permission to plant, overseeing the distribution of resources, and dictating future strategy and priorities. If, for example, bivocational planting is to become a feature of future movements, it will not happen without the support and cooperation of such leaders. To take account of these further sources of data and their potential usefulness to the study and its implications, interviews were conducted with five additional interested parties (hereafter referred to as Supplementary Interviewees (SIs):

One SI is a member of the Presbyterian Secretariat who has part-responsibility for strategy and the resourcing of mission within the PCI. His comments will assist the researcher in discovering perspectives on the extent to which bivocational church

planting has or has not been part of the denomination's thinking. A second SI is a church planting consultant and facilitator, a former church planter himself, now specializing in observing ecclesiological and theological trends within the Irish Republic. He will help the researcher understand the emerging themes within Irish evangelicalism and how they may impact future church planting initiatives. A third SI is a prospective bivocational church planter (non-Irish) who failed to receive support from his Presbyterian denomination. He will provide the researcher with data on the reasons advanced against such ventures. Finally, two members from the church plants pastored by interviewees (a "bivocational church" and a "bivocational-turned-monovocational" church) were consulted in order to discover the "pew-perspective" on how the respective plants were impacted by the pastors' vocational status.

During the interviews, the following questions were asked of planters participating in the research. The interview questions were designed to address the issues raised by the research questions. The questions focused on how the denominational structures helped or hindered the plant, and how the planter's vocational status was both an advantage and a disadvantage to the plant's development. Within the parameters of the semi-structured protocol, additional probing questions were asked.

Interview Protocol

Interviewee Pastors/Planters (10 plus 1 SI)

1. Tell me what your first six months were like. (Listening especially for specific encouragements, discouragements, and passions).
2. How did denominational polity or structures affect your work from the time of the plant's conception and through its early years? (Listening for relevant data which

may not have emerged under question one. For example, difficulties involved in getting the denomination or sending body on board with the vision; the hoops that needed to be gone through, and whether in retrospect they were helpful or unnecessary; the way in which the denomination communicated their expectations; and the support and accountability structures which were available from the outset).

3. How did your vocational status enhance your ministry and the development of the church?
4. In what ways was your vocational status a frustration?
5. If missional effectiveness were the deciding factor, how would you advise a potential planter to proceed in terms of being full-time or bivocational? How would you advise the denomination? (Listening for general advice, strategies or methodologies that may have occurred to the planters as a result of their experiences).

Consultants (2 SIs)

1. What examples, if any, have there been of ordained bivocational pastor/teachers within your denomination/network in the past?
2. What thinking has been done in this area at denominational/ interdenominational level, for example, in reports or research papers?
3. What theological presuppositions underpin the denomination/network's view of ordained ministry that may militate against bivocationalism?
4. What practical problems may be presented by bivocational ministry
5. In any situation where bivocational ministry has been suggested or attempted,

what were the presenting issues that prevented it from happening?

6. What future role could there be for ordained bivocational pastor-teachers in the years ahead? How may the presenting problems, theological or pragmatic be overcome?

Church plant members (2 SIs)

1. In what ways, negatively and positively, did your pastor's vocational status have an effect on the growth and development of the church?
2. How did his vocational status affect the theology and culture of the church?
3. In what way was your experience as a church member enriched/ impoverished through your pastor being part-time (full-time)?

Sampling Criteria

For this study, the researcher interviewed ten church planters, eight of whom are, or were at one time, bivocational⁴⁷² and, for the purposes of contrast, two of whom serve as full-time planters. Since the focus is on the experience of the planter rather than the development of the plant, the churches in question differed in terms of size, age of plant, style of worship, socio-economic context, country and denominational affiliation, although all would describe themselves as doctrinally evangelical.⁴⁷³ Nine are ministering

⁴⁷² Of the eight, five are bivocational (although one began fully-funded), one was bivocational and is now retired from that job, and two were bivocational at some stage but are now fully funded pastors.

⁴⁷³ For a synopsis of evangelical belief see John R. W. Stott, *What Is an Evangelical?*, A Falcon Booklet (London: Church Pastoral Aid Society, 1977). For the historical context see D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London and Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989). "Variations there have certainly been in statements by Evangelicals about what they regard as basic. There is nevertheless a common core that has remained remarkably constant down the centuries, Conversionism, Activism, Biblicism and Crucicentrism form the defining attributes of Evangelical religion." Bebbington, 4. For evangelicalism in its Irish context and development see Dunlop. For Northern Ireland see Glenn Jordan, *Not of This World?: Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2001).

in the Irish Republic, while, to boost the Presbyterian representation (see above), one is planting elsewhere in Western Europe but within a church context very similar to the PCI.

Introduction to Interviewees

Table 3.1 shows the pseudonyms of the pastors, the geographical context in which they are working, and their vocational history, including the type of work in which they were engaged.

Table 3.1

“Name”	Context	Vocational status	Type of work	Theo tradition
Colin	rural	bivocational f/t	family farm	independent
Brendan	rural	bivocational f/t	education	independent
Ruari	urban	bivocational f/t	business	charismatic
Will	various	bivocational f/t	theological education	pentecostal
Fred	suburban	fully funded > bivocational p/t	education	charismatic
Fintan	suburban	bivocational p/t	finance	evangelical
Marcus	commuter	bivocational p/t > fully funded	family business	reformed
Declan	rural	bivocational f/t > fully funded	retail	independent
Ciaran	commuter	fully funded	- - -	reformed
Ian	urban	fully funded	- - -	reformed

Table 3.2 shows the pseudonym, context and role of each SI.

Table 3.2

“Name”	Ecclesial tradition	Role
Richie	evangelical	consultant
Sam	reformed	denominational officer
Terry	reformed	church member
Charles	independent	church member
Murray	reformed	“unsuccessful” planter

Data Collection Methods

The primary method of data gathering was through semi-structured interviews, employing questions that are a mix of the formal and informal. Formally worded questions aimed to extract the core information that was desired from all participants, but most of the interviews were through open-ended questions which allowed the researcher “to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.”⁴⁷⁴ This qualitative method provides for the discovery of the most comprehensive and descriptive data from participant perspectives.

Analysis Procedures

The analysis was conducted using the constant-comparative method, “comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences,” where the overall object “is to seek patterns in the data.”⁴⁷⁵ The data was coded and categorized during the interview process, thus allowing new sources of data to emerge.

Limitations of the Study

Due to limited time and resources, only ten pastors were interviewed for this study, and because of the lack of bivocational Irish Presbyterian church planters, only two interviewees were current PCI pastors. As all of the interviewees are male, this study is also limited by a lack of female perspective. The perspectives of the PCI planters and denominational officers may be generalized and transferrable across denominations, especially within the reformed family of churches, but the reader should take care in testing the appropriateness of the data to their specific context.

⁴⁷⁴ Merriam, 74.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 18.

All but two of the interviewees⁴⁷⁶ are ministering in Ireland, so while the study aimed to benefit from the insights of two non-Irish planters in terms of the planter's vocational status, more data would be required regarding church planting in general in cross-cultural contexts before any other aspects of the interviewees' experiences could be regarded as typical or atypical of their particular situation.

Researcher Position

The researcher is a Christian minister committed to the historic Christian faith as articulated in the ecumenical creeds of the church, and to the reformed branch of the church whose theology is most succinctly expressed through the Westminster Confession of Faith. He is committed to the local church as the primary agent of mission and therefore to church planting as a necessary mechanism by which that mission can be realized. He comes to the study from the perspective of an insider-outsider. He is not a church planter, but he is a pastor of the PCI, and has had previous first-hand experience working for the denomination's Mission Board and developing missional strategy for the denomination in the Republic of Ireland. He currently is involved in one of the church plants at a supervisory level. His wide experience, in a variety of countries and contexts, as a pastor-preacher has enabled him to develop the three skills outlined by Merriam as being important for any researcher in the field of qualitative research – tolerance of ambiguity, sensitivity, and good communication.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ The exceptions being one of the pastors and one of the SIs.

⁴⁷⁷ Merriam, 20-24.

CHAPTER FOUR

Interview Findings

In all, ten church planters were interviewed for this study; two were fully funded while the other eight had been bivocational at some stage in the plant's history. Four had remained full-time bivocational, although one had now retired. They were interviewed in order to establish why they chose the bivocational route, what their bivocational experience was like, and how their vocational status influenced the development of the plant. This was with a view to seeing how their experience might assist the Irish Presbyterian church in their planting strategy. In addition, five further interviewees were selected so that the data could be supplemented by the perspectives of those with experience of denominational or interdenominational polity, and by the experience of church plant members. The specific research questions related to the history and development of the plant, particularly in terms of the policies and support structures of the denomination or wider network of which the plant was part, the reality of the challenges faced by the planter on the ground, and the impact of the planter's bivocational status on both the planter and the plant, as they sought to meet those challenges.

After gathering the data and looking for consistent themes, it became obvious that some common benefits and shared difficulties emerged across the spectrum. It was also clear that the development of the various congregations was not just affected by internal

factors or by the plant/planter relationship, but also by denominational and wider cultural factors.

So, at one level, the findings can be presented according to the three perspectives represented in the triangle in Figure 4.1. However, a closer look reveals that there is a significant amount of data which does not refer simply to one of those categories, but which concerns rather the relationship and interplay between them. This data, it was found, had mainly to do with the whole area of expectations. Thus an “expectation triangle” could be created within the main triangle as in Figure 4.2 with arrows pointing each way, and outlining the dominant respective expectations in each relationship, as they emerged from the interviews.

Figure 4.1 The Perspective Triangle

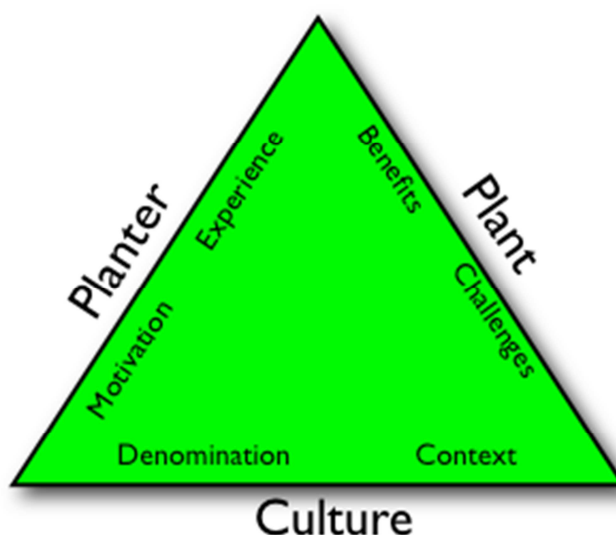
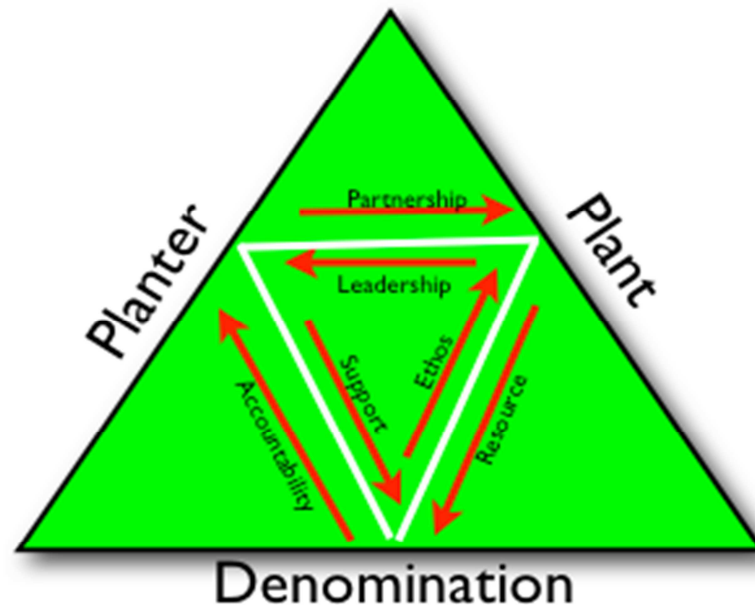


Figure 4.2 The Expectation Triangle



In examining the data in terms of the Perspective Triangle (Figure 4.1), further factors emerged. In terms of the planter perspective, the issues of motivation and experience were key. Why did the planter choose to be bivocational, or fully-funded, or move between one and the other? What was the reality of his experience, positively and negatively, and could these experiences be seen to be a direct consequence of his vocational choice?

In terms of the plant perspective, benefits and challenges emerged, articulated by both planters and supplementary interviewees (SIs). From the two perspectives – leader and member – the pastor’s vocational status both enhanced church life and created challenges and difficulties for the plant’s development.

In terms of the cultural perspective, both the dominant church culture represented by the sending body, network, or denomination, and the wider cultural context in which

the plant was situated had significant effects on the experience of both planter and congregation.

Moving then to the Expectation Triangle (Figure 4.2), the researcher has designated “denomination,” rather than simply “culture” as the relevant third category. The dominant relationship is unsurprisingly that between planter and plant. The expectations here could be said to be characterized by a desire, on the part of the planter, for partnership with the congregation, manifested on their part in a sense of joint ownership of the vision, while the congregation looked to the planter for authentic and visionary leadership.

However, the planter’s relationship with the denomination and the expectations inherent in that were also significant. The planter looks to the wider body for effective and relevant support, while the denomination looks to the planter for accountability, and something that would correspond to presupposed definitions (spoken or unspoken, agreed or presumed) of success.

The relationship between plant and denomination is perhaps less significant. If expectations were communicated or implied, they seemed to be, on the part of the plant, in the area of resources and, on the part of the denomination, in the area of ethos: what type or model of church community was emerging and how it fit in with the existing structures, ecclesiastical culture or denominational tradition.

The Perspective Triangle

The Planter Perspective

Motivation

In extrapolating trends from the various interviewees, it must not be forgotten that these men are all individuals, with their own histories, circumstances, personalities and perspectives, and this is evident in examining the reason why they did or did not choose to be bivocational. For Colin, it was just the way he was wired, “You know, I think the gifts that God has given me are such that I need more than one side to it. I don’t think I would survive if I was doing Christian work on a full day-to-day basis. I am creative in terms of community development and things like that. That is an important part of my ministry here.”

In the case of others, there was a deep inner connection with their previous work, something that never went away, and which, if anything, enriched their church ministry. For Fintan, for example, the call to ministry did not necessarily mean a clear-cut forsaking of his previous vocation, so bivocationalism was an obvious synthesis of his gifts and talents. He explains, “Bivocationalism, I saw as enhancing my ministry. Personally, I always enjoyed my profession. I missed it when I went into full time ministry.” Similarly Marcus, when he moved from bivocational back to full-time, said, “I still miss it because there is part of me that loves that: loves the challenge of going in, developing the customer base, fixing problems.” Brendan had a heart for evangelism but was also a builder. The two just dovetailed, and as there were no other evangelical fellowships in the area at the time he began, he found himself a bivocational pastor almost by accident.

I built a house that was suitable for people to meet in on a Sunday morning so that people could come in to our sitting room and it would function as a meeting room. I really think that was the beginning of what we might call the church. We didn't call it a church or anything like that, but that was the beginning...

... Sharing my faith was just a very natural thing to do. I didn't set out to establish a work or establish a fellowship – that idea wasn't there even. And it is only over the years that things have become clearer as to what has actually happened here, rather than there having been an objective to establish a work.

In fact, Brendan was at least trivocational in that his remunerated work was in education, the building and evangelism/pastoring were just other aspects of his calling, as he saw it. He recalls, "I was teaching. The concept of full-time ministry, the term 'pastor,' the term 'leader,' was not there – it was just not in our frame of reference."

For Ruari, somewhat of an entrepreneur, his personal journey into bivocational church planting came about as a direct result of the sympathetic culture of his fellowship, who encouraged the use of such an entrepreneurial outlook in the development of new fellowships.

A few times we had looked at our church and thought: "We could do this! We could do another one of these." I think then, this is where the whole thing of church-planting ethos comes in. "OK – this is one of our options. How now do we move on with God and follow God and actually plant a church?" The option was there and was visible around us.

Ciaran, by contrast, is working in a different context. He is a full-time planter, and the choice of location and vocational status was, in many senses, made for him through the denominational parameters within which he was working. He shares, "The idea to start a church here wasn't mine, and I am sure that is actually different to a lot of church planters. They go somewhere because they feel called themselves. The vision here came from the mother church."

These examples are a good place to start because often in this discussion, the focus can very easily be on the finances. For the bivocationals mentioned above, the situation was much more complex than simply an issue of funding. Money, however, was a significant contributing reason for others. Fred had been given an initial pot of money so that he could begin full-time. However, he realized that his organisation's initial projections were unrealistic, and therefore he pre-empted any cash-flow crisis by going bivocational, feeling that the fundraising models so prevalent in the Christian community in the West would be inappropriate in his Irish context:

Being bivocational was never part of the plan. But within the first few months I realized that this is a long haul. Expectations were unrealistic. Funding would be needed. And, getting to know the culture, as far as fundraising was concerned, I had been sensitized to anything that might be construed as control through patronage or structure. I know of so many other churches who struggle to raise the finance to release full time staff. So I realized I needed to look for a job. I wasn't forced into it financially for another year.

Marcus, similarly, realized that the budgeting of his organization had been unrealistic, leaving very little for actual ministry expenses. It was going to be impossible to do the work to which he had felt called, and he and his wife had a choice to make. He notes, "Part of what drove us then to stay, and move to being bivocational, was simply to have the funds; to have cash-flow in business terms. We had property assets provided by the denomination, but in terms of available cash to make capital investment – to use business phraseology – there was none." However, the bivocational option had always been in his mind, even if it didn't come about the way he imagined. He recounts, "My wife and I were desiring to be bivocational when we first started, and in the end we ended up being bivocational kinda through the back door." What happened was that developing

his own business allowed some of that money to be released for important planting start-up costs:

We had to do the business to financially provide some input so that there was a budget. For example, we opened an office in order to have a visible presence in the town. Well, where did that come from? It came from our business. We initially funded that. €15,000 of other start-up resources? Well, none of that came from the denomination. It came from our ability to provide because we were doing other things.

However, even to get to that point had been at considerable cost to Marcus and his wife, since the denominational models for what they were asking to do were so embryonic and under-developed that the family had found themselves without access to some of the normal grants and allowances available to colleagues. Nevertheless, they did want to make their vision work.

Basically, we used up all our savings, so – I have to be honest with you – we ended up in a situation where we were having to take out loans in order to stay; and at one stage we had to take a loan to repay loans that we had. We remortgaged our home three times! That way we were able to stay. It is not the way I would hope many others would have to go.

Although financial necessity may be a motivational reality for some, interviewees tended to focus more on the missiological advantages it presents. Will, a serial planter while simultaneously working in theological education and consultancy, agrees, “I think the financial reality is only one aspect of it. I think the idea of community engagement is probably the most significant thing.” This is what he is observing in the trainee planters coming to him for advice:

I think they are finding that connecting with the community is key. Just two weeks ago I had a young couple meet me for coffee. They have degrees in theology, but they don’t want to actually be “the minister” in a church; they want to go and work in a community. So one of the things is they’ve found a job in a community God is calling them to. What they are looking at doing is developing from there – getting involved in the community: in sports organisations, working

with young people, engaging with what is going on in that community, and then developing a community of faith as a result of that process.

Murray is a Presbyterian pastor in a non-Irish context who had a vision and clear proposal for bivocational planting but was unable to get the required denominational support to make it viable. He had a heart not just to engage with the local community, but through a hospitality business, actually to model community.

A strong core of what we wanted to do was try to model community within our team and invite people into that evangelistically and otherwise, rather than throwing up a structure of ministry, a worship service and programs, and then hoping that community happens. That is what we described and the resistance perhaps wasn't so much due to polity as to an innate conservatism.

This vision was actually born out of a change of focus in his own ministry as he began, where he was, to model what this idea would look like. He shares,

As pastor you are the captain of the team, in charge of everything. So trying to find time to spend with people in the community just to build friendships and relationship, to have evangelistic conversations with, go to dinner with, or go camping with – it's impossible. So, just out of frustration, we began to do it. We would just walk away from some areas that I previously might have been spending time in – pastoral duties, program duties, to do stuff I felt was more strategic and potentially fruitful. A bivocational context would have given me so much more of that time.

Fintan regards his bivocational status as a distinct advantage when introducing himself and striking up conversations. He explains,

I think it is easier to introduce myself to strangers in the community. Instead of "Oh I am a missionary, I am working at 'Living Hope' church down the road" – instantly there is difficulty. But it's: "I work in life assurance, I work for Company Z, I volunteer for a well-known denomination." When they ask "Which church?" I can say: "Actually, I'm in the process of starting one!"

This idea of legitimacy is also key to Marcus, who believes that being bivocational is particularly important if one wishes to engage cross-culturally. He elaborates,

One of my learnings and observations is about legitimate presence in the community, particularly when you're an outsider and come from a very different

culture. One of the great strengths of being bivocational is that through your work you develop a legitimate right to be in the community. Our initial thought was that I could try to get a job that would allow me to work part time and be able to initiate a little bit outside of that – maybe through friends giving. I wasn't initially asking for denominational funding.

Ciaran, interestingly, takes the opposite line, and struggles to see how his church could have been planted if he had not been available full-time to get contextualized and to mobilize the people.

My sense is, if you are in a community and you live there and you think you might like to plant a church in that community where you already live, are already known and are already involved, I can see where there would be great benefits in planting a church bivocationally. You already know the place – you're already settled. But my sense is that to go into a place that you don't know already, while trying to work – to hope for growth, hope for momentum to happen while you're working and preparing each week for Sundays and for bible studies, those kind of things – I think that would be very, very difficult to do without time on your hands. My sense is if you are going to do it bivocationally you need to find a group before you start, rather than just going in cold and trying to start on your own. So in terms of missional effectiveness, my experience is that the most effective people are those living in the town - yet they needed to be mobilised. Not many of them had a vision for a church here at the time.

Marcus, however, is unconvinced. For him, those are exactly the circumstances where bivocationalism proves fruitful. He urges, "I would strongly recommend it for most people who are not indigenous. I think where bivocational is most helpful is where you are not indigenous."

The disconnection that many full-timers experience from the community they are called to serve was felt keenly by Murray. He shares,

Part of our vision was that we were highly motivated to enter this new cultural setting [where we hoped to plant] and find natural ways of connecting with the people who live there and work there instead of there being what we had sometimes experienced before – this sense that people felt we couldn't relate to their world and their life and that we lived in a very different setting as vocational ministers.

This sense of identification with the people was a continuing strength of Colin's ministry.

He explains,

Being a farmer kept my feet on the ground and kept me in touch with the local farming community, very much the people I was reaching out to. I had something in common with them. I think it also enabled me to show them that I was not being paid to proselytize, as it were; that I was earning my own living. So the vocational side of it enabled me to keep in touch with people. Also, I think if I had been there full-time I might have been seen as someone who had been paid to do this work and gain from it which, in that day and age, wasn't acceptable around here.

It was a developing understanding of vocation in the biblical sense that encouraged Colin in his own ministry. As he preached the story of Joseph to his congregation (and himself), he emphasized that Joseph was sent not as a prophet but "as a man who would sort out their famine and really be involved in their community for their good and blessing." This insight proved a helpful tool in conversations with others who had a particularly traditional understanding of vocation. He elaborates,

I often say to my Roman Catholic friends: "I love the word 'vocation.' A vocation is a calling." It is a great word, and I think I can have a vocation in their terms, and be a farmer at the same time. That's a slightly new concept to them, but it's been great. Because it is a God-given calling and every situation is different.

It is a perspective he hopes to pass down the generations, and he explains, "One of our children would like to become a full-time pastor straight away, but we have encouraged him about the necessity to have a profession as well." Interestingly, Brendan said the same thing, with an added challenge to those who may use traditional vocations to hide from the rigors of the real world:

We have encouraged our children, for example, to go and get a job, get stuck in, get married, and if at some time you feel the calling in your life to go full-time, fine. But first prove yourself faithful in those little things. Yes, we have benefitted from people coming full-time to help us, but I think that sometimes it can be a form of escapism for young people who don't want to get on with life. All our

grown-up children have professions and are also serving in the church in some capacity.

Whatever the motivation for starting or turning bivocational, an intriguing aspect of the ongoing discussion, and one that crops up intermittently in the literature, concerns whether or not bivocational plants should naturally evolve into having full-time leadership. Is being a bivocational planter an interim measure for difficult stages in ministry? Or, is being a bivocational plant just a transitional phase in the natural life-cycle of a new fellowship? Are there enough advantages missiologically, ecclesialogically, and vocationally to merit bivocationalism being a more permanent feature of the church landscape? Will is convinced that it cannot just be seen as transitional. He shares his own personal experience:

I am committed to holding down a job and working in the church, because I believe the role that I have in the community keeps me grounded in the community and engaged with the community. I don't see my role as providing a service to those who already belong to the kingdom, but rather bringing the kingdom to the role that I have in the broader community. So if, philosophically, that is your perspective then actually ending up being full-time is not my goal in that process, but I do understand that is the goal for some of the people, in fact many of the people, who engage in bivocational ministry.

In fact, a transitional outlook could stifle further development: "For a lot of people the approach is: 'This is what I will do for a particular season, but ultimately the goal will be when we have, say, one hundred people, then I'll be full-time.' Rather than saying: '...then I'll stay bivocational and go and plant somewhere else.'"

Declan would belong to the majority camp that Will mentions. He began bivocationally, but is glad he was able to leave it behind and would therefore struggle to recommend it – at least in a full-time capacity. He believes,

It would be very different if someone could work three days a week in a profession and make enough to live on so that they could give the rest of their

time to the church. Bivocationalism is possible, but it depends on what the person is doing and if they have sufficient time to give to the church. If he's working five days and [is] tired and has a family with children, he's not going to be able to do it.

Surprisingly, in spite of his championing of bivocationalism throughout his own ministry, and his advice to his children, Colin also feels that for the sake of the church, there may need to be a progression to full-time leadership. He notes,

I think moving to full-time is an inevitable part of the evolution if the fellowship grows – it is. I don't know how to put that now, I think that as church grows there's a huge amount of practical work that needs to be done, and of co-ordination. We have a new building, we have people using it every day of the week from the community – voluntary groups and so forth, there's a lot of work in organizing all that.

However, because of the model of ecclesial community Fintan hopes to start, he regards bivocational leadership not simply as being possible, but actually advisable for the plant's maturing. He says,

I suppose I am trying to do something different from the traditional structure and I don't see what I am doing as a stepping stone to establishing a church here which looks like our church in Galway or wherever else. I'm setting up a Christian community and I think you could still stay bivocational because the idea is to release other people to do ministry and to train people, and if you are doing that effectively then you should be able to step back into a more supervisory role. Nor am I necessarily looking to create a community where I step back and a full-time minister comes in to manage that; because I think you could very quickly get back to the traditional model where everyone sits back and says: "now we have somebody, now we have arrived. We have a building, we have a minister;" and you are back exactly where you started. Instead I am trying to instill certain values into whatever community emerges.

For churches like Colin's, which did, in time, choose to build, there was an advantage in not having a salary to pay on top of the building debt. However, when that was paid off and the church offered a salary, he declined. He recalls,

We declined because we never want people to kind of feel as if we planted the church and now we have a job, a salary, from the church. That wouldn't be wrong, by any means, but we just feel we are not the people to gain that way. We

do feel very much the next person will need to be supported. We are getting the church tuned up, as it were, to think a little bit more about giving.

What about the full-time planters? Ian, a full-time reformed planter in a non-Irish context, says his ideal is “that people should be fully supported, or have a network of supporters,” but he admits that being bivocational in those early days might have had its benefits. “There’s no doubt,” he says, “being bivocational certainly is a missional opportunity. You have people on the ground and can invest in them, you can help set the missional culture of the church.” When asked whether he feels that there was enough work for him to be full-time in the early stages, he responded,

In the first year when I wasn’t preaching every week or doing Bible Studies; when I was reading, learning, researching, but had no people to interact with – there were times in that year I thought I was being paid without having much to show for it. I was busy and had a guy holding me accountable, but there would have been scope to have been working in a regular job at that stage.

Ciaran feels the same, and he notes, “I suppose one of the things about being full-time when you start, you could think: ‘Oh what do I do with my time? How do I justify my existence?’” But both independently acknowledge that now that the plant is up and running, the situation is different. Ian states, “At this stage, I can’t imagine me having time to do anything else.” Or, as Ciaran explains, “I have no idea how you would do it if you were not full-time.” Marcus, whilst acknowledging the many benefits it brought, and admitting that something has been lost since he returned full-time, still sees the transition as a necessary part of the maturing of the church. He elaborates,

In one sense the DNA of the plant was largely in place in that first year and so the shift out of business freed me. I was telling my wife I was coming to see you today, and she said: “My goodness, can you imagine now trying to run a business and to do what we do?” So, from a personal point of view, I thought it was appropriate to grow out of that and, other than missing it a little bit, I also was relieved when that phase came to an end. What I would say is, for the new people

coming in now, I am the clergyman, and it's much harder for me to have the same link – particularly with the guys.

While Fred would prefer the proportion between teaching and church work to change slightly, he thinks going to one hundred percent within the church would rob him of some vital experiences:

An ideal life would be to have a day and a half at work instead of the three I work currently. But I don't think I would want to go out altogether – to go full-time. The job has given me a network of friends; it has helped me to understand the cultural mindset; it has opened many doors that would otherwise be closed.

The bivocational interviewees, then, embarked on their ministry out of a variety of circumstances and for diverse reasons. While the financial savings were important in terms of resourcing the wider ministry, issues of vocation, credibility, legitimacy, identification, and missional effectiveness were more dominant in the conversations. Some saw bivocationalism as transitional, while others saw it as an ongoing commitment. Their position on this may have been determined by the type of church being planted, and by the ecclesiological expectations of both planter and plant. Those in full-time planting found it difficult to identify with the competing demands of the bivocationalists' ministry.

Experience

How then did the vocational model adopted by the interviewees affect the reality of their experience as planters? In Fintan's case, it opened up specific missional opportunities. He states,

There are opportunities in work for ministry. It is a large company, and they have a Human Resources department and put on all sorts of different things to help staff. So I suggested recently that I would do something next Lent: a study or something like that. They are very open to that. When I was there before, I did a couple of bible studies in work, with their permission. There's an openness there. There are contacts there, goodwill. There's opportunity within work.

Ciaran, in contrast, believes that the location of his plant would mean that not as much would be gained in terms of relationships within the town if he was working elsewhere.

He says,

Because we're a commuter town, the place is comparatively empty during the day, and I suppose in that sense I see the town in a way most workers don't. It allows me to understand some of the day-to-day goings on: seeing what happens around school-time, family life. Probably if I was a full or part-time worker it would be unlikely to be in this town. I'd be working elsewhere during the day.

Charles and Terry were two of the SIs: members of Colin and Marcus's churches, respectively. They spoke of the authenticity that was obvious and the benefits of being able to identify with those in the plant who were experiencing similar work-related pressures. First Charles shares,

His bivocationalism gave his ministry an authenticity, whereas if someone came from the outside as a missionary, say, everyone would know, and there would be barriers put up because they would say, "he is here to convert me," or "he is here to change me and take me from [the religion] I grew up with." Whereas he had an authenticity in the area. He had a job; he was a local.

Secondly, through his livelihood – farming – he had a lot of contacts. Even for people coming for the first time, he would be able to carry on conversations about local issues, or with farmers he would have things in common with them. It's a rural area, an agricultural area. He had very good links in the community because he was from there and because he was working in the community. He also established himself on hospital committees and every committee in the country, I think!

Terry referred to the wide range of transferrable skills his pastor was able to bring to the plant, recalling,

The one thing that I do clearly remember about Marcus is that he was able to relate to people. He certainly had his share of hardships: staying up all night doing an order and getting it completed; customers not paying him after the order being delivered. He also had the joy of working through personnel issues as well and seeing the plus side as well as the harder side where people are not a good fit for the job and you have to coach them into doing something different in a different organization. So those experiences clearly helped how he related to people – he

did not come in as a holy man or a minister with a collar – and also helped significantly with the plant.

Time management and scheduling are often highlighted in the literature as being specific challenges to bivocationals. However, Ruari questions whether or not there is enough work to justify a full-time planter in the early days and, more seriously, would be concerned that being full-time in the beginning may actually be setting the planter up for disappointment and internal struggles regarding self-worth and pressure to succeed. He challenges,

I think bivocationalism is good. For example, initially you are not going to have a lot of stuff to do. There just isn't enough. So, two days a week sort of covers it for you unless you really want to knock on a lot of doors. Really, it takes talking to people on an individual basis. You have to meet them naturally, otherwise you are not going to have enough to do. I think it's also important, especially for men, in terms of self-significance, and the damage of potential failure. If they're church planting and not doing anything else, it is a problem. It can be difficult. You could end up after a year and you've reached two people and you think "Lord, I've failed!" Whereas, as a bivocational, doing other stuff as well, I might end up with two people, but I've still worked away, and I have made an odd "sale," and it's given me a buzz.

Certainly, Ciaran acknowledged that full-timers had the luxury of a surfeit of time in the early days of the plant's life. He comments, "It's one of those things: you come to a place, you arrive, and on the first Monday morning I remember walking around town, coming back after two hours and saying to my wife, 'Well, now what do I do?' I've seen the town. I have been here for two hours, and I've seen the place!" This simply meant being disciplined with personal priorities, as he recalls,

I suppose I had three angles to work with: the first was getting to know the core folk. Secondly, trying to make contact with people who might be interested in being part of a local bible-teaching church. Thirdly, getting to know the town and its people. I literally did what they say: I went and sat in coffee shops and read my newspaper there. I got to know the local newspapers.

Also, it meant taking advantage of additional invitations that would not have been feasible had he been working in addition to planting:

I also had an opportunity to be on the Community Council, and that, in turn, let me get to know some of the folk. It was a fast-forward version of getting to know the issues in the town and some of the key players. I don't know that if I had had lots of other stuff to do that I would ever have got those opportunities.

Fintan divides his weekly schedule into periods, "...a morning, an afternoon or an evening. My other work is six of those periods at least." He sees discipline in time management as vitally important in keeping all the different aspects of his life and ministry balanced. He, personally, uses timesheets: "Work takes up twenty-two hours plus travel – it is a good chunk of the week. There is not a lot of time left over. It is not just ministry, there's training, there are books to read etc."

Colin once accumulated over seventy hours between the various strands of his "vocation." He realizes that his capacity for work, and the schedule he (and the church) have become accustomed to, may not be able to be replicated in the future by others, but it has worked well for him. He says,

My wife and I did add up the hours one November. We just took an ordinary week, and at the end of the week we added up our commitment to the church. I personally had done thirty-four hours' pastoral work. I had done, I think, twenty-six hours of farm work, and I had done eleven hours of work in the community doing voluntary stuff. I think that was a typical week. So, what am I trying to say about that? With growth, a person would have no problem spending forty hours a week [in the church].

Ruari also recognizes he is naturally wired for busyness and therefore has a high capacity for work:

I have been a busy guy for a long time. I've always taken on tasks wherever I have been. I have three things I gotta do: I am working in the church, I have a family and I've got a job, and so I have to be careful. At the minute it is OK. Already I am working at a higher pace than I would normally. I don't have as much time to watch television, go fishing; in fact I am more careful to take my

game of golf once a week. I think I need to do that – that’s intentional. I take less unintentional rest.

Fintan finds the diversity of bivocationalism enriching and stimulating. He explains,

I had been in Finance for sixteen years. I enjoy the stimulation of work and working with figures and interacting with people at work – getting out of the house. I have half an hour’s train journey into work each way, which is actually beneficial because it is time for reading and reflection. So I get through my book list. It gives my day a rhythm.

However, for Ruari, who is working full-time, that rhythm can be somewhat relentless, especially in the very early days of a plant when so much energy goes on new evangelistic initiatives. He is pretty sure it is unsustainable, but, like Fred, it is unlikely he would want to go out of the workplace altogether. He states,

Over the summer I worked Monday to Friday, most Saturdays we went out to a nearby town for outreach – so most Saturdays are gone – Sunday I have my church responsibilities. At the minute I can do it, but I won’t be able to work full-time as the church plant gets busier with more people, and as I get more appointments and things to do. But I will cross that bridge when I get to it.

For those working as full-time planters, their timesheets tell a clear story in terms of change of focus once the plant is up and running. Ian admits,

I have experienced the truth of what the literature says in terms of once you start meeting weekly, your focus is on the Sunday meeting. Bivocationalism, I don’t think, is as effective if you’re working for a Christian agency. Contact with non-Christians is crucial. One thing that can be so easily squeezed out once you start regular “church work” is that contact. Another is the strategic longer term vision, if you are concentrating on week-by-week stuff.

Richie, one of the SIs, experienced this in his own ministry. He admits, “The more ministry work develops, the less connection I find I have with unchurched people.”

Similarly, it is this strategic thinking time that Ciaran misses, as he reflects, “There were genuinely intentional times of sitting around looking – and I mean that – and one of the

things with now having started, is I don't have the time to do that anymore now and I actually miss that time. I have nothing like the time I once had."

Among the frustrations highlighted by the bivocationals, tiredness and lack of energy, less time for prayer and sermon preparation, difficulties in the workplace, and financial concerns were all mentioned. Declan admits that the exhaustion of his bivocational days is largely why he finds it difficult to recommend that route. He says, "I guess I was always working towards being full-time in the church. It's what I aspired to. Mainly because the nature of my work in retail didn't lend itself to being a bivocational planter. I worked every weekday and invariably arrived home of an evening dog tired: just worn out."

Brendan, too, became aware of the implications on health and home, particularly. He warns,

There are some serious disadvantages. I found that once I crossed fifty, I was having problems with my digestion. It wasn't healthy, balancing everything; it wasn't healthy. Now, my marriage is very good. I can imagine a mediocre marriage might not be able to take the strain [of working full time and trying to lead a church].

He also struggled latterly because his other profession was proving increasingly draining and challenging. Because of changes within education, he was losing some of the passion he once had for it, and it had become less fruitful vocationally and missionally. He recounts,

I was finding it more difficult [to teach] as I went on. You are getting older, and the kids are getting tougher, and just yesterday I heard that two guys were expelled from the school that I taught in last year, and they were the two guys... they made life so difficult for me. That was very difficult. You would pour out your heart here on Sunday mornings, and you are dealing with fantastic, wonderful truths of Christ. You have your own heart dealt with, and you are delivering...but then you go in on Monday morning and you meet incredible insults. Do you know what I mean? Almost devilish: darkness. The school was

pretty tough. More and more, emotionally, I was finding it very difficult at the end.

We had a youth worker with us for a number of years. On Mondays, he used to spend time with the Lord. I was thinking, “What would it be like to get up on Monday and instead of having to drive to school and face this, like?...” I like teaching, in fact, I love teaching. But this wasn’t teaching. No, this wasn’t teaching; it was crowd control.

Charles also felt that, in spite of his many abilities, his pastor’s other work could at times suffer because of his commitment to the church. He believes, “Some people would not be able to cope with all our guy does. His hours are quite flexible, but I think the work can sometimes suffer.”

The time sacrificed that could have been spent in spiritual disciplines, referred to by Brendan, was also an issue for Ruari, who shares,

It’s good as a church plant to take time to pray, which we are doing; but I would probably be doing more. Instead of squishing in a half-hour every morning, I’d be trying to push out an hour and a half a day. I’d probably do a little bit of study at Bible College. I’d be doing a little bit of that if I didn’t have my job. The hours I am spending working, I am thinking, “I could be church planting here, and doing church stuff.” But then I am not sure I would be. If I had no job, I might be walking in the park wondering, “What will I do with my life?”

Similarly, while Brendan would have loved more preparation time, he acknowledges that, in his sovereignty, God equips people according to the resources they have been given, and that there are seasons of ministry. So sometimes the time required for a certain task cannot be generalized. He says, “Jesus did promise that he would build his church. He can do without us more than we think. It doesn’t have to be ten hours for every sermon, even though I could do that. There are times and seasons.”

Nevertheless, the relentless pressure of services and events can be demanding, and snatching preparation time in lunch-breaks can be a way of life, as Ruari is discovering:

I guess you only have so much energy. You are rushing to meetings, you are rushing to get stuff prepared, you are preparing stuff in your free time. So tonight, for example, we have an Advent service. My first public service is tonight! So, I have had to prepare at lunch-time today. I've got the worship slides all done. Before I met you, I was preparing the introduction; my wife is doing a little sharing. I probably would have spent more time on that if I wasn't working full-time.

Although in some contexts, bivocationalism alleviated financial worries, at other times the lack of a denominational income – or adequate income – brought its own difficulties, especially for the self-employed, and especially at times of recession. There were times Colin was glad of outside support, as he recalls,

Other churches supported us for a while, giving money for the ministry, and look: it was money for us as well, because the business I was in wasn't sufficient to keep us going at that stage. Later, the business was becoming much more productive financially. I could see it as a kind of scale of God's provision, really, that in the early years the giving of the wider church was there to support us, but then, as I developed the farm, probably ninety percent of my income today is coming from the business. We do take expenses from the church for things like fuel.

Ciaran is aware that this lack of financial stability is something he is protected from through his full-time status: "I talk to church planters who spend their time trying to fundraise for their church, and trying to fundraise for themselves. I honestly don't know how I would do what I do, if I had to do that. In the grace of God, it can work, but I honestly don't know how I would do it."

Marcus, however, as noted, had a very different experience, and the anxieties were often exacerbated by the fact that for a variety of reasons – not least a real lack of understanding within the wider denominational family regarding the realities of church planting – they felt they had to be bivocational "on the quiet." Their desire was always to fold their business once adequate funding had been injected by the denomination and to avoid any blurring of the lines between business and ministry property, for example, and

this is what eventually happened. But in the meantime, he says that, “Frankly, a lot of the time I think that we felt we had to do this extra [earning] thing in the shadow.”

So, in spite of the excitement, stimulation, encouragements, and joys of being part of something new and different, the interviewees were also open in communicating the frustrations, anxieties, and particularly the cost of such a calling. This cost is more than financial. It has implications for health, reputation (how will it look if I fail?), and family. Brendan summarised the recurrent loneliness that could be part of the planter’s experience, especially in rural areas, and especially before the turn of this century: “There were times we would have liked to have gone away and parachuted into some nice cozy church in another part of the country where our kids would be nicely protected and we would be cushioned against this sense of alienation; where we would have friendships and so on.”

So, often motivated by a missional heart, a strong sense of vocation, and a determination not to let financial hardship hinder the realization of a vision; and prepared to meet the varied spiritual and emotional demands that make up the reality of the planting experience, the planters succeeded in forming diverse Christian communities across Ireland. How then were those communities affected by the vision, values and outlook of the planter and, particularly, how was their development affected, if at all, by his vocational status?

The Plant Perspective

Benefits

Again, while the researcher may have expected the financial savings to feature largely in terms of the benefits to the plant, this was hardly mentioned at all. Charles did

acknowledge, “Yes, I suppose financially as well it helped when the church was small. We could not have afforded a full-time pastor.” However, the interviewees were much more focused on the missional advantages. Even the otherwise-skeptical Declan couldn’t deny the relational benefits: “The only advantage I can think of, to being bivocational, was the ongoing contact with people. It kept me earthed.” Charles remarks, “I think working in the community is a great advantage. It gives you a lot of contact; all the people you work with, and so on.” Similarly, Terry recognized how the plant benefitted from the knock-on effect of his pastor’s business relationships:

In the early days, I think he was fifteen hours a week working with the business. I think that did a couple of things: it gave him a good understanding because he had been operating the business off some relationships in the town, and I think that was really a positive thing. And ultimately his relationship with the landlord through his business opened up an opportunity for us to have some adjacent space, which was a huge positive, both from his own time perspective, as well as giving us a ready-made intro that we might not have otherwise had.

Fred’s experience was similar:

At work we have conversations not about church but about “being a community of men and women who love Jesus.” Staff and boys listen to my podcasts; conversations are generated. We do believe in the corporate gathering, but it cannot be the only arm of church life. We actually have seven communities all driven by the same values. We like to think of ourselves as being value driven: one of those communities is a play group; one is a traditional home group; one is a teenage youth gathering. Whatever the community needs are, we look for vision and community to be built round those.

Marcus can draw a clear line of connection from his work-life and social-life:

But in terms of my connections within the community, one of the things I found really fascinating was that a lot of the people who became our customers became the people that we got to know socially. Work was a place I got to know them. How on earth would I have even started to have a conversation with some of them otherwise?

This in turn yielded tangible results in terms of the plant. Marcus continues:

To my surprise, both theologically and evangelistically, that period of overlap between tentmaking and pastoring had a huge impact on the plant. It had an impact evangelistically in that I heard a number of the guys say – and people said to me afterwards – they were drawn to the church because they knew that I understood what they were talking about when they were talking about their business.

This credibility was a significant factor in the mission of the local church. Marcus recalls, “It was like what they always talk about in the bivocational literature: it gave me a legitimacy.” This was also vitally important in Brendan’s context. He explains, “The single biggest contributory factor in breaking down the barriers between ‘us’ and ‘them’ was certainly that I have been a teacher. When people say ‘What do you do?’ I am a teacher; not the leader of a fellowship. In a rural setting, credibility is a key factor.”

A number of interviewees commented on how the specific skill sets important in their chosen secular work were transferrable into the church context allowing the plant to benefit through the dovetailing of the pastor’s dual callings. Ruari talked most extensively about this. For him, this might be as straightforward as knowing how to manage one’s time, as he shares,

I think this is maybe an important one. Because I work, I learned to use my time well. Sometimes I look at people in full time ministry, and it’s easy to say: “I could do what you do in about four hours – what takes you a day – because I only have four hours to do it.” I don’t mean that as a judgement: there’s just a certain time to do something, and it needs to get done. I think that’s very useful. I think business teaches you that.

But general management, communication, people-politics, and financial know-how (what he refers to as “responsible risk-taking”) also proved useful. He considers:

I would have gained a lot of management skills. Part of planting a church and leading a church is knowing how to manage and how to work with people; how to say “yes,” and how to say “no” to people – communication skills and all that. So my career has been very useful for that. It has probably taught me to look at money a little bit differently too. I know people who would be full-time, and I think they are a little bit conservative when it comes to money; afraid to step out

and invest for greater gain. Business teaches you that skill of responsible risk-taking.

Also important for Ruari was a feel for team-work, bringing together diversity and general pastoral sensitivity. He explains,

Somehow, in my business, I have ended up in committees and organisations where I have been working, even with some of my competitors, trying to achieve a shared goal. I think that is going to be very useful, as churches in Dublin and Ireland start to talk to each other and get to know each other. I know how to work with people going towards a shared goal...

... I guess bivocationalism does a few things. Trying to get a feel for employment levels, unemployment levels, what's going up, what's going down; what's selling, what's not. Pastorally, I get a feel for people's lives. I'm meeting people all the time in a non-church environment. I've just got a bigger pond to fish out of because I'm meeting more people because I am not in full-time church.

Terry believes his pastor's familiarity with leadership styles and his entrepreneurial ability brought obvious advantages to the plant. He adds,

Well, I think clearly his interest in leadership from both the Christian as well as secular perspective has shaped some of his business thinking; and in the early days he won some kind of a small business award. They were trying to do some innovative sorts of things. I think he brought some of the same kind of energy that would have led to that, and the same kind of abilities that led to getting that award, to the church plant; and the fact is he was working bivocationally but it was in a business that he had started. The entrepreneurial nature of the business dovetailed really nicely with the church planting. Not only energy, but a sense of vision and idea-generation that were very, very important for the church in the early days.

Brendan and Marcus both raised the credibility issue again, Brendan believing it applies not just outside the church (people relate quickly and easily to you as a fellow-professional) but inside as well. He states, "I think that, no more than having credibility outside, when people do actually come to church there is a greater empathy with someone who knows what it is to get up in the morning and pay the mortgage. That's the way they see it."

Terry expands on this and believes the positive effect this can have, particularly on a fledgling church plant, shouldn't be underestimated. He urges,

I think there's a lot to be said for church planters who can empathise with what many people in their congregation feel: whether that's being downsized, sacked, having legitimate relational issues with people at work, all those things that would be part of what would be a typical Monday to Friday forty-hour-a-week job. I think to the extent that the leaders in our church, particularly teaching elders/ministers, can incarnate the worlds in which their parishioners live – and don't have a life which is somehow set apart but can really relate and have navigated some of those things – then the plant will have an air of authenticity.

For Marcus, tentmaking opened pastoral doors, and some business events led to new members arriving at the church. He recounts,

I think undoubtedly I had credibility amongst the guys that I wouldn't have had otherwise. Some of them were having issues in business, and they would come and say "Hey can I talk to you about this?" And it turns out I was able to empathise and advise. One of the families that joined us first encountered me speaking at a new business event in a local hotel.

Colin shows that it is not just the cross-fertilisation of skills between church and marketplace that can be of benefit, but the diverse and multifaceted nature of some work contexts. The flexibility and fluidity of his business brought with it great opportunities and benefits to the fellowship. He notes,

When you have a farm, it's an ideal place to invite people out to: they love coming to the house because it is a welcoming place and this home here had been hugely used by God in the establishment of the fellowship. Also, young people, unemployed people, people with addictive problems; it's an ideal place to give them a job, a few shillings, to get to know them. For those with problems, it's a great way to get them out, have them cutting timber for a few hours – a bit of therapy in some ways for them. Sometimes it gets them out of a little depressing dingy flat in town and out to here. Also, the type of farming that I do is flexible time-wise, so therefore I'm never in a position where I can't leave the farm to attend to an urgent pastoral call. I can go at the drop of a hat. I can move everything around so I don't have to be here. And the sort of place we are means I can move everything around in church as well (except Sunday morning) so that I can be here if there is a cow calving. It's a very fluid situation where I can be bivocational – or trivocational if it came to it.

So then, what of the full-timers? If they lose out a little on some of the areas of immediacy and empathy highlighted above, the extra time and freedom to focus exclusively on the plant must surely compensate in some ways. Brendan has experienced both worlds and feels that, at least in the area of preaching, the plant has benefitted from the luxury of his extra time. He says, “So now, to me in early retirement, having this extra time is an absolute luxury. I am doing a Bible College course and I find now that my preaching has improved a lot because I have more time.”

Ciaran feels that being full-time helped to mobilize the core group and relieved them of the added pressure of prospective failure. He considers,

I think it is fair to say in the early days there were varying degrees of committedness to the project. For most there was unease in terms of what this might look like; of what the vision would be. And having somebody spearheading this, and moving into the area, actually helped them in the sense that the responsibility didn't fall on their shoulders; somebody else would fall if this didn't work, and there was somebody there full-time to mobilise and to think through the practical details – all those kinds of things.

But, for Marcus, that illustrates the very heart of the problem. Churches are too often paralysed by fear, particularly the fear of failure. What needs to develop is a culture where the emphasis is on stepping out boldly and taking risks for the right reasons, without trying to solve all the prospective problems first. He encourages,

I think the bivocational option allows you to start more churches, to give it a go! Three out of four new church plants around the world fail. That's ok, but we say, “Failure is not acceptable!” I think the bivocational thing would make it easier for us to say to somebody, “OK. Go and have a go.” As a denomination, we would be more able to step back a little. But at the minute, our structures say that everything needs to be in place.

There seems little doubt that the greatest benefit to the plant, which emerged in the interviews, was the natural relationships developed by the planter through his other work, although complementary skill-sets, team work, and the feeling that the pastor understood

the daily life of the members were also important factors. While the interviewees were happy to share the clear benefits to the plant of their bivocationalism, they were also very open about the real challenges presented by it.

Challenges

Many of the difficulties highlighted earlier by the planters themselves could, of course, also have an indirect effect on the health of the plant. Wearing his consultant's hat, Richie has observed that "exhaustion is a serious challenge and struggle for bivocationalists." Marcus, for example, simply confesses, "I was working far too many hours."

Declan feels that "there were a lot of disadvantages" to bivocational church planting. The plant never really benefitted from his bivocationalism because of geographical distance. He shares, "After all, I was working in a different town, so even the personal contact with locals didn't necessarily result in growth for the fellowship." Most of all, though, he rues the lack of time available, recalling, "The biggest frustration in those early days was undoubtedly the limited time I had available for church work. A few years into the plant I was able to quit the retail job and was part-paid by the fellowship and part-paid by an Irish missions agency."

He also draws attention to the issue of "leadership deficit" in his context, where there weren't too many obvious contenders to share the leadership if he had remained bivocational. He explains,

In established situations where you have equipped leaders who are recognized by the church as such and who are able to be called upon for pastoral duties, for example, then yes, perhaps [bivocational leadership] would work. But that is a rare situation. You need to have other acceptable legitimized leadership within the church. Bivocationalism really stands or falls on the availability of other leadership. For church planting, a dozen is a good start for the core group. And so,

if the person had sufficient flexibility in their schedule to take care, first of all, of their family, and also of their responsibility to their employer or clients, it is possible; but I imagine they would be under a lot of pressure.

Family, and how they need to be totally committed to the project, was a factor openly acknowledged by Colin. His bivocationalism would not have been possible without not just his spouse's support, but also her active participation. He qualifies,

Now, having said all that, I could only do it because my wife, although she had been a teacher, devoted herself to being at home with the children and did not go back to work. She gave herself to being someone who was here in this home and who welcomed people, nurtured people, counseled people. Just the particular gifts that God gave us made it work. I think if you were working in a very demanding job in a local computer factory, or working nine-to-five, it might not be that simple. The practicalities of it just might not work.

However, there are also potential difficulties in moving to full-time. Not the least of these is the very big jump involved in becoming or remaining financially self-sufficient with the additional salary expenses. Marcus admits that his full-time status has affected their financial projections:

We committed to being self-sufficient, but the truth is we don't think we can make it this year; we just don't think it's possible. So what does that mean financially for the plant? Would it be better if I had a part-time job, with the salary implications as far as the plant is concerned? Well, in one sense, it would.

Ciaran felt that the corporate ownership and quick understanding of every-member ministry that many bivocationalists mention as a feature of their plants was possibly missing in their early days. He says,

I am sure, on the other side though, that [being full-time] could lead to – and maybe has led to in some circumstances – allowing the full-timer to do everything. Or perhaps it takes a while for them to grasp the vision, or it takes them time to own it for themselves. Now, I think, looking back over the years, people have moved from feeling a little bit wary and a little bit uneasy, to looking beyond themselves and using their gifts as much as they can. If I wasn't full-time, would they have a greater ownership, a greater sense of responsibility? I suspect they might.

He then pauses and adds, however, “Whether they would have got to that point without a full-time person I don’t know.”

So, thinking of it from the plant’s perspective this time, is transition to full-time leadership inevitable, or even desirable? Terry and Charles believe that momentum occurs which makes such a transition almost impossible to avoid. Terry explains, “With the congregation becoming mature and officially recognised by the denomination, there’s just a lot more complexity. It would be much more difficult now for him not to be full-time.” Charles adds, “I think, quite possibly, a full-time person will be needed in the future. I see something down the road – because of size, plus taking some of the burden off the pastor; freeing him up to do other things. I think he sees that himself now.”

Will, however, begs to differ. Not only does he think that avoiding such a shift to full-time is possible, he believes it is probably necessary to prevent some vital ingredients of the plant’s focus, ethos, and missional effectiveness from being lost. He cautions,

I think that all of the good work done in the initial phases – in relation to the community connection, community involvement, community engagement; the social capital that’s generated, the social cohesion that someone involved in the community brings to the process of planting a church – all of that can be very quickly lost when that person is made full-time. Because then the focus of the church ultimately ends up shifting from an external focus to an inward focus. There is a transitional scenario there that is unhealthy.

That final phrase from Will is certainly thought-provoking. It opens up the wider issue of how, when asking about the advantages and disadvantages of certain models, further questions may need to be asked, such as: “advantages to whom?” or “disadvantages in what aspects of ministry?” This is because what may be advantageous to the growth and stability of the plant on an institutional level may not be healthy in terms of its outward focus or missional impact. These questions merit further consideration.

The Cultural Perspective

Denomination

In the area of church planting, “culture” could mean either the dominant church culture into and from which the plant is emerging, or the wider cultural context of twenty-first century Ireland: urban, suburban, commuter, large or small town, or rural. Since the interviewees came from such a wide variety of networks and denominations, their experiences varied greatly in terms of how denominational culture may have influenced the plant’s development. Those who had no formal denominational linkage, for example, may have suffered a little in terms of lack of initial funding and may have felt the isolation that comes with not having a ready-made formal fellowship of colleagues. However, this was more than compensated for through more informal interdenominational relationships. In fact, in Brendan’s case, the lack of label facilitated the creation of a broader support-base:

We have no back-up; we don’t belong to a denomination. We have 10K in the bank; we are talking about buying. But we have a lot of friends in a lot of places across denominational boundaries, because we are not a denomination ourselves. That’s one of the advantages. We have an appeal right across the denominations.

This was also Colin’s experience:

Churches of different denominations were incredibly supportive towards us and gave very generously for our work. There was no formal link, and we were never working under a denominational Mission Board, or anything of that nature. These churches just basically supported, encouraged, and prayed. It was an indigenous work out of the need that was there. It had always been our intention that somewhere along the way the town needed an evangelical church.

Fintan does have denominational backup, but his denomination is largely inexperienced in contemporary planting and were already very aware of the financial unsustainability of older models. This made them more receptive to a bivocational approach. He comments,

Getting agreement was surprisingly easy, I think, because it wasn't costing anything. That made it much easier. The denomination are only feeling their way in church planting. A while ago, they put a lady in another part of the country, and they bought her a house, and they are paying her stipend. That was their first attempt, and they have already run out of money! So, my proposal was to go back to work part time and do what I had done before I went into "the ministry."

Before this, he had simply come up with his own proposal, which arose out of a sense of call to a particular location:

The denomination had been talking about planting for a couple of years. There wasn't any formal application process, so I just applied anyway. I just wrote a letter, and I put together a proposal as to how it might work. I chose the location through a sense of call. A family in our previous church moved to this area, asked where their nearest church of our particular ethos would be, and I realized that in three big commuting counties we had virtually no presence, so I thought we should address that, and I prayed about it and really felt led towards this direction.

Fintan's denomination, although having little or no track record in recent planting, does seem prepared to encourage him to make an attempt. The lack of cost to the church centrally not only allows him to have a go, but it also removes any unrealistic time pressures and gives him a feasible schedule. He notes, "I've been given roughly a ten-year time-frame. Although I could be moved out anytime, they will probably give me ten years to have a crack at this."

The openness of Fred's agency to work on the basis of "divine instruction" gave him the freedom to act when "God gave supernatural guidance," and to take it from there. He explains, "I got a grant from our Agency, which is very rare, but which was only to last twelve to eighteen months."

For Ruari, church planting was very much part of the DNA of his denominational culture. He said, "Church planting? We talk about it all the time, hear about it all the time, see it all the time. It's one of our core values in the denomination." A fascinating by-product of this is that comments, outlooks, attitudes, and tendencies which in other

church cultures may cause irritation and be actively discouraged, or seen as evidence of insubordination, in this context are viewed as evidence rather of a potential church planting mindset or personality profile. Ruari shares:

Sometimes in church we'd be chatting and saying: "This is poor," or "We would do that differently." Not so much a complaining, but thinking: "If I was running this, I would do it a little differently." That, for us in our church, is: "Ah! There's a church planter!" Because we think we would do such-and-such differently, it shows you want to put your own shape on things; that starting something new would not faze you.

Will recognizes that although his denomination had a reasonably good record in church planting, they have had to re-examine their default attachment to a mother-daughter model.

I think back ten to fifteen years ago. Certainly, within our milieu, we were looking much more at how we could get four or five churches to support either a daughter congregation being pioneered from the main congregation, or alternatively, how they could financially support someone to be able to be full-time in a community. The daughter model worked well in certain climates. For example, if you were in a more urban center and looking at developing a congregation in another significant area of population, then planting out a daughter church seemed very feasible.... I think we were very idealistic in the beginning: "Every church to plant a daughter church." But this seemed to be much easier for the urban congregations rather than the rural congregations, and I think there is a realisation now that this isn't necessarily the way to go.

However, much of this is in stark contrast to those who were trying to work from within the reformed theological context. This was the case, not just in terms of embracing new models such as bivocationalism, but in terms of a lack of understanding of church planting per se. As Marcus recalls, "When I went initially [to the denominational leadership] and said that we felt called into church planting, the response was 'What's church planting?'" Some of the objections were really quite difficult to fathom, and betrayed a mindset completely out of tune with the developing missional thinking that had been part and parcel of his church planting reading and training. He shares, "I

remember hearing a primary objection to being bivocational, which was: ‘If there is not enough work for a full-timer, then why do we want to be involved?’ It’s hard to know how to respond to that!”

He says he was simply asking for the freedom to “have a go,” but in contrast to Fintan’s experience above, too many obstacles appeared to be in the way. He recalls,

From the point when I first raised the possibility, to the point where we were able to be involved in a church plant, was seven years. For seven years we were not able to start, and all we wanted was permission to try. We were not even able to begin to try because of the issue of funding; because the model that existed in the denomination then was that it was entirely funded from the church. It took me seven years to even get the chance to try.

To his ears, it seemed that the denomination was keen to get all kinds of administrative and structural minutiae sorted out before granting permission. There was no risk-taking, no grasping of vision, no stepping out in faith, no concept of waiting to cross bridges when they appear. Instead, as a bivocational model was presented, there was a tendency on the part of the denomination to ask all sorts of questions to which answers couldn’t realistically be given until the project was underway. He recounts:

In our naïve youth, we weren’t initially wanting any denominational support, financially. We wanted to purchase our own home and work through that within the denomination, but such a plan is not workable because to be a minister of a congregation in our denomination you have to be funded centrally. The Pension Scheme became one of our conversations! You can’t be bivocational: the Pension Scheme requires that your salary comes centrally, and if your salary doesn’t come from centrally, then you can’t be in the Pension Scheme. That became part of the conversation. There was actually a bucketload of those issues.

For Ian, this is indicative of a widespread problem: the lack of a sympathetic mindset, or vision for church planting within the wider reformed family; something which may stem from simply a lack of successful role-models from within the tradition. He remembers,

It was around a year before a first couple joined us. The comment of course was made: “Why are you trying to start a church when there are other churches in the city?” I think, at heart, the problem is that, in this part of the world, church planting has just not been done in reformed circles. There has not been the mindset for it.

This was not the case for Murray, who was aware of a developing tradition of church planting from within his North American reformed context. But although his denomination had embraced some models of planting, bivocationalism was not on the menu. He admits,

There were virtually [no practitioners] that I was aware of. Most of the examples that we had read of had been outside our denomination: guys working as hospital chaplains, some Baptist folks; but within the denomination – not much....

...We had heard of people do it by necessity. Maybe they had raised a boatload of money, burned through it in three years, then found themselves having to do something like part-time work at Starbucks. We were averse to working in someone else’s business. We had visions of potentially starting a café or an art studio and food business combined, and different models such as that. We had never seen someone who overtly headed out with this in view. Part of our reasoning was, if the experience so many times is that church planters do this and then find they must [go bivocational], then why not plan for it?

This may sound reasonable, but no proposal is tabled in a vacuum, and Murray found what he refers to as “a lot of anxiety in the system.” This was partly due to historical factors. There had been past failures and yet still a tendency to support the tired failed models rather than take creative risks. He laments, “They were anxious about our model; anxious about ten years of failed church plants and lots of money spent with about two churches to show for it, and then another traditional church plant wanting to come on board at the same time as us.”

If Marcus had found the denomination preoccupied with administrative complexities caused by the new model, Murray discovered resistance of a deeper, personal, even prejudicial kind:

A very conservative member of the committee who would [favour] a different model – different values – didn't think it would work. One comment he made was: "This sounds like Haight-Ashbury!" You know, the place in San Francisco where the drug culture was. A church planting team trying to build a community model sounding like Haight-Ashbury! Yeah, right! Huh!

He was finding what Marcus, in another part of the world, had found out years before in terms of how some reformed churches function: namely, what makes perfect sense to the creative planter, is not always as clear to the decision-makers. Marcus shares,

We were painting an idea that made perfect sense when you were surrounded by church planters. But, because of their jobs, the denominational officers had to think about the impact of what that meant, not just for me, as it turned out, but for all other areas of ministry. I have a much better understanding now about the whole thing of precedent. We are bound by precedent in our denomination, and I know it can bring stability, but I think, sometimes, we are gagged by fear of precedent.

Ian puts it this way: "The difficulty of planting into existing structures is that those structures are so rigid." So, much of the resistance or delay seems to be caused because aspects of the new models just don't fit with what exists at present. Murray says:

When we presented our larger team model: three couples, right? Well, the pushback was: "We don't know how to assess a team. We assess individual church planters who subsequently call the team members that they want to bring in. But in terms of looking at a team, its make-up, its complementary parts and so on – we don't know how to do that!"

To him, this was symptomatic of a more serious problem:

I don't think we as Presbyterians do team work very well. And I realize again that there were strong geographical, sociological, economic issues that contributed to [our struggle to be accepted], but I don't think we understand team ministry very well, and I think that is a factor that is really important to explore in this whole broader question.

With resistance possible on all sorts of different levels – in terms of administration, communication, understanding of vision, team assessment and finance –

this is where the denomination not only should, but must listen to and observe how other denominations have been doing it. Marcus again notes:

Take “Denomination B” in Ireland at the moment. They are planting churches all over the place. What do you need to do that? You need a measure of theological training, you need approval of the denominational leadership, and you need some means of funding yourself. For the majority of church plants people just go to their family and friends. In the States, how some reformed churches there work is often a third, a third, a third: a third provided centrally, a third by your Presbytery and a third you have to find yourself. So even in models there that are full time there is a recognition that it is not going to be all funded centrally.

This is borne out by Will, who believes fully-funded plants are soon going to be a thing of the past, but that this will allow denominations to think more creatively from a missiological perspective. He posits,

I think there is a lot more awareness, particularly in Ireland, that financially the cost of providing a pastor/minister to go into an area and develop a church is prohibitive – particularly in the current economic climate – and there is a desire amongst younger people, I think, to go and do something for God, but to develop a community of faith engaging with the community at large as an initial process. Whereas, traditionally, we started with the larger community and then decided to plant a Christian community in the midst of it; and then we would try to work out later the interactions between the wider community and the faith community that was planted there.

Terry feels that since cash-flow seems to be a sticking-point with many denominations, bivocationalism is a ready-made answer for that problem. He argues,

The constant outflow of cash can be very difficult for a wider denominations or a wider network of churches to get their heads around. With one other bivocational planter I know, that outflow of cash that covers his living expenses comes from his Company, but the church has supplied him with a house. That’s one way of doing it.

Marcus was a little surprised at his denomination’s reticence to get excited about a new bivocational model since, as he points out, some thinking had already been done centrally on this issue a few years previously:

Interestingly, already within the denomination, the notion of tent-making and all of that had been put forward in a strategy report from previous years. That was all present. But we were probably the first people to come and say: “What about doing this?” And, at that stage, then the problems began to emerge.

Bivocationalism appeared to be a non-starter at that stage, and even the church planting model he was placed into was fraught with difficulties and teething problems – the sort of problems that eventually led him to having to go bivocational. It also meant that the start of the planting experience, when the planter should be expending his energy and intellect on issues such as mission, community engagement, and church development, he was actually preoccupied with structural and administrative issues. He recalls,

When the opportunity came, it came a little awkwardly; there was initial funding but the model that was to be used was switched at the last moment. It changed the dynamic, but also changed the funding. Even though the model eventually became a functioning model, there were big challenges: the level of salary was different, there was no access to normal grants available to other pastors, no accommodation. So the model itself had to be worked on. Maybe two thirds of my salary went on rent, never mind bills, and so the initial start was far from settled.

Ciaran, whilst benefitting enormously from his full-time status, recognizes the unsustainability of this as the dominant model, and recognizes the need for new thinking on a whole range of areas. He believes,

I mean there are days where I look and I say: “We are expensive. For our denomination to do a church plant, it’s desperately expensive.” As a denomination, (we need) to look at ways to be more flexible in terms of how we call people, how we use people; and yet, having said all that, I have no idea how you would do it if you were not full-time.

Both Ian and Marcus found that the predominant mother-daughter model was just not workable in their context. For Ian, it was because of the lack of a core group and inter-denominational tensions within the wider reformed family:

The only model I had seen had been the mother-daughter model, where fifty-plus people go off and start a new church. I thought we were a long way from that in terms of critical mass and sustainability. Because of some denominational

sensitivities, it was all very secretive right until I began, so there was no real opportunity to prepare the ground.

For Marcus, it was because the mother church itself was not yet sustainable. He noted, “When we talk about churches planting other churches, it is always strong churches. So the natural assumption is that the mother sustains the daughter. But that just wasn’t the case.” However, a decade later, when Ciaran was planting, some of those issues had at least been worked through, and the mother-daughter model (or a significant adaptation of it) proved more workable:

The vision came from a mother church, and the wider church, and I came and I fitted into that. My experience is overwhelmingly positive in that there was a structure set up: an overseeing body made up of local and central church people as well. There is an accountability in that and it provided me with people to talk ideas through with.

Nevertheless, Ciaran was aware that new difficulties were emerging as the denomination continued to struggle with how to deal with church plants and church planters within the existing structures:

We have very strict guidelines, I suppose, for membership and how you become a member, and I think that’s right – it’s for committed Christians. But as we work through having membership and then having eldership and leadership and which people have a say in who becomes elders; that’s a process that has taken a lot longer than it could have. It seems that in these early days, there are some church structures that we have to work through.

For Fintan, the problem was not so much denominational obstacles as a lack of understanding within the culture of the local churches, including the fellowship his family attended, which resulted in an almost imperceptible distraction from his church planting vision. He explains,

I probably expected more support from the nearby church [that I was attending] and those living in my target area. What happened was I found myself getting sucked more into their agenda. Initially the only commitment was to preach there

once a month, but then other things started coming along. Suddenly I got put on to rotas. I've just kind of got more involved there, and I'm trying to pull back a bit.

It was fascinating that, amidst all the pragmatic, methodological, or philosophical objections to bivocationalism, no theological objections surfaced in any of the interviews; neither from interviewees themselves, nor from any of those with whom they had conversed on the subject. Marcus said simply, "No. I never heard any theological objections." Will wryly remarked, "I'm not sure I've come across a clearly-stated theological position against bivocationalism. I don't think anybody views it theologically as a bad thing. I think Paul's tent-making is a pretty strong argument!"

Murray, likewise, said when he enquired about theological objections, all he got were more pragmatic ones:

Two things I picked up. There is a view that if you have trained in the way that you have for ministry – and, of course, it is a demanding role and requires professional attention to such things as sermons and so on – that it is a downgrading or a stepping away from a high view of vocational ministry to consider doing something else that occupies half or more of your time each week...

...Then, I pushed for more specific theological objections, but one of my advocates said that when he presented the model to other church networks all they said was: "We have never seen it work; we have never done it before."

Fintan, too, only experienced a cultural resistance, and, interestingly for him, this came not from denominational headquarters, but more from the grassroots. He shares,

I have had nothing but support from the top level and from colleagues. A lot of people would say: "Fair play to you. I could never do it. It wouldn't be my cup of tea, but it is great you are doing it." Where I encountered resistance would be from the bottom end; the people in the pews thinking I am a loss to the denomination: "Sure, wouldn't it be great if you could come to our church." I did fairly well in the first churches I went to and people think: "Ah, he could be used somewhere else to do ministry and to serve us" – that's the only sort of resistance.

Sam is a denominational administrator within the reformed family. He is aware of many of the practicalities in trying to get these models to work, and he is therefore someone who can shed light on why people such as Marcus, Ian, Ciaran, or Murray may have had the experiences that they had. However, he was also clear that when Irish Presbyterians last visited a debate regarding flexible models of ministry, theological objections were conspicuous by their absence:

Are there potential theological stumbling blocks? Possibly, but not serious or very widespread ones – maybe in certain regions where there is a very traditional view of ministry persisting, especially in relation to issues such as Ordination and Office. There are also those who have a very traditional view of theological education. There may have been some dissenters who were coming to the debate with a high view of preaching, or a traditional view of ministry, but the speeches against were largely practical – pragmatic.

This issue of ordination was highlighted at length by Will:

I think, theologically, the issue for certain denominations is their understanding of the clergy/laity divide, their understanding of ministry, their understanding of ordination. Whilst many denominations will talk about the priesthood of all believers, they will actually then, advertently or inadvertently, actually create a hierarchy. I'm sure that needs to be theologically unpacked at some level. I think ordination is a massive issue. I have had a conversation in the last month with leaders within our denomination asking the questions: "why do we ordain in this way?" "Why are the roles perceived in this way?" If you look at some of the definitions from the New Testament, many of the terms describe functionality where we have made it positionality – office. This is an issue for church-planting. When do you recognise someone as a minister? If they are going out engaging with the community? If they are reaching their community? If they start a congregation? If they are called Reverend? At what point does recognition actually happen?

Talking with Sam, it became clear that, while bivocational planting may not explicitly be on the radar, moves are currently afoot within Irish Presbyterianism to move towards much more flexible models of ministry which will, in time, open up a panorama of new possibilities, including bivocational planting. He shared:

The Auxiliary Ministry position is much more flexible than anything we have tried so far: and it needs to be. This is exactly the sort of position which could be ideally suited to planting: it may be stipendiary, part-time or non-stipendiary, opening up the door to those who wish to work or even plant bivocationally. In putting together the syllabus for Auxiliary Ministry we want to make it word-based but with some pastoral components. Assessment will be in placements and there will be a mentor attached to them. The mentoring will also be a key part to our Accredited Preacher's course as well as the dozen or so units that make up the course.

Sam has been pre-empting some of the possible objections to these new "offices," as he explained:

We are in the process of fine-tuning the legislation around "part-time" ministries. The objections to this were again mainly cultural or pragmatic: would they get a manse to live in? Would they have a vote in the courts of the church? But it has many other advantages: it could be encouraged to be taken up by those working, for example, in the denominational secretariat, or in the theological colleges.

Some of Sam's comments about conversations he had had regarding these new flexible schemes illustrated the tendency of Presbyterians only to feel secure when every possible avenue has been examined, objections have been refuted, and anomalies eradicated. He continues:

A question was asked: to what extent are Auxiliary Ministers leaders? Well, to the same extent as Youth Fellowship leaders and home group leaders; they are under the authority of session and a teaching elder. One objection centered round whether or not to have the Accredited Preacher course open only to elders: that is, those already ordained. In the end we felt that was too restrictive; that there could be people with clear preaching gifts who, for whatever reason were not elected, or declined election to the eldership. There is not going to be a service of ordination or commissioning or anything that might cause difficulties in the eyes of those who are skeptical about the scheme: just what we are calling a Service of Recognition for Accredited Preachers

Ian had mentioned how the rigidity of the denomination's structures could be a major problem. Sam echoed this, specifically with regard to the PCI, but believes that this need not be permanent; there can be a maturing towards flexibility as trust is built up. He elaborates:

These new options have big implications. Our structures like certainty; they don't cope well with loose ends or loopholes. What you find is that our denomination brings in schemes very tightly, and apparently restrictively, yet they then become looser as the denomination becomes more comfortable with them.

Although Ciaran strongly insists that he couldn't have done what he did had he not been full-time, he admits that in other situations a part-time or bivocational approach could bear fruit and this is something the denomination should consider:

What has been most effective here has been Christian families making connections with their neighbours, with the people their kids are in school with. I hope our denomination could find a way of mobilising, say, three families who lived in an area, equipping them, encouraging them, sending them somebody part-time to help them think through the practical things, but giving them a sense early on of church and community in that area. I don't know exactly what that would look like but I would love to see us think that through as a denomination.

Other Irish denominations are already looking at varying their model and developing a Church Planting Movement. It is interesting to observe how – the structural frustrations experienced by denominations such as Presbyterians notwithstanding – those with a more independent ecclesiology are finding the need for some quasi-denominational structure to aid their church planting vision. Declan says: “Churches need to be planting other churches. It is our policy that the first wave of planting will be done by the Central Agency, and this will tend to be in the hub towns. Whereas the second wave of ‘satellite’ churches will be planted and equipped from the churches planted in the first wave.”

Will says that it is “very difficult to parachute people in,” and that it is better to “identify key people with the gifts to plant.” What Declan calls the Central Agency, Will calls “the Movement,” and he sees the Movement as inspiring financial support as well as training, facilitating and placing planters: “We’re looking at ways for certain churches to get together and provide financial support to the [church planting] Movement and then

the Movement would identify key areas where they wanted to plant.” Seeing church planting, not as an isolated activity, but as part of something greater and wider, was also advocated by Ruari. It was noted earlier how planting was a core value for his denomination, and Ruari spoke of how important it was not to lose sight of this once churches were established. There would always be the pull towards a preoccupation with internal affairs, a pull which must be resisted. He explains:

At one of our church planting courses, one guy said: “I’d hate my biggest problem to be a buzz in my left-hand speaker. I’d hate that to be my biggest worry; or the price of chairs.” So it’s one of the things, one of the values of our church as a new church plant – how can we keep this planting attitude for as long as we can? Lots of people arrive at church and basically sit down and say “feed me,” but as a church plant we can’t be doing that. We’ve got to get out there and get more people. I’d like to be doing that in twenty years time – still.

It appears then that, in contrast to denominations where church planting has been established as a core value – part of their DNA – or where fledgling church planting movements are underway, and in contrast to other networks or congregations who allow flexibility in funding, European reformed denominations struggle to adopt church planting within their structures and “*modi operandi*.” There is a tendency to want all possible eventualities to be covered and a very real fear of failure. Nevertheless, within Irish Presbyterianism, some evidence of flexibility has appeared in embryonic form, and some new thinking in the areas of office, ordination, ministry, and mission is beginning to emerge.

Irish Context

The fact that all but one of the main interviewees were planting in contemporary Ireland meant both that the plants would inevitably reflect some of the features of what might commonly be regarded as “Irish culture,” and also that the expectations,

presuppositions, and worldviews of contemporary Irish people would affect the strategy and methodology of the plant. Will says that, paradoxically, in spite of the hierarchical nature of the dominant church tradition in Ireland, Irish culture as a whole responds better to a grassroots approach. He notes:

If you look at the nature of community in Ireland it is a very bottom-up type scenario. The example of the G[aelic] A[thletic] A[ssociation] is quite interesting. It has a national forum in the sense of Croke Park and its governing body, but ultimately it is the ownership of the parish and the county that actually makes the thing function – not Croke Park. I think that's a very bottom-up approach to society and societal development. In that sense if you look at church planting: begin at the parish level and work up into a sense of ownership. That can be lost if our focus is on a hierarchical church model.

For Fred this was reflected in the nature of their early events:

We had a lot of open days; we invited people round. We are a typical Irish town: the pub, the sports ground and the church are symbols of vibrancy. There is a craving for community. People who came to what we put on commented on the similarity of our events to the ceilidh, or to pub life. The challenge is to find a place for gospel roots to emerge and for it to be more than just a gathering of people who resonate with an ethos or style.

For Colin, Will's paradox can be resolved through by-passing the centuries of Romanisation and looking much further back into the earliest forms of Christianity on the island. He asserts:

We didn't have to worry about structure. We kind of modeled the thing on St. Patrick's time. I mean, around this area you find dozens of towns or townlands beginning "Kill" (church). They were simply places where a man of God arrived with the fire of the gospel in his heart and his life showing it: the old Celtic model. I believe that is the way it should happen. God does raise up people and they attract others and a little community of Christians is made.

In contrast, bad cultural contextualization can damage the plant's credibility and development. This was Brendan's experience for a while:

We had a little bit of an encounter with a group from America who came in and set up church – basically brought their style with them wholesale. It became a bit of a system. Culturally [they were] quite irrelevant really, now looking back.

They were totally like fish out of water. They basically brought their denominational style, lock, stock and barrel and plonked it in the middle of rural Ireland. There wasn't any real sense that people from the locality were being reached.

Fred shared how at least one of his neighbours expressed discomfort with some basic terminology: "It's interesting you use the 'plant' word. A neighbor of mine reacted incredibly strongly to that word when I told him I was here to plant a church, because of its association with the political plantation of Ireland. 'You people never learn,' he said." It was interesting that Fred was the only one of the interviewees (some of whom had been working in areas much more steeped in Irish Nationalism and Catholicism than his) who raised the issue of the vocabulary of "plant," which could lead one to conclude that this terminology is not a significant or widespread barrier. It was also rather ironic that, when interviewing Fred regarding his early evangelistic events, he spoke of "inviting people round for soup;" something which, given the history of perceived "souperism" in nineteenth century Protestant evangelism, may be likely to offend more sensibilities than the use of "plant" terminology.

Brendan mentioned how it has taken decades to build up credibility and grasp what authentic church planting should look like in certain parts of rural Ireland. He says:

In the early years we were indistinguishable from the Jehovah's Witnesses. People didn't know who we were or what we were. That was quite difficult. We always found that sense of alienation. I think we were partly responsible for that ourselves, in retrospect. We took on board the methods of the parachurch group that led us to faith and, again, it wasn't really working here. It's really only now, after thirty years plus, that I think we can finally begin to say that we are getting the hang of how to do church in this part of Ireland.

In terms of a noticeable shift in the culture, this has been most easily evidenced, in Brendan's mind, through the benefits of having a physical presence in the community.

This building, I feel, has contributed quite a lot to the development and acceptance of the Fellowship. I can honestly say this is the best thing we have ever done. The threat of ostracism has dissipated. Funnily enough, even though our initial thoughts were that this would have created a further barrier, it has added credibility, added something indefinable. We now get front page coverage in the local press for some of our activities: unheard of twenty years ago!

However, bearing in mind the ever-present cultural fear of proselytism, more important in achieving this credibility has been the change in Brendan's own perspective regarding whether or not people actually join his fellowship or end up worshipping or serving elsewhere. He notes:

I have now reconciled the tension in me with regard to where they make their home. That has decreased, first of all, the emotional trauma in my own life, and it has also increased our ability to reach out in love to the community, because we are not a threat in the sense that we are much freer to genuinely seek people's conversion to Christ rather than people's conversion to our fellowship. And somehow, I think, we have got to give people credit, you know. They can pick up if you really are trying to "get them" or if you are really interested in who they are.

Interestingly, Murray implied that this was actually no different from the cultural mindset in the place where he had been hoping to plant in the United States. He recalls, "We wanted genuinely to pursue a work of value alongside folk in the community....They can 'smell' if you have ulterior motives." Charles, too, felt the informality of their meetings had been a plus in the culture. He stated,

I think people are surprised that there's no collection plate passed around. They are surprised at the freedom in the leadership, the informality, the different people leading every Sunday, the rotation, the involvement of the ordinary people rather than it being led by one person all the time. It's not very structured, but people like the informality of it.

In terms of where the credibility of bivocationalists may fit in within this culture, Richie had an interesting perspective from his own experience, sharing:

One of the difficulties in this culture is that, in Ireland, people have a very definite paradigm for priest and people and their relationship. When I left full-time church

work to go bivocational, it was actually my non-Christian family and friends who struggled the most with the transition. Some thought I had lost my faith – thrown the whole thing in. And this was from an outsider, who was quite appalled by it.

This was strange, given the recent Irish clergy scandals and their effect on popular perceptions of the priesthood. Richie continues:

People see clergy as a profession like doctor or lawyer, and even though I wasn't in a mainstream church and didn't have a title as such, seeing me as a professional helped them put a name to what I did, it gave them a category. And, while they have moved away from respect for the cloth on a social level, they have not replaced it with anything else, so they still like the category to be there.

Therefore, he surmises, bivocationalists may struggle to find acceptance not just from within the church, but also from within the culture at large from those who, although functionally secularist, still operate within traditional categories. He maintains, "If there is a natural resistance to anything that transcends those paradigms – that is outside the box – then it will be harder for bivocationalists to gain acceptance." Terry, however, points out the relational advantages to bivocationalism as that post-Christian culture makes way for a more rigidly secular one. He emphasizes:

I think there are huge advantages to bivocationalism, particularly if you are going into an unchurched culture which more and more, certainly in this part of Ireland, is exactly what we are facing. So, it helps to the extent that someone can communicate to them and be a real person, and relate to them and understand what they are doing. Work and sports are certainly the way that men relate to each other. So I think that if you are trying to build connections with people you have to have something to talk about as your intro other than necessarily spiritual things; if that's all you know, it makes the conversation very difficult.

Marcus thinks that the positive effect of his bivocationalism in building bridges into the community may be indicative of a wider antipathy towards clergy in contemporary Irish culture: "I found it fascinating, the reputation that you develop within a community. I wonder, does it reflect a really sad view of clergy? People were so over-the-top impacted

and surprised and impressed that I was in business and had some business ability, it was really weird for me – a positive.”

Colin believes that the prevailing culture in some more rural, conservative areas of Ireland is still quite religious, with many of the suspicions that often arise in such a milieu. He therefore views bivocationalism as a totally culturally appropriate model. He explains:

The nearest town here that needs an evangelical church would be X. If someone had a burden for X, it would be brilliant if he (sic) was from X originally. But if not, I would say: “Go down and try and get a job there doing something, and spend every bit of spare time you have reaching out whatever way you can, and involve yourself one hundred percent in the community, for its good and its blessing – whatever way you can. And try not to stick out like a sore thumb as a paid minister of religion. For X, a mainly Catholic place and very conservative still, I would think you would have to be bivocational to be authentic.

In spite of the Catholic conservatism in some areas, both Fintan and Ruari admitted that, in other situations, denominational labels need not be a hindrance. “At least you can refer to the denominational label for values, and a little bit of track record,” says Ruari; while Fintan believes that the track record of the more historic denominations means that full-time ministry may be less of an issue in that context, whereas new fellowships may need the “cover” of bivocationalism:

It also depends on what the perception of your denomination is in the culture you are working in. If you are a mainstream denomination I think people understand it more. They know what a Methodist, or a Presbyterian, or a Church of Ireland or a Catholic is, or a Baptist even. They probably have a fair idea, an established name-brand. You can probably do a lot more if you are full-time there, because what you are trying to do is get out there and get known; meet the other church leaders and get to know the local representatives and politicians and all the rest. Whereas, if you were a new church, or coming in with some funny name, something that people didn’t recognise, some new church, they might think: “maybe it’s a cult, maybe it’s from America.” If they don’t know what it is then it’s going to be more effective to be bivocational. Identify yourself as a plumber, then you get to meet people who are on the same level as yourself, and later introduce that you do the church stuff as well.

Nor are the relevant issues only to be found on the macro-cultural level. The effectiveness or otherwise of bivocationalism may also depend on the micro-culture of the local town or parish. Declan says he is unconvinced regarding bivocationalism in his context simply because the demographics of his fellowship (reflecting the demographics of the region) are such that pastoring and leading such a needy group of people is so people-intensive and time-intensive. He illustrates,

For example, converts who have been coming to us have loads of baggage. They are complex people. We seem to be reaching, generally, the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. This means the time-scale for developing new leaders is often longer than in other, perhaps suburban, contexts; both because of some of the social issues we are dealing with, but also because of a deficit in confidence and general leadership experience.

For Terry, their micro-culture derived from the fact that, even in Irish terms, their context was historically dominated by the institutions of the Roman Catholic church: “I think too, in terms of mission, because it was a reformed church in a place where there was no reformed tradition at all, there was the potential of great hostility from the very dominant Catholic church in the region. It required a lot of creativity and a lot of non-traditional approaches.”

Other relevant cultural factors that emerged concerned the effect of the dominant Christian sub-culture and even, for Presbyterians, the powerful influence of cultural Presbyterianism in some areas. Sam maintained that the real battle in getting some new models of ministry accepted lay not in convincing the denominational decision-makers and leaders theologically, but rather winning over those who had unconsciously embraced the tenets of a type of Presbyterian folk-religion. He argues:

An awful lot of the battle is, not so much preparing the denomination for these changes (ministers, elders, decision-makers), but preparing the wider Irish

Presbyterian culture. One of the biggest things about bringing in the new is changing this culture – particularly in places that have largely older elders and usually situated in more rural communities that have traditionally been dominated by Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism, both of which have a priestly view of ministry. There is also sometimes a pre-occupation with death and even a superstition about the importance of what happens in the rites surrounding death. For example, if my church has a part-time or Auxiliary Minister who works Sunday-Wednesday, what happens if I die on a Friday? That has actually been said.

Will drew attention to ways in which wider Christian cultural expectations, especially amongst seminarians, may also militate against creative missional thinking and a willingness to attempt new models, including bivocationalism. He muses,

I think there is an expectation around people who study theology at a third level that they will leave college and get a job in ministry. If you have invested three or four years of your life and find at the end that there are not really the opportunities that you expected to come, and so you sit down and someone says: “Here are the options: Go away, get a job and develop a community of faith wherever the opportunities exist,” – you’ll not be impressed! The more we provide an educational framework around training for ministry, the greater that difficulty will become because you are asking people to put in effort financially, effort academically, and then at the end of it you are offering them nothing other than the opportunity to go and live somewhere. I think there needs to be a transition in our cultural understanding of what ministry is. Because, in the broader context, in Ireland at the minute, there are no guarantees of a job for anybody, anywhere – particularly for people who have graduated in certain fields like accounts and financial management. Those jobs are now gone. If theological graduates have an expectation of having a “role” and that role is very positional in its focus, I think that presents a problem. But if it is much more missional, then I think there is a degree of flexibility there.

On a different issue, Brendan commented that he regularly found programs and events organized within the wider Christian culture to be of little relevance to him as a bivocational planter laboring away at the other end of the country. In fact, he wonders if, by perpetuating many of these things, the church is feeding a type of isolationist culture which will prevent the emerging generation from exploring more missional possibilities. He exclaims:

Christians have to break out of this “swarming together” kind of thing that they have a tendency to do, where they have [all these] conferences. I remember getting an invitation to some big conference and thinking: “I don’t have the time; I haven’t got the resources, and I am not interested anyway.” I mean, it is another world. It would be of no benefit to me.

A number of interviewees commented on some recent cultural changes which the church could use to its benefit in terms of vocation, mission, and church planting. Colin believes bivocationalism is best suited to the self-employed, and this could be a growth market, along with those who are out of work. He shares,

The ideal (for bivocational ministry) would be to have a type of self-employed vocation. Of course, in recession and with more people working from home, e-working and so on does provide a flexibility: so we might be heading that way. Also, there are a lot of unemployed people out there who have a heart to serve God and this might be their time.

Richie comments,

Another model that may warrant increasing investigation in the current economic climate and with the increased life expectancy and improved health care, is the use of the semi-retired and early retired. People in this category could give a good fifteen to twenty years to ministry in some cases.

Murray says that global economic trends mean that this fluidity will be more common no matter where one lives or works. What constitutes normal working patterns could change irrevocably in the years ahead. In fact, he says, the serial bivocationalism of Paul could be rediscovered as a very appropriate model today:

[Bivocationalism] has a very strong biblical base. The Apostle Paul was a missionary who was part of a very mobile church planting team. There are times when he seems to move in and out of bivocational mode very fluidly. I think there is a lot of wisdom in this as a model: to move in and out according to necessity. We are clearly in an economy worldwide now that may mean that “business as usual,” at least for us, is no longer “usual.”

So the plants were shaped in subtle ways by the macro-cultural issues common throughout Irish (and indeed global) culture. These issues may be of a religious, political,

or social nature, and they often determine the methods and priorities and missional strategy of the plant. However, they were also affected by micro-cultural issues common to their particular locality; be they of a demographic, geographical, or sub-cultural nature. In addition, social and cultural changes continue apace, particularly in the area of employment, and these could have major implications for bivocational ministry and how it will be received in the future.

Having looked at the three perspectives; planter, plant and culture, it remains to look at some specific areas of interplay between them. The researcher has dubbed this “the expectation triangle.” This study will now look at what can be learned from the mutual expectations placed by planter, plant, and culture on each other, and the implications of this for mission and planting in Ireland today, particularly in terms of Irish Presbyterianism.

The Expectation Triangle

The Planter/Plant Axis:

Planter-to-plant

In terms of the expectations the planter had of the plant, these could be summarized in terms of partnership, along with the accompanying sense of ownership and a high degree of participation. As Fintan comments:

We are all in it together. When you are a “full-time minister,” it’s: “He has the time. We are paying him to do it.” So you get into this traditional model and the minister takes an awful lot of the responsibility. But if you are bivocational, you can say: “Well, we are all working; you can do this, I can do that.”

Colin echoes this in terms of his bivocationalism necessitating greater responsibility to be assumed by others:

I personally feel that it has actually enhanced every member ministry and that it has hopefully helped us to avoid the scenario of “the pastor does everything;” that “he is paid to do it so let him do it.” It is very rarely that I would be leading the morning worship – that’s delegated. It’s very rarely that I would be doing it on my own and, if I was, I wouldn’t be preaching that Sunday. I believe it has helped the church to be more involved in the work.

Both Terry’s and Charles’s experiences as plant members cohere with this. Terry admits, “In terms of the congregation there is a high sense of collective participation, and in our reformed system we want to encourage that.” Charles also confesses, “For me, it has stretched me. I have been given roles I never imagined I would be doing. It has stretched me and taught me to dig deeper into God.” This experience has been shared by others, he says: “People were willing to take on roles, because they knew Colin was so busy. Things were delegated very much. I remember we discussed it at an elders’ meeting and the fear was that, if we had a full-time pastor, everyone would pull back and just leave it all to him.”

Similarly, Marcus’s expectations that, because of his various work commitments, the rest of the plant would have to step in and truly minister alongside him in partnership, bore good fruit. He explains,

I think one of the things that is enormously strong is our concept of team. We have a ridiculously high percentage of people involved. Part of that was simply through necessity. Sometimes I’d have to say: “Listen guys, I have to go to Y [a hundred miles away] tomorrow. I am not here; will you do this?” That was because there was a problem with the business.

However, he did not communicate his expectations purely in terms of “gathered church” responsibilities. Rather, his bivocationalism, he believes, also illustrated some core expectations to the membership in terms of what it meant to be a whole-life disciple, seven days a week. He recalls,

Because I was bivocational, it helped create a culture where people thought the same way. I was in ministry, and I was also in business and, without even thinking about it, maybe I was a living illustration! Theologically, I think it made a huge impact into the culture of the plant. One of the things is that it helped me create what, for most people in our denomination, is a completely different type of culture. The notion tends to be that the church is about the churchy people – that to be in leadership in the church you need a theological degree. And one of the things I constantly said to people in the early days was: “Your calling to ministry is no different to mine. I am no more a full-time worker in the Kingdom than you are.” This is engrained in our theological position, but not in our practice. Reformed people should not have a problem with this – it is in our theological tradition. But I don’t think it’s in our cultural tradition. The culture of our churches is very professional, and that affects how they look at ministry.

For Marcus, this commitment to getting the plant on-board early with his vision and expectations dates back to values drummed into him in his college church planting course. He elaborates:

What the guys in college banged into our heads keeps coming back to me: that ninety-nine percent of the reasons why church plants fail are in place before day one. If you get it right before you start, you have a far better chance of moving forward in terms of vision, in terms of funding, in terms of culture, and all of those kinds of things.

Fintan feels that, in his case, things weren’t in place at the beginning in terms of people understanding why he was there and what he was doing. He reminisces:

In retrospect, maybe there should have been more conversation with the local church so that they could own it a little bit and see themselves as planting a church with my help rather than me coming to do it. Maybe they felt: “He’s going to take some of our families, and we have very good relationships here we don’t want to lose.”

As a result, things drifted and vision leaked, and he has been left with a little remedial work to do:

I still intend to plug away at visiting potential core-group people, and to try and give them a vision for what they could do in their own community. You know, there’s a couple of families from a town nearby, and I’d say: “You guys could get together, start something you could invite your friends to” – try to get them excited about their own community and evangelism. My idea is to have a group in

every town in the region. Whatever way it goes, I would like it to be a movement rather than a denomination.

Ian's expectations have not been realized, as he would have liked due to the failure of many interested parties to transition from interest to active commitment and participation.

He states:

I think sometimes ownership comes when there is a sense of control. There are good people travelling past us to go into the city to churches of three hundred, plus: churches where they have responsibility and influence. But would they leave that aside for the sake of a new mission? That's who we would like to see consider joining us. Some of them are sympathetic: they pray, they may even want to keep in touch and hear about the work, but they're not joining.

Murray's team had factored in, from the beginning, some "anti-dependency" mechanisms, whereby there would never be the expectation that one planter would have to do all the pastoral and preaching responsibilities in addition to holding down another job. That this model didn't get the chance to work was a further cause of disappointment to him. He laments,

What we anticipated, and what we tried to structure to prevent, was the difficulty that if you're a planter spreading yourself fifty-fifty between pastoring and another income-generating venture, you will never be able to create through your ministry, a sufficient community to be able to relieve you of the need for the other job. That is the "never work" part of it. So we anticipated that and prepared for it. What often happens, you see, is that you build in a dependency into the community based on your willingness to augment your income, and you retard the growth of the community. So we anticipated that and built in a team approach where responsibilities were spread out and shared between the two or three couples – there wasn't just one very part-time "minister" seeking to do it all. Then, as the church grew through this multiple-minister model, if the pastoral load began to be such that someone needed to devote more time to it, and there needed to be a transition to (or towards) full-time, the numbers would be such that the financial jump up wouldn't be impossible.

One of the other by-products of the positive culture of participation and ownership, encouraged and exemplified by Marcus, was that the expectations which the plant had of him, the planter, were subtly different from many other places. Their

understanding of ministry was so well-developed that it protected Marcus from any simplistic or crass criticisms regarding him not doing enough “traditional ministry.” He notes:

No-one from the plant ever once made a negative comment [about my bivocationalism]. Part of that would be that the leaders knew about the financial reality. I suppose the other thing, which I am ashamed to admit, was that everybody knew that I was working far too many hours, I think that was one of the things that we were prepared to do for a few years. There was nobody in the plant who was saying: “Marcus is not spending enough time doing ministry.”

Plant-to-Planter

The researcher will now turn to these plant-to-planter expectations. As far as the outlook of those in the plant was concerned, interviewees were aware both of positive and negative expectations. At heart was the issue of leadership and the type of leadership expected and offered. Some, like Marcus, above, had fellowships that understood their philosophy of ministry and knew that they were in it together. Furthermore, Charles was conscious of how paying a pastor could put that leader under “a certain amount of pressure,” whereas he feels the bivocational model adopted by his pastor avoided that pressure to prove oneself, and was actually a major factor in the type of leader he became. He shares, “It is not a kind of domineering leadership; it’s a servant leadership.” Fintan admits to being “a little reactionary against the whole traditional model” and anything that places the pastor “on a platform and creates this mystique;” therefore he wants to ensure no such traditional expectations are present within his core group.

Declan accepts that there always will be various expectations and demands on the pastor’s time, which is one of the reasons he believes bivocationalism cannot be a viable long-term option. He urges, “I think churches that have been planted by bivocationalists need to work towards having full-time leadership because, as the fellowship grows, the

demands on the leader's time will increase. It is hard to sustain that type of ministry indefinitely in a growing church because of demands on time."

However, it is these very demands that Will and others want to challenge. They explain:

As soon as that person becomes full-time, in reality it's: "Why didn't I get a visit from the church leader when I was in hospital?" "Why is our church leader not available to me twenty-four hours a day, thirty-one days a month?" If it has always been the expectation of the church to have someone full-time, there were reasons for that expectation: usually unhealthy and unproductive ones.

However, not being that available has, in Fred's view, been a constructive way to manage expectations and communicate a different philosophy of ministry. He has reinforced these values through the quite radical step of not always meeting every week as a central fellowship. He points out, "The first Sunday of the month, we don't meet at all. It's helpful that I am not available like a traditional church leader. It forces others to step up to the plate. My being bivocational has reinforced the values of the church."

In contrast, Fintan illustrates how easy it is, even for very young churches, to revert to the default traditional patterns and expectations of church and its leadership, without asking the key missional questions. He notes, "The church down the road, which is only a plant itself, is talking about two things. They are asking: 'How can we get a minister?' and 'How can we get a building?' And I say: 'Those are the wrong things to be talking about!'"

There were significant expectations in place, therefore, between the planters and the emerging plants. Some of these (such as partnership, ownership of vision, equality of ministry, and authentic servant leadership) were helpful to the plants' development. Others, (such as an unthinking acceptance of traditional models of ministry and

leadership) were less so. However, since it is unlikely that some of these expectations arose in a vacuum, it is possible that the culture, particularly the denomination, had expectations of how the plant would develop that were consciously or unconsciously imposed on the situation. This raises the question of what, if any, expectations did the plants have of the denomination or the wider network?

The Plant/Denomination Axis

Plant-to-Denomination

There was not a lot of data gleaned from the interviews in this area. The issue of how the plant views, or what it expects from, the wider network was not raised explicitly and may not have a significant bearing on the issue of bivocationalism; except, perhaps, in the area mentioned above, where some plants did have a presupposition that a full-time leader would be provided from somewhere. In fact, the issue of a larger body needing to resource the plant did arise from time to time.

It is a subject, however, that may merit further study. For plants that are self-consciously independent, there still may be a self-understanding of how they fit into, or relate with, the wider Christian body that could be of relevance to their growth and development. Plants that are part of an established denomination or network will inevitably have a perception of the planting body or agency that, positive or negative, will affect the plant's maturation. Will summarized the issues as they are perceived by many plants:

The center needs to be a resource. But around some of these initial church plants there needs to be a greater degree of flexibility than would exist with the more traditional established congregations. For example, I think it is important that the center provides... child protection, good financial accounting – all of the things that are important from an accountability perspective. So too with theological training, inspiration, engagement, feeling part of something bigger: all of those

things are vitally important and can actually endorse and equip a plant no matter what flavor the denomination or network has.

It was interesting to note that, in the research, even those plants that began as independent fellowships were now working hard to establish relationships with other like-minded groups. Brendan was developing links with an interdenominational Bible College, while Declan was speaking of a Central Agency for church planting and was involved in a pan-Evangelical body, as was Colin. Nevertheless, of much greater import to the study were the expectations, real or perceived, which the plant felt the wider denomination or network had placed on them, in terms of their development.

Denomination-to-Plant

A significant element in the denomination-plant relationship concerned the ethos of the emerging fellowship: how it was going to “do” or “be” church. Sometimes the problem was as simple as a lack of clarity. Marcus, who was operating within a mother-daughter church model, spoke of how even some of the basics had not been clarified at the beginning. He said, “The truth was that there was some confusion in the denomination, and confusion locally, as to what it was we were doing. Were we a church plant or were we developing another campus of a single congregation? That became a large discussion.”

Fred appreciated both the clarity and the flexibility of his agency, and, although he spoke earlier of unrealistic expectations in terms of timeline, he was glad that those expectations did not extend to the type of model evolving or, as he put it, a rigid idea of what “the wineskin” might look like. He comments,

There are key principles which need to be in place, but we want a flexibility regarding what the wineskin looks like; a variety, maybe, in the clothes that are round those principles. The core Gospel principles don’t change, but it was very

helpful not to come with a model or expectations. We just looked for the “low-hanging fruit.”

This allowed them to proceed in ways that they felt were culturally appropriate among people for whom a very obvious formal denominational structure would have been an obstacle. He elaborates:

We encountered people disillusioned with some previous models of church and planting, especially North American models that had structured organizational clarity. In contrast, we were invited to lots of parties where people were open to prayer and the supernatural – probably a legacy from the Roman Catholic Church. They would be expressing an experience and exhibit a hunger for this. “Organized church” was a turn off.

Fintan is working within a more established denomination, but one that seems to have achieved some sort of balance between the plant having an ongoing link with the parent body and the freedom to develop at its own pace and in its own way. While, as long as a plant is receiving some sort of funding from the center, there will always be a sense of “the one who pays the piper calls the tune,” nevertheless there is a growing sense that young churches need a degree of autonomy, and the leadership of those churches is probably best placed to decide the most culturally appropriate way for the plant to develop. Fintan’s group seems to have thought this through – at least at the macro-level. He explains,

Well, the one expectation of the denomination is: “By the end of your time [at least 10 years], there should be a Christian community established, made up primarily of unchurched people – people who came to faith as a result of your ministry – and with some kind of connection with the denomination.” Certainly, there has to be some link. It doesn’t have to be in name, but certainly the theology underlying it would have to be consistent with the denomination. There would have to be a solid link there.

A number of interviewees made similar comments regarding how denominational strategy needs to take account of local realities and, above all, of what gifted people are

available. There was an antipathy towards any strategy based on a crass geographical “dots-on-a-map” basis. Marcus was quite explicit, calling such thinking “a fraud.” He argues,

I think there are a number of mistakes that we continue to want to make in the denomination, that bivocationalism, in my opinion, would help. For example, we still want to decide where we need a new church, or where we as a denomination feel we want to plant a new church. In my opinion that is a total fraud. I think throughout church history the church planting has always centered around the team who plant the church. So instead of saying: “We would love to have a church in X or Y,” I think the starting point should be: “What church planters do we currently have?” And, in my opinion, thus far, we have failed to give enough understanding and time and input to people. It doesn’t matter how great the opportunity, or how much funding you give someone who is not really a church planter – it’s not going to work.

Terry agrees:

There are sort of two ways to do this: one is to put a pin in the map and say: “We need to be in this geographic location.” The second way would be to identify the church planter. From what I have read, the latter can be the more effective approach. You identify the person; you then find the place. We definitely have to be on the look-out for those kinds of people and give them the resources they need: financial resources and theological resources – they are probably short of both those things.

This was echoed by Will, who added that the issue was not just the need for gifted planters, but the need for people who are committed to community engagement in the long-term:

I think, as well as that, it is very difficult for a church leadership, on a national level, to do significant engagement around community and local issues. So, for example, it may well be that a church wants a dot on a map to say that we have a congregation here, to kind of “join the dots” almost. But unless you have people who are genuinely committed to that community in the longer term and who are willing to bring faith to that community in the longer term, all the dots on the map will not increase the influence, or make the impact that we sometimes think we’ll make, by getting “dots on a map.”

If such people were to be found and identified, should they be bivocational?

Marcus obviously believes that that would help in some significant areas. Fintan agrees,

but echoes something that arose earlier in this chapter: namely, that it essentially depends on what type of church one wants to plant, and this is where the expectations of the denomination or agency regarding the plant are so important. He states,

I think it depends on two things. I think it depends on, first of all, your missional approach, or your sense of call to what you are trying to do. There are two different ways of going about it: one is attractional, where you set up as soon as possible on a Sunday, or you set up some kind of meeting and try and bring people to it. The other approach is incarnational, where you say: “I am just going to get in, on the ground, bottom up, and just get to know as many people as possible – find out where they are at.” That is a longer route; a much longer route. I think if you are doing the incarnational method then the bivocational approach would be more effective. Whereas, if you are doing the attractional method: trying to get a Sunday service up and running, trying to visit everybody who comes to it, and do all the stuff around traditional church, then I think having as much time as possible to do that is better.

For those situations, therefore, where the central agency has very clear and defined expectations of what type of church it wants in a given place, then it would seem, if it’s to be a fully-functional traditional church, that a bivocational pastor may struggle to meet those expectations. However, questions must be asked as to whether that is always going to be the best model to pursue, in which case denominational expectations may need to be modified.

The Planter/Denomination Axis:

Planter-to-Denomination

The third axis to be explored in terms of relationship and expectation is that between the planter and the denomination or agency. Here the dominant expectation from the planters was for support and inspirational encouragement. Although the interviewees’ experiences were mixed, all did, at some stage, acknowledge their indebtedness to the wider church for varying levels of support and encouragement. Marcus admits, “I do

realize that the denomination, in many ways, has supported the plant tremendously, and it wouldn't exist without the denomination, for all the groans we might want to make.”

Ciaran was aware of the spiritual support throughout the country, sharing, “It’s wonderful that we have a denomination mobilised to pray, and [who are] being excited about our plant.” He also felt the denomination was learning from the difficulties of previous models and recognised the need for a degree of freedom on the ground. He explained,

On the one hand, denominational support was very strong in terms of the vision for the place; on the other hand, for me, it wasn’t too prescriptive in terms of how that would happen. The overseeing body were excited to be behind it but still allowed me, as the church planter, the freedom to work my way through things.

Ruari’s being bivocational saved the plant a massive amount in salary, but the sending church still has responsibilities, and they provide money for the general ministry:

Generally, you would find our overheads would be very low. My salary is my salary from my full-time job. We have a team, and the sending body gives us half of the team members’ tithes. So we use that as our fund for outreach, bits and pieces, equipment that we need to buy, and so on. We’re pretty much funded as a team and we give half to the parent body who give us support.

Marcus found his denomination’s budgeting to be a lot less realistic. While grateful for what they did provide, he is not sure it was spent on the right things, or in the right proportion. He comments:

Financially, as a new venture, it was very hard for people to know how to fund it – and I want to be clear in what I say: the denomination funded our home and funded my salary (which was an enormous amount of money) so there was huge support there. But, in fact, the total budget given to me to start the church during the first twelve months was €5000. That was our total ministry budget – and our projector cost €4000! In contrast, I remember reading Tim Keller talking about Redeemer [Presbyterian, NYC] when it started and, I think, within three months from launch I have a feeling he had about \$180,000 budget for ministry. He was able pretty much to hire staff in his first year.

Interestingly, although grateful for the accommodation provided, he felt this was yet another example of policies being inflexible and, even under the guise of generosity, actually making mission and development harder than necessary. He explains,

We fought long and hard for the denomination not to buy a house because, if they bought a house to fulfill current standard criteria, we felt they would buy a house where people like us would not live, and it would isolate us. But – they bought a house in an area where people like us do not live! And we have very little relationship with our neighbours. In our previous town, we bought our own house, and we probably know our neighbours back there (from nearly ten years ago) better than we do our neighbours here where we are working. Because the people you reach most easily are those most like you.

Ruari benefitted particularly from the training and selection process undertaken by his denomination:

We felt called to planting, so we announced it and talked to our leaders in the denomination. We went through a two-year preparation period: an interview process. We talked about calling, what's involved, what kind of free time do we have. We did some gift analysis. What are we good at? Where would we be lacking? We were trying to learn how to budget, how to handle money, stuff like that.

He felt the seriousness with which his agency took the selection and training process was indicative of the level of support that would be there for him afterwards. They were keen to make sure his expectations were realistic and in line with his own abilities, as he explains:

We concentrated on strategic stuff. What they were trying to find out was: “Do you have what it takes in terms of the basics, and do you know what you need?” Similar to: “Before you go to war, see how many soldiers you’ve got.” Anyone can plant, in a way, but it’s good to know what gifts you have and what gifts you don’t have. So whether it be preaching, teaching, or worship leading: – “Have you ever led a team before?” “Have you ever shared your faith?” “Are you good at sharing your faith?” “Have you directed people to Jesus before?” Because that’s what you are trying to do.

Of course, such active involvement from the wider church should not be limited to the pre-plant period. A number of interviewees commented on the value of ongoing

mentoring. Although Ian was critical of how the structures of reformed churches generally failed to accommodate the “new wine” of planting, he was extremely grateful for the specific overseeing body who supported and encouraged him. He notes:

To have these sponsoring mentors who invested in us, spent time and money coming to meet with the core group, give advice, live with us for a week and just chat – that was great! Because one of them began bivocationally and had to remortgage his house, he said to me, “If we can help you not do that.... It’s better if you don’t have to do that.”

Ruari felt his supervising body was a lifeline at times:

I suppose having an organisation for the “before,” “during,” and “after” of the launch is very good. Firstly, from an accountability point of view. So, I have a pastor and he’s got a pastor, so that we are accountable as a couple and as individuals: that’s important. Then, just the moral support: I don’t know how we could do it on our own. There are days when it’s hard and you can ring them up ...it’s very important. You know there are people there for you, praying for you, supporting you. If something was to go wrong they will be there for you.

Fintan appreciated the trust placed in him, but admits the supervision could probably have been a little more proactive, and this may have prevented a couple of the frustrations that did arise. He shares,

I meet a supervisor about every six weeks for an hour and have a chat about how things are going. I’m meant to report to a Board, but that hasn’t met since I started! They are quite busy and it’s been a “light-touch regulation,” really – they kind of trust me. But, yeah, I think there should have been more in place: a formal meeting with that Board, probably every six months. If you know you are working towards that meeting I think it puts pressure on you to do the things you are called to do. If you are not going to be “hailed up,” it is too easy to drift, get too involved in the other church ministries I was being sucked into. If that had been flagged up after six months it probably would have been easier.

For some, such as Ian, guidance has also come from a distance through helpful authors.

He says, “I have found [Tim] Keller’s stuff most helpful. It is not making assumptions. It starts with learning and understanding your context. Some of the [church planting] books

are completely irrelevant to my context. [Steve] Timmis and [Tim] Chester have also been influential.”

The interviewees also think that general pastoral care should be available, even if it is not as specific or formal as a mentoring relationship. Marcus believes there is an extent to which this pastoral care could be regulated. This is mainly because, if it is left optional, planters (who are by nature activist) and those who may be working in demanding or isolating situations will always find excuses to avoid attending, when perhaps the most important thing they could do at that moment is to stop “doing” and start “being” with other colleagues who are experiencing similar challenges. He explains:

In my opinion, every two or three months, mission personnel and planters should be forced to come together – you won’t be paid next month if you don’t – for training and support. I mean, [look at] Paul’s missionary journeys. He spent a lot of time also supporting what he had planted. Most of our central budget for pastoral care and training goes on training. I would like to see it cut in two and a lot more given for support and mentoring on the field because, frankly, a lot of the training stuff isn’t relevant.

Part of Marcus’s passion for this stems from how he has observed colleagues being pastorally isolated. Since planting can be such a difficult calling with a high percentage chance of failure, the church cannot afford to continue ignoring pastors or planters who are in struggling situations. He mourns,

I mean, one of the things we do horribly is, when a church is struggling or “failing,” instead of sitting down regularly with people – even once a year would do it – and saying: “Honestly, what are the signs of growth? What are the discouragements? What are the difficulties?” What we tend to do is leave those people alone, almost giving the impression that the church is ashamed of them. If you’re in a setting like that, we can let people languish for years there. That’s what the denominational structures should be for: to be able to ask the tough questions within that wider supportive context.

Some of this is borne out of his own personal experience. When he was faced with personal financial problems due, in part, to inadequate funding for the pioneer ministry,

he did not receive any guidance from headquarters. He points out, “I don’t think the powers that be were ever aware of them. Nobody ever asked us any of those questions.”

Marcus’s comment regarding some denominations’ inability to deal with struggling or failing churches is confirmed by Murray. His proposed bivocational model was struggling to gain acceptance while another more traditional model was sanctioned. The denomination said later that they would have approved his model, even though they had not studied the proposal documents thoroughly. Murray was perplexed:

This reinforced for me that this is the way they have always done church planting. They have not been careful to think about the implications of their decisions. Those kinds of models had failed in the past but they were prepared to approve both of those models uncritically. Then, not having looked at our structure or assessments they would eventually have approved us, which reinforced to me the wisdom of not proceeding. Because, if we had struggled when we went out there, they would have said: “Well, we never thought it was a good idea.”

Interviewees felt that while denominations should be there for guidance, support, care, and accountability, sometimes the planter/denomination relationship was characterised by political negotiation, and a lot of energy could be spent on discussions round structures and policies. Murray recognises that he may have been more successful if he had spent time cultivating some of these political relationships, but he didn’t have the personal motivation or resources to do so. He confesses,

I have grown now in my ability to navigate things politically. I had avoided politics, but probably could have been wiser and tried to navigate the various competing dynamics and interests and values. We were aware of the issues, but not necessarily adept at dealing with them. There were some key players in the system that I might well have been able to simply spend more time cultivating, winning over, one-on-one.

Politics also came into play for Ian, where the issues were of a competitive and territorial nature:

In my naiveté, I thought I would go to large sympathetic churches and get a critical mass to form a core group. Ministers may have been happy to let me in and even let people go, but it takes the next step: it takes an active sending. The people you would be doing this with would be, in many ways, the best from these churches: and ministers don't want to lose their best! They may be happy to send some for service for a limited time, but not happy to lose members.

One experience brought this home extremely forcefully, as he shared:

I got an invitation to one large flagship evangelical reformed church in the city, to speak at a meeting about the vision and work. The person who invited me was obviously sympathetic and keen but, a week or so before the meeting, the invitation was rescinded by the minister because there were "certain sensitivities in some places, regarding our work." So there can be an unhealthy territorialism at work.

Marcus actually believes that, in order to achieve some necessary systemic change, conflict will be inevitable: "One of the things we have to face, ultimately, is that any development ministry brings you into conflict with the current structures, and sometimes those current structures are represented by people, and so it brings you into conflict with people. I think part of my calling was to be willing to face that."

If denominations find it a challenge to offer adequate pastoral support for planters and isolated leaders, the challenge will be even greater in terms of meeting the needs of bivocationalists. Will draws attention to the ways in which traditional training and pastoral support mechanisms are not workable for those in tent-making situations:

Simple things, like if you have a minister's day or a leader's day they tend to be Monday to Friday, and if you are bivocational you cannot afford to take off five Mondays in a year because those are five of your holidays. So I think there needs to be more thought given in those areas. I think it comes back to what kind of jobs people do as to whether there is the flexibility. For example, I have a flexible working rota; I can make those hours up again. If I was taking a day's holiday I would be less inclined to go and meet with other leaders and yet, in some of the smaller contexts, those days are vital in terms of relational engagement.

As Marcus had commented earlier, denominations and agencies, therefore, probably need to build appropriate support mechanisms into both their central training and pastoral schedules, as well as their budgets. Will agrees:

The issues of bivocational people need to be considered in the broader movement's thinking. Instead of demanding more, time-wise and financially, from those who are probably having trouble making ends meet, the level of endorsement that I would see as being significant would be to say, "We are going to take these people away for a weekend and fund that as a connection point; as a point where they can relate to each other, where they can be inspired and challenged and encouraged, but also an opportunity for them to take time out that is not costing them." I think there needs to be a serious rethink about the top-down approach to a lot of these issues. Bigger denominations need to look at how they can resource Irish regional planting movements and support them.

Will returns to the central point that bivocational ministry can offer a wealth of new opportunities, making what was previously impossible, possible. It should, therefore, be facilitated as much as possible; not just in terms of the pastoral care mentioned above, but also in terms of goal-setting and targets. Marcus admitted in his interview that "sometimes good and right targets can be set without any reference to ongoing pastoral care and support." Will believes this need not be the case, and bivocationalism offers a scenario where a subtly different relational dynamic develops between planter and supervisor:

The bivocational model does provide for a greater level of flexibility around target setting and goal setting. The person who oversees a bivocational planter becomes much more of a support rather than primarily someone to whom you are accountable, as in: "What are you doing with this money?" I think that is an important shift. I think that the literature reflects that – not just in the church planting field – but even in church leadership. We used to ask our leaders to provide vision statements and follow through with five year plans. Nowadays we are looking much more at engagement models where those things can be addressed not necessarily in a clinical, linear fashion, but in a much more fluid fashion.

Planters naturally expected that their denomination or agency would provide a level of support that included basic pastoral care, an understanding of the reality of their context – free from competitiveness or political maneuvering – and usually a degree of ongoing mentoring. If they were bivocational, then they expected the particular challenges of that situation to be taken into account. The researcher will now consider the denomination's expectations of the planter.

Denomination-to-Planter

The final relationship to examine is that of the denomination towards the planter, one where the dominant factor was accountability. Were there situations where the planter felt the denomination's expectations were fair and helped him to stay on track? Or was it the opposite: were there expectations directly conveyed, or implicitly communicated, which were unhelpful or unrealistic? Fred seemed to experience the latter:

We had to make some projections regarding when we would be fully sustaining, and how fast the church would grow. What we soon found was that these projections were very unrealistic in terms of the culture. I essentially had to rewrite the coaching questionnaire that the agency uses because it was written from a UK perspective and was extremely unrealistic. Post-Catholic situations require a different approach, particularly in the area of relationships. We need to move away from structure. People are fed up with a hierarchical religious structure. We see this in the lack of large churches here.

Ruari, on the other hand, never felt undue pressure. His denomination prepared him well for the “hard slog” and the inevitability of disappointment. They were more interested in curbing his expectations, than vice versa. He muses, “Church planting is funny. I’ve thought a lot about expectations. People in the denomination warned us about it. They said: ‘Just be careful of your expectations. You get disappointed, then you get discouraged, then disillusioned. It’s a battle.’”

Ian, similarly, felt his agency was well-attuned to the difficulties and realities of planting:

I'm fortunate that I have a very strong supporting church. It hasn't set demanding deadlines or communicated any unrealistic expectations. They know the reality of life here; the key leaders have been and seen it and spent a week with me walking through what ministry is really like here. That has relieved me of the financial burden.

Fintan, however, feels that his bivocationalism is directly related to the lack of pressure coming from the top. He reflects:

I think the fact that I am working means there is less pressure from head office to produce results. If I was costing a stipend it would mean some other church isn't getting money. What they did do – they did buy the house, and we pay a small rent towards that and we pay all our own bills, as I say, so it is not an expensive experiment.

Terry, who was aware of Fintan's situation, applauded his denomination for this creative compromise: "I think that was a clever way for the church to go because it has taken the pressure off the church planter and allowed him to see what might develop in a pretty lively area of the suburbs."

For Will, unrealistic expectations can unfortunately be directly linked with finance. For those who receive a salary, or have raised funds, there will inevitably (and rightly) be some pressure to conform to a pre-agreed definition of "success" or "effectiveness." Will comments:

We tend to look at the targets around the issue of accountability. So, if you are raising funds to plant a church, the people who have raised those funds feel in partnership with the church planters, and then there is an expectation that those funds will be used wisely. That is completely right and understandable. However, in a smaller rural community the targets that are set need to be tempered, compared to what you can achieve in a much more urban area. Yet it is important that we see the value of reaching rural communities as well as urban communities.

Will sees the key being whether the denominations' hopes and dreams for the plant are obsessed with targets or are driven by something deeper, such as the values and missional understanding of the emerging community:

I certainly think that fifteen to twenty years ago, we were very much driven by a vision statement: a one year plan, a three year plan, a five year plan, that was very clearly defined. It was very rigid and, if you were drawing down funding from some of the major sources, that was the expectation of many of the people sitting on the boards: that there would be a one, or three, or five year plan or some variation on that. I think nowadays there is a greater degree of understanding around the idea that building connections with the community, and being missional in our approach in the communities we are trying to reach may actually mean – not that we are disorganized or poorly prepared – but a greater degree of flexibility so that planning becomes much more value-driven than target-driven.

Sometimes discouragements or pressurized expectations placed on the planter came not from officialdom, but from elsewhere, perhaps through individuals or colleagues within the denomination. Ian says, “There was one guy who was super-enthusiastic, then waned. At the beginning he was saying things like, ‘This will work, it has to work, we’ll make sure it works.’ Later it was: ‘This is too new, too different. How long do you think it can go on before they pull the plug?’” For Marcus, there were cultural expectations that he should not be bivocational. He recalls that people expected him to be one thing or the other:

We took some stick for our involvement in business. From the outside it looked like I had a full-time salary; the church was paying me to do ministry and I was off building my business. People didn’t know the financial realities. And they wouldn’t have known that we didn’t have any ministry funding for the plant itself. So, people tended to look and say: “Well, is he a businessman or is he a church planter?” From the outside, it’s hard not to wonder when you see people doing what I was doing.

Some denominations may have been reasonable and understanding in their expectations regarding the planter’s church development ministry, however they sometimes managed to find other ways of adding to his workload through a different type

of expectation – the extent to which he would be involved in wider denominational life, for example. Terry defended his pastor's need to be full-time at this stage, partly on the basis of these wider denominational responsibilities:

I think it has clearly helped that he is now full-time when you overlay denominational connectedness and the fact that there are some obligations there, and that usually means travelling a lot. If anyone is going to do any of that – if we're going to remain connected – it has to be through him.

Fintan, too, has suffered from this. In his case, his wider denominational responsibilities are tied to his professional expertise rather than his planting experience, and they take quite a chunk out of his church ministry time. He explained:

I am responsible for the national pension scheme of the denomination, because of my background. I am actually travelling today in connection with that, so that's two [time] periods [in the week] gone. That takes up probably a quarter of my time outside my work. I enjoy it and all the rest, but it's not what I am here to do. There are always regional responsibilities and denominational meetings to be at as well.

I asked him if he thought this was a unique challenge for bivocationalists within established denominations:

I think, maybe, if you are full-time in ministry you can soak it up a bit; do a couple less visits – you can do them next week. Maybe you can pull an old sermon out – you can compensate. But for me [denominational responsibilities] do eat into your time. If you have got four periods a week and two are gone on a denominational meeting, then half of it is gone, you know.

Ruari believes that the problem may not lie so much in having high expectations, but rather the stigma that surrounds failure. Echoing something said earlier by Marcus, he believes that expectations are well and good so long as there is no punitive culture towards those who took the risks and gave it a go, even if they didn't succeed. His analogy from the world of business is worth pondering:

I am involved with Engineers Ireland, and we had a guy come to talk to us about Venture Capital and investments in Irish companies in general. He asked: "How

many companies do you start up in Ireland per year? How many failures do you have?” We said that we were very proud of the fact that less than five percent failed. He shook his head: “No,” he said, “less than five percent is not enough. There are obviously not enough people taking risks. That’s a sure sign: not enough failing means not enough are trying!” If you look at many successful churches, young churches, what you need to realize is that those church planters might be on their third or fourth attempt, and they’re finally getting it now.

Obviously, bivocationalism would be immensely important to that methodology since it would mean less of a financial risk, but the implications for how church bodies view risk and the possibility of failure is perhaps more pertinent.

Ciaran probably should have the final word on this particular topic. He admits he is all too aware at times of the financial investment in a full-timer such as himself. However, in the interests of his overall mission and calling, he is adamant that he cannot let those expectations distract or deter him. After all, there is something much more serious at stake than money or a denomination’s reputation:

There are times there are expectations which you do feel. You are not just doing this yourself in your local area, but you’re here because the denomination has invested financially, prayerfully, and in terms of its resources. Not that I think about this every day, but there is quite a lot of expectation on your shoulders. The church puts in so many hundreds of thousands of Euro over a number of years. What are people expecting? But I am content to say: “Listen, if the church doesn’t grow, it means that people aren’t becoming Christians,” and that is a much bigger cost, as far as I am concerned, than however many thousands of Euro have been invested.

Those words convey a missional passion and commitment which was probably the overarching common theme through all interviewees, regardless of whether they were full-time or bivocational, planter or member, an advocate of bivocationalism or skeptical regarding its effectiveness. While the planters’ motivations and experiences differed, whether plants prospered or struggled, and whether denominations were helpful or frustrating, there was an understanding that everyone involved in this process – virgin or

experienced planter, denominational administrator or consultant – all were aiming for the same goal, albeit by different methods. All had a heart to see vibrant missional communities of faith planted where none previously existed and, in so doing, to serve and glorify the God who had called them to ministry. It remains for this study now to look at how the experiences of these interviewees cohere with the main themes found in the literature on church planting and vocation, and to attempt to draw some tentative conclusions which may be pertinent to the Irish Presbyterian context.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Contribution Bivocational Church Planters Could Make to the Mission Strategy of the Irish Presbyterian Church

The goal of this study was to look at the different ways and contexts in which bivocationalists operate as church planters, particularly in Ireland, and whether or not bivocational church planting could be a viable option for the Irish Presbyterian church. Literature was consulted covering areas of missiology, ecclesiology, church planting, vocation, ministry, and Irish Presbyterian history, and eight conclusions reached. Ten Irish planters and six other interested parties were then interviewed and the inter-relation of plant, planter, and cultural context was examined in depth, along with the mutual expectations of congregations, planters, and denominations. It now remains for the literature study and research findings to interact in order to draw the various strands together and establish what, if anything, can be learned regarding the inter-relation of vocation, ministry, and church planting, as well as the potential relevance of this to Irish Presbyterianism.

In bringing together the data, several foundational principles or considerations emerged relating to both the discipline of church planting and to the concept of vocation. Furthermore, three broad areas could be discerned in which significant themes of relevance to our study emerged: the area of church planting and its place, past, present and future within Irish Presbyterianism; vocation and its relation to church planting; and vocation and its relation to Irish Presbyterianism. In this chapter, an attempt is made to

bring these strands together and see what can be learned about church planting, vocation, and the future of the Irish Presbyterian church.

Foundational Considerations Relating to Church Planting

Natural Gospel Activity or Desperate Denominational Strategy?

While some may be interested in this subject in order to see how church planting may be useful in halting statistical decline, or how bivocationalism may prove financially attractive and offer a timely reprieve to over-stretched denominational coffers, such foundations are made of sand. Bayes warns of how statistic-driven panic gives birth to haste, and, “This nervous haste hovers around in the air, gathering force like an electrical charge”⁴⁷⁸ However, church planting cannot be seen as a quick fix or used as a “Get out of Jail Free card”⁴⁷⁹ for a struggling denomination worried about its survival and interested only in self-preservation. Church planting must flow from the vision and heart of a church gripped by the message of hope and grace contained in the gospel, and initiated by individuals whose lives have been transformed by that same message. Their goal must be neither personal gain nor institutional aggrandizement, but solely the glory of God, the coming of his kingdom, and the salvation of his people.

The words of Ciaran, with which the previous chapter ended, illustrate how the faithful planter will be more concerned about people than funding, and that gospel opportunity, rather than finances, should determine whether or not a plant is worth pursuing. Nor, once the plant is up and running, must the basic missional focus be lost. Will’s words regarding the danger of defaulting to a maintenance and inward-focus were

⁴⁷⁸ Bayes, 4.

⁴⁷⁹ The phrase has its origin in the well-known board game *Monopoly* and in popular usage has come to mean a simple way of getting out of a difficult situation. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Get_Out_of_Jail_Free_card

borne out by interviewees Ciaran and Fintan, as well as several places in the literature.⁴⁸⁰

If church planting is a natural gospel activity, then it needs to be, as in Ruari's context, part of the DNA of the plant itself. Reproducibility should be one of the plant's core values, as "plants plant plants," and what Presbyterians refer to as "erection to full congregational status" must not be regarded as the finishing post. This is because neither the activity of planting nor the establishment of a vibrant sustainable community of faith can be seen as ends in themselves. Rather, they are both parts of an interdependent dynamic that seeks to demonstrate the kingdom of God and the reign of Christ to a needy world. This dynamic is explored in the next sub-theme.

Church and Mission as a Mutually Enriching Symbiotic Partnership

The church is central to God's mission, and any attempt to separate the two will fail to do justice to the full biblical witness and the interdependence of the two disciplines. In spite of the surface attractiveness of the idea that the church has often failed by pointing to itself rather than to God, articulated by writers such as Murray and Bosch,⁴⁸¹ but popularized in myriad contexts in modern and post-modern evangelicalism, Chester and others have shown convincingly that church and mission not only belong together, but cannot truly exist without one another. While many are acquainted with Emil Brunner's oft-quoted phrase: "The Church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning,"⁴⁸² few seem to have emphasised the corollary: that true mission cannot exist apart from the church, and central to our mission is the creation and replication of

⁴⁸⁰ Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World. [Lectures Delivered at King's College, London.]* (London: 1931); Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 129ff.

⁴⁸¹ Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*; Bosch.

⁴⁸² Brunner, 108.

authentic vibrant communities of faith, worshipping, serving, and sharing the good news of the God in whose mission we are participating.

As Robinson and Christine⁴⁸³ most helpfully remind us, historically, church planting has played a vital role in the advancement of the kingdom of God, particularly at times of cultural flux or, to borrow Roxburgh's phrase, "liminality."⁴⁸⁴ This was the case, for example, in terms of Jew/Gentile integration in the first century and in the reformation of the European church in the sixteenth century. Church planting, they argue, must remain a vital part of the future of any church or denomination, not just for the obvious reasons of reproduction, but also because of the wider benefits to a city or region as a whole – something which has been emphasized most strongly by Keller, amongst others.⁴⁸⁵

It would be a huge mistake, however, to see the relationship between church and mission as a parasitic one, characterized by a view of mission so activistic that it sucks out the church's energy and burns out the church's people. It is also mistake to see the church as so formal, institutional, and self-serving that it exists like some unwanted tumor, stifling creative and exciting missional endeavors (although both those scenarios are unfortunately too familiar). Rather it is to be a symbiotic relationship,⁴⁸⁶ with both drawing nourishment and energy from each other, to the mutual advantage and strengthening of both equally. If one is absent, radically underplayed, or relegated to a secondary position, then the other is diminished.

⁴⁸³ Robinson and Christine.

⁴⁸⁴ In Van Gelder, 100.

⁴⁸⁵ Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

⁴⁸⁶ The analogy with the biological phenomenon of symbiosis is used by Tim Keller, following Tetsunao Yamamori, to explain the appropriate relationship between evangelism and social action in Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 113ff.

Church Planting Is Not a Luxury But Is Integral to the Church's Mission

There is a myth that church planting may be a worthwhile exercise to undertake when resources are plentiful, both financial and in terms of personnel; that in such circumstances it would be natural to look at expanding into new areas. However, the argument goes that at a time of economic and numerical recession, the church has a difficult enough job conserving and servicing what it has, and talk of planting new churches is both unwise and unrealistic.⁴⁸⁷

It only requires a cursory look at the New Testament to expose the fallacy of such thinking. The greatest church planting movement in history was the first one. The Apostles functioned neither in an economic boom nor in a culturally sympathetic context. The planting of fledgling churches all over the known world took place against a backdrop of hostility and persecution, where the planters themselves knew nothing of a settled parish or regular income, and where, as Allen and others have argued, “tentmaking” was the norm,⁴⁸⁸ with prison and poverty being more common experiences than status or stipend.

Church Planting is Not Cloning

Effective church planting cannot take place without a radical re-evaluation and reassessment of both past practice and the present status quo. A thoughtless replication of what already exists, the same only slicker, will not suffice to meet the challenges of the current century. The literature is unequivocal about how many of the past failures were due to imposing an outdated model on an unreceptive new audience.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁷ See Kennedy’s conversation with PCI administrator referenced in footnote 444 above.

⁴⁸⁸ Allen, *Voluntary Clergy Overseas: An Answer to the Fifth World Call*, 134-135. See also R. Paul Stevens, *Tentmaking*, in Banks and Stevens, 1031.

⁴⁸⁹ See Bayes, 16; *ibid*.

Robinson and Christine wrote of “old failed structures.”⁴⁹⁰ Malphurs emphasized the need for contextualization, taking seriously the planter’s unique identity, location, and community,⁴⁹¹ while Moynagh spoke of how often plants were not built with the local people in mind, but rather designed for them, “and very often the design didn’t fit.”⁴⁹² This was the reality discovered by Fintan, who observed how easy it was for even fledgling congregations to default to traditional patterns and expectations of church and its leadership – “When will we have a building? When will we get a full-time pastor?” – without asking more fundamental missional questions, such as: “Who are we trying to reach?” “What sort of community will best serve these people?” “What type of spiritual leadership will speak into this culture most effectively?” or “What scriptural guidance is to be found to help us answer these questions?”

Such reflection returns us to the very heart and purpose of the church planting endeavor. The end goal cannot simply be about the erection of buildings and the formation of new congregations. This will be counter-productive if little or no theological thought has gone into exactly what type of community is being created. As Beynon and Thornborough observed, flexibility and variety are key elements in any new planting initiative,⁴⁹³ since the New Testament never focused on form and, as Timmis highlighted, the basics of church life as set out in the New Testament do not require the sort of budgets contemporary “cutting-edge” churches spend on property or programs. Rather, they can all be present in the smallest of groups.

⁴⁹⁰ Robinson and Christine, 31.

⁴⁹¹ Malphurs, 16.

⁴⁹² Moynagh, 108.

⁴⁹³ Beynon, 19. Roberts and Thornborough, 101.

This conviction lies behind the philosophy of his “gospel communities.”

Furthermore, such base communities illustrate that the fundamentals of church life can be lived out and experienced without large budgets or extensive facilities. They are therefore easy to replicate. While members of large churches may shy away from planting because they are intimidated by what they imagine to be the sheer size of the project (i.e. reproducing what they currently have), members of gospel communities have no such illusions because planting becomes relatively straightforward and just requires a missionary heart and sensitivity to context. Timmis writes: “At present church planting carries a certain mystique. Church planters are portrayed as a unique kind of rugged pioneer. But we need to create a culture in which transplanting is normal. Every local church should be aiming to transplant and raise up church planters.”⁴⁹⁴ Stuart Murray highlighted that this is where a lot of the training literature and handbooks are particularly unhelpful, since they presume a level of resources that many churches – who may still be willing and able to plant – simply do not have.⁴⁹⁵ Even Putnam and Stetzer’s helpful and creative book *Breaking the Missional Code*, seems tied into expensive and personnel-heavy models.⁴⁹⁶ The simpler the base model, the easier this becomes. It is as if there is an “anti-cloning device” built into the system. Since there is not much to clone, to begin with, there is the possibility, once the foundation is in place, to “experiment like wild with the expression” (to use Frost & Hirsch’s phrase).

⁴⁹⁴ Chester and Timmis, 95.

⁴⁹⁵ Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 26.

⁴⁹⁶ Stetzer and Putman, 162.

No “Change for the Sake of Change”

However, a radical reinventing of church is not the only way to go. These groups, however they are constituted, should, as Schier-Jones is at pains to point out, still be church: one, holy, apostolic, and catholic.⁴⁹⁷ Bayes cautions that no single structure should be changed until the agreed core values of the church have been established.⁴⁹⁸ Stuart Murray, who was one of the first in the United Kingdom to question many of the presuppositions and “sacred cows” present in the earlier planting literature, rightfully reminds us that asking radical questions will not necessarily mean rejecting tried and tested methods.⁴⁹⁹ Similarly, Chester and Timmis are less concerned with methodologies and more focused on theological reasoning and ensuring that the corporate worshipping life of the believer is as close to the rest of their lives as possible. They speak of “ordinary life with Gospel intentionality.”⁵⁰⁰

As self-conscious postmodern writers such as Buffington et al are anxious to point out, “The Church is under tremendous pressure to change with the times and to adjust in ways that will not compromise the integrity of God’s kingdom. Issues of style, strategy, and survival consume us.... But postmodernism stands outside of the simple notice of ‘change’”⁵⁰¹ They claim that many within the emerging generation do recognize that old is not necessarily bad, nor is the new good. This is coherent with the well-documented

⁴⁹⁷ Shier-Jones, 189.

⁴⁹⁸ Bayes, 5.

⁴⁹⁹ Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*, 204. At a 2008 Church Planting conference, I listened to one planter explain how, after extensive contextual research and polling, and having offered midweek, Saturday and evening alternatives, the leadership learned, much to their surprise and even to the disappointment of some, that the optimum time for their new church to meet was 11am on a Sunday!

⁵⁰⁰ Chester and Timmis, 62.

⁵⁰¹ Laura Buffington, John Emmert, Erin McDade and Chris Smith, “Postmodern Issues in Church Planting”, in Jones, 84.

postmodern penchant for fusion and fragmented juxtapositions.⁵⁰² Rather, it is often modernism that emphasizes newness whilst the reflection and regeneration treasured by postmoderns are exactly the type of qualities that can inspire and nourish an effective contemporary church planting movement. They write, “So many new and innovative experiences are offered to us each day that we have reached a point of an identity crisis. We are pleading with the Church to tell us who we are, to tell us who we can be.”⁵⁰³ The important thing is that the questions are asked: that the emphasis is not on the “how” but on the “what.”

Values and Vision

What values do the leadership want to see embodied in the plant? This question refers to more than just theological values, which are often very easy to discern within a given tradition. They involve something more challenging – what the culture and ethos of the plant is to be. A lack of clarity in this area from either denomination or congregation, or both, led to unnecessary difficulties for a few of the interviewees, notably Marcus, Fintan, and Fred. If the sending body or the embryonic congregation have a very different understanding of the purpose of the church or of what church life should be like, then conflict and confusion will be likely at an early stage.

The original vision is likely to leak if it is not re-enforced by the leadership. For example, a consumerist mentality on the part of the congregation will be fatal to any reproducible planting vision, as internal interests will inevitably take precedence over the missional vision. Equally, if the denomination or sending agency has an ulterior agenda, this too could kill the plant’s missional effectiveness. Note, for example, Nodding’s

⁵⁰² See Richard Appignanesi et al., *Introducing Postmodernism* (New York, NY: Totem Books, 1995).

⁵⁰³ Buffington et al. in Jones, 86.

caution about buying too readily into an ecumenical model which may sound and look like a good idea, but where fruitfulness and clarity of message and purpose can sometimes be sacrificed in favor of public unity.⁵⁰⁴ In both cases, interests other than missional ones have taken precedence.

Maintaining Orthodoxy and Getting On With It

Frost and Hirsch introduced the helpful phrase: “Hold fast to the core but experiment like wild with the expression.” It is outside the scope of this study to survey the various new models or to evaluate how faithful they have been in holding fast to the core, or whether in an attempt to be contextually relevant, some of the core has been diluted. Nevertheless, it is an important foundational principle that the historic principles of apostolicity and catholicity as expounded in the classic ecumenical creeds provide an important and tested framework, under scripture, by which present and future expressions of church may be judged. In order that each successive generation might be able to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people”⁵⁰⁵ and “guard the good deposit”⁵⁰⁶ entrusted to them, then the parameters of orthodoxy and heresy need to be no broader nor narrower than scripture itself dictates. There must be a place for non-negotiables.⁵⁰⁷ By holding firmly to the credos of the early church, new “wild expressions” of Christian community will maintain the vital and necessary link with the past, and with Christian orthodoxy, without which – just like many first and second

⁵⁰⁴ Nodding, 137.

⁵⁰⁵ Jude 1:3

⁵⁰⁶ 2 Timothy 1:14

⁵⁰⁷ The author has been at church planting conferences and colloquia where he has heard phrases such as: “the importance of not having a position on any doctrinal issue” (including, when pressed, the deity of Christ); or in answer to a question regarding their non-negotiables, one spokesman said: “We don’t have any, since we feel “non-negotiables” is a very modernistic term.”

century ecclesial manifestations – they will indeed wander and find themselves “tossed back and forth...blown here and there by every wind of teaching.”⁵⁰⁸

One feature of some postmodern planting literature that, although not necessarily resulting in the abandonment of orthodox belief, may unnecessarily undermine it and lead to a lack of clarity, or “dropping of the guard,” is the tendency for false dichotomies. This might be between doctrine and experience, or between belief and lifestyle. Buffington et al, for example, write: “We are looking for truth to be illustrated rather than dictated, demonstrated rather than defended... living truth instead of absolute truth.”⁵⁰⁹ Later, they say this:

We care far more about how to live than about how to prove...The church must be willing to engage itself in the lives of people and to provide an example of what a God-honoring life looks like...We are far more likely to accept truth when it is revealed to us in the context of relationship than when it is dictated doctrinally.⁵¹⁰

These are false antitheses: living truth is absolute truth. “True truth” will be illustrated and dictated; demonstrated and defended. It is surely not possible to know how to live unless we have the confidence to offer proofs as to why such a lifestyle is not only desirable, but necessary.⁵¹¹

Some of these dichotomizations ignore that, for the scripturally-consistent modernist, it was always about lifestyle and relationships based on foundational truths. If postmodern writers wish to critique the superstructure that sometimes was erected on the

⁵⁰⁸ Ephesians 4:14

⁵⁰⁹ Buffington et al. in Jones, 86.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 87.

⁵¹¹ This complementarity of knowing and living is of course is brought together succinctly in Francis Schaeffer’s title: “How should we then live?” Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*, L’Abri 50th anniversary ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005).

foundation of propositional truth, they will not improve on this by questioning the foundation. The better way is surely to keep the foundation and build a better edifice.

To be fair to the authors, they do state that they are not so much against absolute truth as the way in which it has been manipulated. Of course, one is more likely to accept truth that is not merely dictated but illustrated in a relationship. Nevertheless, the impression given in statements containing such stark contrasts is that one side of the equation is good and right for this time and culture, while the other is irrelevant and outdated. This is unhelpful. Cultural contextualization must not come at the expense of the integrity of the very message that lies behind the venture of church planting in the first place.

It is also worth remembering not to value style over substance. Stuart Murray's quote is important here, as he draws attention to the self-indulgence and micro-analysis that can be too common in some emergent circles. He charges, "Dogmatic iconoclasm is no more attractive than dogmatic traditionalism."⁵¹² He has witnessed situations where "beautiful, radical and culturally cool churches never got off the ground" because too much energy and money had been spent on cultural analysis and stylistic research, and no resources were left to actually plant.⁵¹³ As borne out by all interviewees, an effective church planting vision arises out of a heart transformed by the historic orthodox, scriptural message of grace, seeking to share that message. While each interviewee had grappled deeply with issues of contextualization (Fred in the use of his home, Brendan in his relationship with the majority community, Ruari and Colin in specific bivocational

⁵¹² Murray, *Planting Churches in the 21st Century: A Guide for Those Who Want Fresh Perspectives and New Ideas for Creating Congregations*, 137.

⁵¹³ *ibid.*, 136.

issues, Ciaran and Marcus in the naming of their plant), all of them struggled with those issues as they planted. First and foremost, they got it done.

The Importance of Biblically Accurate and Culturally Realistic Definitions of Success

It is important to understand from an early stage what constitutes success in the eyes of the planter, plant and sending body. One problem with trying to import a particular model from elsewhere is that those models often come not just with methodologies that may not work in the new situation, but also with a whole philosophical framework of expectations, definitions, and presuppositions that may be foreign to the receiving culture. Of particular relevance to a church planting scenario, which is by nature pioneering and subject to review and reassessment, is the understanding of what constitutes success. It is vital that, regardless of the size, age, or location of the plant, the three interested parties of planter, plant, and sending body have a definition which is comprehensive, biblical, and not limited to numbers and finance.

Snapper⁵¹⁴ highlighted the unhelpful role of narrow CGM definitions in the Christian Reformed Church, which were theologically and culturally suspect in his context. A much better definition can be found in Tim Keller's Introduction to *Center Church*. There he outlines why neither numerical/financial success nor dogged faithfulness are adequate metrics for judging biblical success. Instead, he advocates fruitfulness, which can be a measurement of competence and godliness as well as doctrine. He writes, "The church growth movement has made many lasting contributions to our practice of ministry. But its overemphasis on technique and results can put too much pressure on ministers because it under-emphasizes the importance of godly character and the sovereignty of God." Similarly, naming faithfulness as the only

⁵¹⁴ Snapper, "Unfulfilled Expectations of Church Planting."

required characteristic “does not lead [pastors] to ask hard questions when faithful ministries bear little fruit.” According to Keller, with fruitfulness as the benchmark, “We are held accountable but not crushed by...expectation.”⁵¹⁵

Fred emphasized how his expectations and those of the sending body had to be radically altered in the light of the realities of twenty-first century post-Catholic Irish culture, while Brendan similarly spoke of the lack of success an imposed model had in his rural town. Such disparity in expectations is not limited to cross-cultural models, but can be seen within Ireland, and even within denominations. Fintan spoke of expectations of a different kind, this time amongst the gathering people in terms of what church should be like, but he also said that if he had been costing money, rather than bivocational, there would have been greater expectations from Head Office in terms of numbers and finances. Will spoke of the need for new criteria, especially in rural situations, and this is what lay behind his strong advocacy of the bivocational option.

It is of course natural, and in line with good biblical stewardship, to be financially accountable and to be prepared to ask hard questions and make difficult decisions. However, those questions and decisions must occur against a backdrop of strong biblical principles that don't make a simplistic equation between numbers and effectiveness. A small or slowly developing plant may be having a massive impact on its community while a large burgeoning one may have succeeded only through transfer growth with little or no effect on the surrounding area. If decisions are taken to withdraw or reduce resources, or even close the plant, they must be made for more strategic reasons than purely numerical ones – if, for example, there had been little or no missional impact and

⁵¹⁵ Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, 14.

the finances currently allocated to a particular plant could be used more strategically elsewhere.

Assessment and Reassessment of a Plant's Viability Must Inevitably Include Issues of Finance and Salary

While funding was not the foremost reason for the interviewees' bivocationalism, nor the issue about which they first spoke, and while the literature is careful to emphasize that the availability or unavailability of money is not a good enough reason in and of itself to start or discontinue a plant, finance is still nevertheless a key factor in any plant's development. Inadequate or insecure funding can distract the planter with unnecessary anxiety (something Ian's sending body were determined to avoid), while responsible budgeting and financial self-sufficiency will always be a barometer of a plant's maturity and stability. Central to these financial discussions will be the amount of budget allocated to stipend or salary.

Allen and Stevens have illustrated how the traditional stipendiary system was only suitable for some places and at some times, but for development and expansion work, it is in fact "the greatest possible hindrance."⁵¹⁶ In spite of the antipathy towards bivocational planting in the majority of the literature, they are the among a vocal minority who believe that pioneer situations are precisely the contexts where bivocationalism is to be recommended. In fact, to use Nerger and Ramsay's term, bivocational planters are "uniquely wired for Kingdom growth."⁵¹⁷

It will be increasingly difficult for the Irish Presbyterian church to develop a realistic and sustainable church planting strategy without facing the bivocational issue.

⁵¹⁶ Allen, *The Case for Voluntary Clergy*, 23. See also R. Paul Stevens, *Tentmaking in Banks and Stevens*; Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture*.

⁵¹⁷ Nerger and Ramsey, Subtitle.

Other denominations, such as Fintan's and Ruari's, have realized this. For Ruari and Will, it has been an option for quite some time, while Fintan's older denomination, which is structurally similar to the PCI, has only recently embraced the idea. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly common in the ecclesiastical landscape, and the PCI cannot afford to ignore its potential or benefits.

Foundational Considerations Relating to Vocation

All Believers Have a Single Vocation From Which All Other Vocations Flow. These Are All "High Callings"

"Bivocational" is used in this study as a term of convenience to describe the ways in which a believer's primary calling to be a faithful follower of Christ can be worked out in more than one career or profession. While aware of Volf's concerns that vocation not be equated with occupation or payment,⁵¹⁸ it is nonetheless inextricably linked to the divine gift of work, which was given to mankind before the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. This work can be redeemed by the church when believers, while not exempt from the drudgery or alienation inherent in the post-fall curse,⁵¹⁹ find, through their work, renewed meaning and purpose, and a significant locus of service and ministry to others, regardless of whether the work in question is remunerated or not. We affirm what McGrath, commenting on Calvin, says regarding every piece of work being "a potentially productive act of praise."⁵²⁰ Furthermore, Calvin's assertion that there is no work, however "mean and sordid," that it cannot be "important in the sight of God"⁵²¹ is borne out by the fact that Paul, an educated religious man, stooped, for the sake of the kingdom,

⁵¹⁸ Volf, 106ff.

⁵¹⁹ Genesis 3:17-19.

⁵²⁰ McGrath, "Calvin and the Christian Calling," 34.

⁵²¹ Calvin, 725.

to work as an artisan.⁵²² Among modern authors, Hudson⁵²³ has re-emphasized the damage done by the sacred-secular divide in both the minds of many Christians and the philosophy of many churches. The sense of vocation a church leader – even pastor – can still feel in terms of another area of employment was brought out in the experiences of Colin and Fintan, who described themselves as “wired” for different areas of employment, or having “missed their work” when they went into full-time pastoral ministry. Ruari, too, spoke in an energized way about his business and his “capacity for work,” which he saw as complementing his planting initiative.

A more traditional approach to vocation in terms of ordained ministry being a “higher calling” is well articulated by reformed writers such as Clowney, Milton, and Campbell.⁵²⁴ These authors have an understandable desire to highlight the immense privileges of pastoring and preaching, and the necessity that those who are called to these offices assume them solemnly and humbly. However, using terms such as “the greatest office in the world” or “higher calling” can unfortunately (and unintentionally) undermine the integrity and spiritual nature of the work undertaken by believers in other disciplines and fields, can reflect a pre-Reformation understanding of vocation, and can perpetuate the sacred/secular divide opposed by Hudson, Nelson,⁵²⁵ and Keller⁵²⁶ amongst others. Clowney does seem to qualify his comments by factoring in the issue of calling and gifting, and in this he is closer to Calvin, who believed there was no higher

⁵²² See Lohr, “He Identified with the Lowly and Became a Slave to All: Paul’s Tentmaking as a Strategy for Mission.”

⁵²³ Hudson.

⁵²⁴ Clowney; Milton. Also, Iain Campbell, “The Call to the Ministry”, http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/articles/article_detail.php?1106 Accessed 22nd March 2012.

⁵²⁵ Nelson.

⁵²⁶ Keller and Alsdorf.

calling than to be in the vocation to which God had called and gifted you, whatever that might be,⁵²⁷ or, as Sherman put it more recently, to “bloom where you are planted.”⁵²⁸

Vocation Must Be Separated From Remuneration

Vocation stands apart from economics. It also stands above “work.” However, when Volf wrote of freeing work from “the dead hand of vocation,”⁵²⁹ he had in mind a very limiting view of vocation which either confined it to religious pursuits (Catholic) or inflexibly restricted it to, usually, a single profession or skill (his critique of the Reformers’ position). However, Volf’s concerns can be better heeded not by “freeing” work from vocation, but by developing a theology of vocation sufficiently rounded to incorporate work as one means of living out one’s various vocations.

Furthermore, one can be true to one’s calling and find a vocation fulfilling and productive regardless of whether one is paid. Homemaking is one obvious example of this, as are many “second vocations” undertaken in retirement years. Bivocational advocates such as Bickers,⁵³⁰ Dorsett,⁵³¹ Nerger, and Ramsay limited the term “bivocational pastor” to those who are paid at least something from their church, in order to distinguish them from “volunteers.” They are also anxious that, in the interests of longer-term sustainability, the church or plant does not develop a culture of dependency, and also that pastors are not taken for granted and the worth of their work is recognized. It will often be a temptation for plants not to pay the pastor if he or she is willing to work for nothing. These concerns are valid. It is not healthy for a plant, for example, to have been lulled into a sense that this can be “done on the cheap,” so that if a time comes for a

⁵²⁷ Calvin, III.x.6, 725.

⁵²⁸ Sherman, 151.

⁵²⁹ Volf, vii.

⁵³⁰ Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister*.

⁵³¹ Dorsett.

full-time pastor to be called, they are financially ill-prepared for the expense that that will involve.

However, the issue of terminology remains, and it is an important one. Linking the term “bivocational” to earnings and excluding those who serve gratis threatens the integrity of the vocation which has its origin in the call of God, and would still be a vocation whether money changed hands or not. Colin, for example, never took a penny from the church, but there is no doubt from his interview and his years of pastoral experience that he had a clear vocation to plant and to lead. The same was true for Brendan. Since Colin’s church is in a stage of succession-planning and on a trajectory towards employing a pastor for the next stage of the plant, one may question the wisdom of his continuing not to take remuneration. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that he has been, and is, a fine example of a bivocational pastor. There can be no doubt that the term “bivocational” can be used legitimately for “serial bivocational” such as the Apostle Paul, who worked at times and at other times was happy to receive financial help. So, if he was regarded as bivocational even at those times when he was actively tentmaking and not receiving payment from the churches, it is clear that we must resist any temptation to extract the term “vocation” from its original context of “divine calling” and attach it to remuneration.

Work Has Inherent Integrity and Is Not a Means to an End

It was a major rediscovery of the Reformation that work in and of itself had integrity. Most recently, this has been championed by writers such as Nelson, Sherman, Hudson, and Keller. Volf queried the adequacy of the Reformers’ theology of work and sought to expand it to include a pneumatological and eschatological dimension. He felt

that, without this, work too easily became seen as a means of productivity or creating wealth, something which rigid and unprincipled capitalism found easy to exploit.

However, while Volf's concerns may be valid regarding the need to counter dehumanizing work and alienation in work, and the need to consider multi-vocations or serial vocations in an ever-changing marketplace, the Reformers' emphasis on the integrity of all work can still be affirmed.

One of the weaknesses in some of the church planting literature is that bivocationalism, if it is discussed at all, is done so in a way that sees the pastoral or planting work as truly vocational and the other work as, at best subservient, or at worst, inferior to it. It is seen as a means of "paying the bills," or "making contacts." It is this very dualism that Keller critiques.⁵³² It undermines the value of work, the attitude of the planter towards it is inevitably compromised, and the sacred/secular divide is reinforced in the mind of the planter and the culture of the plant.

This was something Marcus was keen to avoid in his plant, and he believes that his bivocationalism helped to cement a more holistic and biblical view of vocation within the culture of the plant. Fintan too spoke of how bivocationalism instills values of co-operation, participation, and leadership development in the plant that would be lost if it had been planted with full-time personnel from the beginning. While none of the authors or practitioners consulted would be as brazen as to say openly that their work was of more value than that of their congregation, as long as the emphasis above remains, the unspoken message is there and is being subtly reinforced.

One area in which this might be exposed is in the advice a young person may receive every time they enquire about how best they can serve God. For example, Roberts

⁵³² Keller and Alsdorf, 196-197.

and Thornborough's book is aimed at recruiting more workers for "gospel ministry," and in it Richard Coekin actually refers to work outside the church as being a distraction for the believer. He says, "Christians working in offices often find that the growing demands of their jobs can begin to distract them from their evangelistic relationships or homegroup preparation... Too often today, potential gospel ministers are being distracted by their creation ministry from maximizing their gospel ministry."⁵³³ Later he writes, "We must all seek to maximize both our creation ministry and our gospel ministries but where they compete for our time and resources [how can they not?] our gospel ministry takes priority over our creation ministry"⁵³⁴ (parenthesis mine).

If Coekin is unambiguous about the pre-eminence of church-based work over other work, he is equally unambiguous about a hierarchy of importance amongst ministries when he argues, "The ministry of the Word of God takes priority over the other kinds of ministry we perform for God."⁵³⁵ Yet, while he quotes from Acts chapter six and the division of labor between the apostles and deacons, he fails in his attempt to apply the principle of "gospel ministry priority" into all situations. This is because his definition of "gospel ministry" is narrow and would evidently exclude the work of the diaconate. Therefore, the question remains: "Why did Peter choose one form of ministry and Stephen another?" Equally, "Why, if their ministry was less a "gospel ministry" than that of the apostles, did the deacons need to be "men full of the Spirit and wisdom?"⁵³⁶ Coekin is representative of a contemporary stream of thought which, although helpful in emphasizing the indispensability of "word ministry," and although fruitful in encouraging

⁵³³ Roberts and Thornborough, 38-39.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁵³⁶ Acts 6:3.

recruits for such ministry, does so in a way that perpetuates an unhelpful and unbiblical bifurcation between sacred and secular, creation ministry and gospel ministry, and is contrary to a reformed understanding of the Lordship of Christ over all creation.

While there may be very good reasons, as Milton and Cox⁵³⁷ show in their books, why someone should leave one profession in order to follow a calling into preaching and pastoring, just as there may be very good reasons why a planter or leader should be full-time in that work, nevertheless those reasons need to be articulated in a way that does not denigrate or relegate the importance of the ministry in which the person had been engaged as a faithful Christian doctor, accountant, project manager or factory worker. If the churches being planted are to be theologically rounded and healthy, then the work done by the members in the 110 hours⁵³⁸ they are on what Hudson calls “their frontline”⁵³⁹ must not be seen as inferior, nor must any work done by their pastor outside of the church be seen as a “necessary evil” or simply as a means to an end. Dorr alludes to this when he writes of those who “...believe that God has called them for ministry in their secular arena as much as in their religious setting. These ministers do not see tentmaking as ‘paying the bills’ for their church work. Rather, both areas are important fields of ministry.”⁵⁴⁰

Bivocationalism Has a Rich Pedigree, Is Without Serious Theological Opposition, and Is Particularly Suited to the Contemporary Culture

Dorr and Allen were at the forefront of illustrating how bivocationalism has a rich history dating back to the earliest days of the church, resurfacing at the time of the Reformation when “a flourish of bivocational ministers” emerged because many

⁵³⁷ Cox.

⁵³⁸ Hudson’s calculation. See Hudson, 56ff.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 93.

⁵⁴⁰ Dorr, 16.

preachers and church leaders found themselves excluded from the mainstream church and all the benefits that would normally come with it.⁵⁴¹ In the centuries in between, Bosch explains, “The clericalizing of the church went hand in hand with the sacerdotalizing of the clergy.”⁵⁴² The reformed churches ever since have had to struggle with defending the right and proper office of the pastor-teacher on the one hand, and the priesthood of all believers on the other. That we have not always succeeded is evident from the words of interviewees such as Sam, who spoke of Irish Presbyterians in some quarters having “a very priestly view of ministry.”

Dorr also points out how the early days of American church history were saturated with examples of bivocational pastors, and he cautions against presuming that the modern ambivalence regarding bivocationalism has always been the case: “Bivocationalism isn’t a new idea. In our day we tend to picture the minister as a religious professional, academically and professionally trained and serving a church which adequately supports him financially. A minister who doesn’t fit this category tends to be somewhat suspect.” However, in some places and eras, the opposite was true, as Door notes, “A ministry supported by the church was frowned upon by many frontier people.”⁵⁴³

In fact, it is probably safe to say that, in both the literature and interviews, no theological objections to bivocationalism emerged. The caveats were all of a pragmatic nature – not “Is this permissible?” but “Will this work?” One may have expected to hear

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁴² Bosch, 468. See also Dewar, 5.

⁵⁴³ Dorr, 25. He quotes Carter: “Baptists in the colonial period had trouble separating a paid ministry from the state controlled and state subsidized ministry of established churches” (Dorr quoting James E Carter “The socioeconomic status of baptist ministers in historical perspective”, *Baptist History and Heritage*, 15 (Jan 1980), 39.

more about the Presbyterian concern to preserve an educated ministry so as not to downgrade the centrality and quality of preaching, but this did not feature, leading one to conclude that bivocational ministry need not be incompatible with an educated ministry. While some mention was made by Bickers and others⁵⁴⁴ of the need to restructure training and theological education to take account of bivocationalists, there was no suggestion that if the bar is being moved, it be lowered at the same time. Here, as in many other issues related to this subject, the example of Paul, “a Hebrew of the Hebrews...a Pharisee,”⁵⁴⁵ is ample proof that bivocationalism need not mean a lack of proper education or training. In fact, the presumption that bivocational ministry may result in a lowering of quality is an unwarranted and unsubstantiated accusation that conveniently ignores the many ways in which bivocational ministry brings much fresh qualities, added richness, and new energy to a congregational context.

There are signs that we are entering a time when, culturally, bivocationalism is not only possible but desirable and increasingly common. Volf hinted at this when he spoke of the information culture emerging at that time and the “synchronic plurality of employment”⁵⁴⁶ that was becoming common. This has, if anything, accelerated in recent decades. A more fluid and uncertain economy, an increase in “home and cottage industries” (such as that of Marcus), self-employment (such as the case of Colin), second and third careers, flexibility in degree structures, and incentives towards re-training are all components of a changing marketplace which can facilitate bivocational ministry.

⁵⁴⁴ Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry*, 51ff.

⁵⁴⁵ Phil.3:5.

⁵⁴⁶ Volf, 106-107.

There Are Clear Advantages to Bivocationalism

Bivocational ministry can be recommended not just because it is increasingly possible within the current economic climate, but mainly because it brings with it many inherent advantages. These were mentioned in the literature, but were mainly illustrated by the interviewees themselves.

Although denominations may be attracted to the model for financial reasons, as mentioned elsewhere, this was not the key motivation for the planters, just as Fee,⁵⁴⁷ Lohr, and Hock⁵⁴⁸ would argue it was not the main motivation for Paul. Certainly there were advantages for the planter outlined in the literature, advantages that are often overlooked. Contrary to the popular idea that becoming bivocational will prolong years of debt and financial hardship, Bickers and Palmer showed that the opposite can also be the case, and that another vocation can give the pastor more financial security and protect him or her from vulnerability to church schisms or internal power-games.

Nor did the interviewees see the obvious financial savings to the plant as the main advantage, preferring instead to highlight the ways in which congregational development was enhanced through the pastor's missional contacts, pastoral authenticity, identification with the people, and relevant preaching born out of normal working life. In addition, from the congregation's perspective, there were further benefits through the eradication of a sacred/secular mindset, the outworking of every-member ministry, and the rapid emergence and training of indigenous leadership. One unexpected benefit that emerged, because it is so counter-intuitive, is the way that a bivocational lifestyle, rather than burning out the individual, as might be expected, can actually give their lives a rhythm

⁵⁴⁷ Fee.

⁵⁴⁸ Hock.

and infuse them with energy, providing a ready-made emotional and physical outlet that can prevent them from becoming consumed and spiritually dehydrated by the church.

Some who had transitioned out of bivocationalism, such as Declan, did mention exhaustion and tiredness. Others, such as Brendan, spoke of how their work became dispiriting in later years as they got older, while Marcus said he could not imagine returning to those days. Nevertheless, the majority experience was overall positive, with not as much focus on burnout as one would expect compared to the alarming increase in reported cases among full-time pastors.⁵⁴⁹

It was Stevens who pointed out the dangers of burnout for full-timers because they “invest too many expectations in one commitment” and the re-energizing that is possible through the “natural rhythm” of bivocationalism⁵⁵⁰ – a new rhythm and discipline that Fintan acknowledged had emerged since he had become bivocational. These men would agree with Rozko that the variety inherent in bivocationalism leads to “all-round healthier churches, and healthier pastors.”⁵⁵¹ This is so far removed from conventional wisdom that it is probably only through the testimony of a new generation of practitioners that presuppositions can be challenged and the cultural mindset altered.

In summarizing these foundational considerations, it is probably apt to conclude with the words of Justice Anderson, and one of clearest apologias for bivocationalism.

David Jones, speaking to the Australian Baptists, quotes him thus:

Bivocationalism is not an unauthorized, illegal intruder in the Christian ministry due to poor performance, or a second option, or a refuge for failure. On the contrary, it is a legitimate, original New Testament option sorely needed for the

⁵⁴⁹ The PCI has seen an alarming increase in pastors taking leave of absence due to stress-related illness, necessitating various recent reports and Panels dealing with *Stress in the Ministry*.

⁵⁵⁰ Stevens, 143.

⁵⁵¹ <http://lifeasmission.com/blog/2009/10/bi-vocational-ministry/> Accessed 2nd January, 2012.

carrying out of a bold mission thrust. It must be given equality and an elevated, recognized place among the options for ministry. It has a theological basis and a noble history. It is absolutely essential to the Christian world mission in today's world.⁵⁵²

Emerging Themes Concerning Church Planting Which Are Relevant to the Irish Presbyterian Context

Presbyterians and Church Planting: An Unnecessarily Distant Relationship?

To say that Presbyterians have not been to the forefront in either church planting or the bivocational resurgence would be an understatement.⁵⁵³ In the United Kingdom and Ireland, they are conspicuously absent in the literature. For example, in the various denominational summaries of church planting initiatives mentioned by Bayes, while Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, and of course Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals feature, Presbyterians are conspicuous by their absence.⁵⁵⁴ Roozen remarked that, while many denominations seemed capable of adapting to the structural and cultural changes necessary to facilitate a planting-focus, those from a Calvinist tradition struggled in this regard.⁵⁵⁵

One implication of this is that much church planting literature, due possibly to a lack of a clearly-articulated ecclesiological basis, has tended to focus on method rather than theology. As a result, the importance of church planting has been absent from most

⁵⁵² David Jones, "Bivocational ministry: the other choice." *Report to the Baptist Churches of NSW/ACT*, Downloadable resource from http://baptistnsw.asn.au/bi-vocational_ministry.pdf 4. Accessed 2nd January 2012.

⁵⁵³ Redeemer Presbyterian NYC, and their city-to-city network (which, significantly, is much broader than Presbyterian) is the recent exception which proves the rule.

⁵⁵⁴ Bayes, 7-8. It is interesting that of the churches Hudson worked with in his "Whole-life Discipleship" project, the only Presbyterian one was a Scottish plant. See [http://www.licc.org.uk/uploaded_media/1343658428-Imagine%20Unpacked%20%20\(Mar%2009\).pdf](http://www.licc.org.uk/uploaded_media/1343658428-Imagine%20Unpacked%20%20(Mar%2009).pdf) 11. Are plants not only the best missional communities, but also the ones most open to reassessing other aspects of congregational life and witness?

⁵⁵⁵ Roozen and Nieman, 592.

reformed ecclesiological discussions and systematic theologies. Writers such as Hibbert, Chester, and Timmis are surely correct in warning of embarking on church planting without an adequate ecclesiological foundation, while, at the same time, urging mainline churches to keep church planting at the forefront of any developing ecclesiological discussions.⁵⁵⁶

As we seek to understand why reformed churches may struggle more in this area, however, the question from chapter two remains: are there still perhaps barriers – structural or theological – which prevent Presbyterians from enthusiastically pursuing the avenue of church planting in general, and bivocational ministry in particular? On one level, one can see how independent churches operating from a “gathered church” model find it relatively easy to plant within what they would regard as a “free market.” On the other hand, those with a “national church” or connexional ecclesiology would wish to be more cautious in terms of how planting may affect their inter-church or intra-church relationships (witness the various debates referenced in chapter two regarding parish bounds). However, if the establishment churches in England and Scotland, which have a longer history, more weighty institutional structures, and are even more tightly bound to a parish model than the PCI, can publish substantial reports on church planting and begin to experiment with incorporating a variety of “fresh expressions” within their denominations, it is difficult to see why Irish Presbyterians should have been so slow in this regard, or why some of those in positions of leadership should have said “What’s church planting?” when one of the interviewees requested permission to try.

⁵⁵⁶ Chester and Timmis, 93; Hibbert, “The Place of Church Planting in Mission: Towards a Theological Framework,” 316.

Similarly, those operating outside a centrally funded denominational structure will more naturally look to bivocationalism as an option, even if it is a “means to an end,” while those, such as Presbyterians, who have historically been provided with personnel from a centrally-administered pool, will be less inclined to do so. However, although a particular understanding of “call” may lead to a suspicion of bivocational ministry in some reformed circles, it is difficult to find in the literature or interviews any articulated reasons why there should have been a moratorium on missional church planting into virgin territory for over a century in the PCI. It is possible that lurking underneath the surface there are some theological shibboleths⁵⁵⁷ causing the reticence, but these did not come out in the research. It is outside the scope of this study to examine whether or not certain aspects of reformed and Presbyterian ecclesiology, such as covenantal theology, a more inclusive doctrine and practice of the sacraments, our understanding of catholicity, and the inter-relation of the church visible and invisible, have any bearing on church planting motivation, strategy, or practice.⁵⁵⁸

Nevertheless, this much can be affirmed. As a church committed to the scriptures as the “only infallible rule of faith and practice,”⁵⁵⁹ the command of Christ and the example of the apostles leave us with no alternative but to establish disciple-making communities of faith wherever God sends us. As Hibbert emphasized, the metaphor of

⁵⁵⁷ A term based on Judges 12:4-6 and denoting a minor peculiarity of a certain group or sub-group.

⁵⁵⁸ These issues were raised in an unpublished paper by senior Irish Presbyterian minister Warren Porter: “The Church Visible: an examination of the historic Presbyterian doctrine of the visible church set forth by the Westminster Divines and their successors.” Available from the author.

⁵⁵⁹ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *The Code: The Book of the Constitution and Government of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (Belfast: General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 1980), §10.

the church as a body presupposes an inbuilt ability for reproduction.⁵⁶⁰ For the PCI, this means making a significant and unique contribution, not only to the renewal and extension of the Irish church – what former Irish Presbyterian Moderator Trevor Morrow calls “a mission for the reformation of the church catholic”⁵⁶¹ – but also to the evangelization of the increasingly post-Christian and multicultural people of Ireland.

Planting or Revitalization – or Both?

In a denomination such as the PCI that has had no recent church planting movement, some of the questions answered in the early literature are still relevant. While some of the tools and methodologies have been superseded, the objections to planting are still heard in some circles. For example, it is surely a false dichotomy to force a choice between planting and revitalization. If, as Keller et al argue, effective planting can revitalize a city or region, it can also revitalize willing denominations and congregations. However, that does not mean all congregations can or should be revitalized. Revitalization may use up just as many, or even more, resources and time than planting. Robinson regards it as “laudable but difficult,” and this quote is still very pertinent in terms of priorities and stewardship:

It is a sad fact that many such congregations are unwilling to let go of ways that, though they might have served the kingdom well in the past, no longer do so. It must be asked if it is good stewardship of kingdom resources to perpetuate ineffective activity. Sometimes a cure is not possible and there must be death before resurrection can take place!⁵⁶²

⁵⁶⁰ See Hibbert, "The Place of Church Planting in Mission: Towards a Theological Framework," 330.

⁵⁶¹ See Trevor W. J. Morrow, “Mission Ireland: a Reformed Perspective”, *The Furrow*, Vol.38, No.8 (August 1987), 493-503.

⁵⁶² Robinson and Christine, 142.

So, in some contexts, planting may actually be easier than, and preferable to, revitalization in terms of time, energy, and financial resources.⁵⁶³ For a church such as the PCI that puts so much of its financial and personnel resources into maintaining what currently exists, this is an important consideration. The financial costs of persevering with “ineffective activity” are relatively easy to compute, but what about the personal costs as young leaders, who may have made fine planters, have their enthusiasm dampened, creativity stifled, and dreams diluted because the only avenues of service available to them are revitalization ministries in places that do not want to be revitalized?

Avoiding Cloning

The warning against cloning that permeates the literature is particularly relevant in any denominational context where one model of church and ministry dominates, or even monopolizes, the culture. Such presuppositions are common within Presbyterianism. Although, as pointed out in chapter one, most of the PCI’s new church development has been in areas of population shift. Even a glance at these newer congregations will uncover churches with full-time pastors, organs, choirs, uniformed organizations, and women’s associations – in short, replicas of the churches from which the founders had moved, whether or not such models were appropriate to the new time or the new context. This is what interviewee Murray experienced when the receiving Presbytery plumped for a previously failed but familiar model over his bivocational proposal.

However, the noticeable shift in the literature away from an almost formulaic approach to one that took time to reflect on the aims and purposes of the planting process

⁵⁶³ Interestingly, the author spoke to one senior Presbyterian pastor who had successfully revitalized a dying congregation about whether he thought he could do it again. He said: “No, I wouldn’t have the energy or patience at this stage in my life. I think I could possibly start from scratch, but I don’t think I would have the personal resources to turn another one around.”

is mirrored in the experience of the interviewees. Brendan spoke of the singular lack of success a CGM-dominated approach had in his small rural Irish town, while Fred confessed that the expectations of his sending body, based as they were on United Kingdom and North American statistics, were utterly unrealistic in the Irish context. It was this that actually led him to become bivocational in order to adopt a more incarnational approach and give himself more time to learn the culture without having to worry about funding.

The Need to Explore New Models

According to Tim Chester:

There is much talk about “new ways of being church”....Some of this reflects a postmodern culture that downplays truth; some reflects a ‘me-centred’ culture which wants a form of church that indulges my selfish desires. We need churches that address this culture without capitulating to it. We need gospel-centered churches.⁵⁶⁴

But what type of models might be worth investigating in the current climate? Fred and Brendan both spoke of how many Irish people had been turned off “organized church,” not just in terms of the institutional majority church but also some highly-structured and programmatic North American models. Since Presbyterianism can be seen as “structure-heavy,” it will be important to look for ways in which, like a good referee at a soccer match, the structure and bureaucracy are not noticed and the players are allowed to get on with the game. The trouble is, as Ian remarked, “In this part of the world, church planting has just not been done in reformed circles.”

Coffey and Gibbs’s various transitions are worth noting, especially those that show that big is not always better and that effective communities can be created with relatively few resources. These transitions include: “from bureaucratic hierarchies to

⁵⁶⁴ Tim Chester in Roberts and Thornborough, 78; *ibid.*

apostolic networks;” “from attracting a crowd to seeking the lost;” “from generic congregations to incarnational communities.”⁵⁶⁵ Following Donald Miller, the authors claim that “the pyramidal structures inherited from the past need to be replaced by a much more democratized structure with a high degree of decentralization and empowerment in the present cultural context.”⁵⁶⁶ They acknowledge that careless decentralization can lead to fragmentation, and that leadership with a strong commitment to founding values and vision will be needed to prevent that. The encouraging reality here is that although in many places Presbyterian polity may be seen as part of the problem (centralized and bureaucratic), it could also be a significant part of the solution (democratized, connexional, unity around core theological principles).

However, just as Stuart Murray warned that reassessing traditional models is not the same as abandoning them, and that new is not necessarily better, so too it is important to realize that the traditional model may still be the best one to serve many areas of Ireland. The question is, should it dominate, or even monopolize, the Presbyterian ecclesiastical landscape? Al Barth comments that urban and suburban professionals used to high quality “productions,” especially in music and lecturing, are more likely to be reached by larger, well-resourced, and highly trained personnel.⁵⁶⁷ The reality is, though, that such demographics constitute a small minority in Ireland.

Barth’s four models of gospel-centered communities across the denominations are worth considering. He suggested that all cities will need a handful of “cathedrals,” which are very large, multi-staffed, offering centralized training and multifarious programs, and well equipped for “cold evangelism,” especially among the unattached – young, single,

⁵⁶⁵ Coffey and Gibbs, chs.3,7,9.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵⁶⁷ Al Barth, “RE: Research.” E-mail to the author (29 December, 2011).

divorced, immigrants, and those recently arrived. Cities will also need half a dozen to a dozen “regional churches” (depending on the size of the conurbation), which are several hundred strong in membership, that have an influence beyond their immediate parish, and also provide a variety of services – evangelistic, discipleship, “mercy ministries” – to both members and wider community. Also necessary are several dozen “community churches” that are probably around a hundred strong, single-staffed, with an emphasis on family life and on pastoring/ caring, but with volunteer-led programs that provide well for the members and the immediate parish area, providing perhaps one or two outreach services and/or evangelistic events. Finally, each city needs numerous “cell churches/gospel communities” of a couple of dozen or less that live, worship, and share faith together in small informal groups, and among their immediate circle of friends. If a city has such churches in all categories then most sub-groups can be reached, and the spiritual needs of the believers adequately met.⁵⁶⁸ There are a few PCI churches that could fall into the second “regional” category, while the vast majority would self-consciously adopt the third “community” model. Even those that might be several hundred strong would still see themselves primarily as parish/community churches.⁵⁶⁹

This dominant framework means that the one or two that could have made a jump to “cathedral” level have found themselves unwilling or unable to do so. This is because they have tried to grow in centralized programs, training, resources and outreach, while simultaneously trying to hold on to a parish pastoral model. Inevitably, because they are still trying to operate like a church of two or three hundred, where everyone, especially

⁵⁶⁸ Personal conversation with the author as part of an advisory visit to Irish church planters and supervisors, December 2012. Al Barth: alb@redeemercitycity.com

⁵⁶⁹ Of the eleven churches of more than seven hundred families at the time of writing, only a couple in the Belfast area would draw significant numbers from outside their immediate area.

the pastor, knows everyone, their capacity to function as a “cathedral” hub of teaching evangelism and training resources for the wider city is then severely curtailed.

Similarly, the dominance of the third model means that little or no thought has been given to the possibilities presented by the fourth. While many churches would have “home groups” or “interest-groups,” there is still a suspicion surrounding such groups in some quarters, and a determination – almost paranoia – to keep them well-supervised and tied to the center. Any thoughts or utterances along the lines of such groups morphing into churches would be seen as schismatic, instead of as a potential planting and outreach possibility. Models such as those hypothesized by Moynagh,⁵⁷⁰ where small sub-groups meet as “churches” for fellowship and teaching in a multiplicity of contexts and at different times, but are tied to a central hub that offers facilities, training, finance, youth programs, outreach and occasional joint celebrations, have never been tried. Nor is this conservatism limited to Irish Presbyterians; interviewee Murray was proposing something close to Timmis’s gospel community/cell church model and was met with institutional resistance and frivolous comparisons to Haight-Ashbury. Fred, on the other hand found within his structures the freedom to experiment with that type of home-based model.

Creativity is needed not just in terms of expanding the options within a certain area, but also regionally and across traditional boundaries. Scotland and Beckwith⁵⁷¹ have shown how in the past the parish system has been bypassed within the Church of England in order to facilitate new church development, referring to pre-Reformation monastic orders, Puritan lectureships, Wesleyan classes, patronage trusts, and proprietary chapels.

⁵⁷⁰ Moynagh, 100ff.

⁵⁷¹ In Scotland (ed.), 63-68. 63-8.

They outlined ways in which these varied and diverse groups are evidence that parish boundaries have never been sacrosanct, and they suggested “privately-financed clergy” as one way forward. In similar vein, Calladine and Skinner,⁵⁷² in a chapter entitled “Cross-boundary church plants: some principles and precedents,” argued the irrelevance of the parish system to contemporary relationships. This was in turn challenged by Roxburgh, who is unconvinced by the “network church” argument and still feels that historic parishes and denominations have a significant role to play.⁵⁷³

Nevertheless, regardless of its current relevance or future prospects, the parish system should not be used as an excuse to stifle growth, nor territorialism introduced to prevent gospel initiatives. As early as the 1990s, the Church of England recognized that a greater authority than church tradition and polity should be the motivator: “Church planting across parish and diocesan boundaries has happened under the pressure of an evangelistic imperative that has assumed precedence over loyalty to the institution and its territorial contract.”⁵⁷⁴

Of the PCI planters interviewed, both had planted out of mother churches in the Republic of Ireland where the Presbyterian presence is so small that parishes are indeed irrelevant. However, in cities and major towns in the north of the island, it is difficult to plant without trespassing into someone else’s parish, yet the need, particularly among the young, disenfranchised, post-modern, post-Christian population is so strong that freedom must be given to those visionary enough to want to plant as appropriate, regardless of

⁵⁷² In *ibid.*, 70-81.

⁵⁷³ Alan Roxburgh, “Reframing Denominations from a Missional Perspective”, in Van Gelder. Also in “Being Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood”, lecture at East Belfast Mission, November 2012.

⁵⁷⁴ Church of England, *Breaking New Ground: Church Planting in the Church of England: A Report*, 2-3.

geographical location or traditional boundaries. As Kennedy rightly challenged: “There may not be much geographic space uncovered by Presbyterian congregations in the Province of Ulster today but there is much ‘social space’ where we are not present.”⁵⁷⁵

This comes close to what Coffey and Gibbs articulated a number of years later when they warned against mainline churches trying “to regain the center.”⁵⁷⁶ If, as they argue convincingly, culture itself is increasingly fragmented without center or circumference, perhaps the time has come for the church to think of working from the margins and seek to infiltrate and influence with gospel-hearted compassion the various disparate sub-cultures that constitute our post-modern cultural landscape. However, if the response (or lack of it) to the Church’s Strategy for Mission Reports of the 1990s, and the data from this study’s interviewees, are anything to go by, such a mindset seems well outside the traditional frame of reference of most Irish Presbyterians.

The evidence from the non-Presbyterian interviewees and from the number of new denominations springing up in Northern Ireland in the past decade is that a protectionistic territorialism is pointless. If Presbyterians don’t plant in our cities, then someone else surely will. While that is not a problem for those of a generous mind and ecumenical spirit, it casts yet more doubt on the denomination’s future, and deprives the city of the particular contribution reformed witness can offer, especially in the areas of preaching, teaching, and apologetics.

Fintan drew a comparison between the expected resource-intensive “attractional” model whereby a church is established with the hope that people will be drawn to it, and one that is “incarnational,” which is actually more time-intensive but can be fruitful in a

⁵⁷⁵ Kennedy, “Through a glass darkly: a look at the future of church planting” (Part 1), 24.

⁵⁷⁶ Coffey and Gibbs, 218.

very different way, especially with those suspicious of attending formal church events. It is vitally important, whatever model is chosen, that planter and denomination have a clear and common understanding of what is being attempted, or else expectations will be unhelpfully unrealistic. Snapper's findings illustrate that false or confused expectations can be fatal to any church planting movement, and his article shows how plants initiated centrally, without a strong local sponsoring fellowship, almost invariably struggle.⁵⁷⁷

Presuppositions about what sort of church fellowship should emerge may also lie behind many of the objections to bivocational planting and leadership. If what is envisioned is the traditional CGM model, complete with large core-group and "bells-and-whistles" launch, then many will find difficulty in imagining how this could be achieved without full-time leadership. However, if what is envisioned is indeed a "new expression," or a gospel community à la Chester and Timmis, a house church, a base community, call it what you will, then the case for bivocationalism is not only strong, but may be irresistible.

Of course, these are not the only two options. There is a middle way, and it is here that one finds most of the interviewees. It is possible to have a gathered fellowship in a purpose-built or rented space, following an expected liturgy⁵⁷⁸ and comprising youth, children's, and community outreach programs, but with no set expectations to grow to a pre-determined number or to employ increasing numbers of staff. It could, in fact, be argued that the lack of "mega-churches" in the Irish context points to the fact that either

⁵⁷⁷ Snapper, "Unfulfilled Expectations of Church Planting," 486.

⁵⁷⁸ I use the word liturgy here in its broadest sense, covering everything from the *Book of Common Prayer* to an extensive period of band-led praise followed by talk; whatever the culturally-expected "order" or routine may be.

this smaller traditional model or the cell/gospel community model are the ones most suited to the emerging Irish context.

Encouraging Entrepreneurs

Church planting by its very nature has close similarities with other entrepreneurial endeavours, so it naturally attracts creative people with those ranges of gifts. Ruari, for example, working with an independent network, was actively encouraged to take his entrepreneurial savvy honed in the business world and use it in his church planting context. Such people are not absent within the Presbyterian family. The difficulty lies in whether or not the denomination can make room for them, harnessing and directing their creativity without stifling it, and in whether the entrepreneurial spirits are willing and able to work within the restraints necessary in being part of a wider network. Do they have the capacity to bless the wider denomination by being teachable, humble, and patient enough to tolerate the frustrations for the larger purpose of injecting some of their vision and vitality and creativity into the thinking of the denomination, inspiring others and releasing similarly gifted creative leaders who can follow behind them?

The track record of the reformed denominations is not good in this regard, and it is interesting that geographical context does not seem to be as significant a factor as theological context. The Presbyterian interviewees, for example, were working in three different countries. Every group needs its entrepreneurs. They may be difficult, at times unrealistic, and often in need of being kept in check by the pragmatists, but any grouping without innovators, any denomination that is constitutionally wired to stifle the creative thinkers or quench the entrepreneurial spirits, will find itself in serious trouble.

Contemporary reformed churches need to heed Stuart Robinson's cry regarding the need for evangelists and pioneers/apostles to be catered for within mainline training and structures as much as the dominant pastor-teacher role. Kevin Mannoia's call for bureaucrats and entrepreneurs to start working in creative partnership as allies rather than foes also needs to be heard. Robinson reminds us of the loss to the local church of the pioneering minority who have tended to "become overseas missionaries, [get involved] in parachurch structures, or [begin] new denominations!"⁵⁷⁹ Mannoia, in words that are highly relevant to any struggling denomination, promotes how having both administrators and pioneers working together saves us from the "vicious cycle of self-preservation and protectionism...[and from] shallow, disorganized, flash-in-the-pan programs."⁵⁸⁰ He also gives us a timely and encouraging reminder of the advantages of denominations, even in a more fragmented and post-modern context, because of the "support, accountability and multi-generational stability" they offer.⁵⁸¹

Specific Challenges for Presbyterians Denominationally

Presbyterians share, with other denominations, organizational and political characteristics that will inevitably be stretched and challenged by the proposal of new ideas and models. However, these challenges can be creatively used as an opportunity for growth and for the organization to re-invent itself to meet the new reality. Church planting offers a unique opportunity to do this much-needed reflection.

The Center Should Resource the Grass-Roots, Not Vice Versa

Roxburgh believes that such reflection can be an important work of God within a denomination at a time of transition. He notes, "the Spirit continually disrupts the settled

⁵⁷⁹ Robinson and Christine, 32-33.

⁵⁸⁰ Mannoia, 39-40.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 146.

assumptions and structures of God's people."⁵⁸² Gibbs and Coffey summarized the issue well when they differentiated between denominational structures as "instruments of control" and those that "provided financial and personnel resources by which local churches can be effectively serviced."⁵⁸³

The common conclusion of both the literature and the interviewees is that the center needs to resource the wider community, and that the ineffective should not deprive the missionally productive and visionary of resources. Both Moynagh and Mannoia affirmed the positive role denominations can have, but only if they resist the temptation to control and dominate and begin to realize that local congregation and denomination are indeed interdependent.⁵⁸⁴ Hay,⁵⁸⁵ speaking from a Scottish Presbyterian context, mentioned the interesting concept of "subsidiarity" whereby, contrary to the usual Presbyterian practice of General Assembly and Presbyteries "sending down" reports for consideration by the wider church, a new way of working should be introduced where local congregations initiate and "send up" suggested resource needs or changes in legislation for consideration by the central secretariat, whose job it would then be to find ways of making whatever was needed happen for the good of the local congregation. Such an approach could have better served planters like Marcus, who spoke of how planting theory made perfect sense to those practitioners on the ground, but little sense to the administrators or decision makers who were working with a very traditional and inflexible model in mind.

⁵⁸² Van Gelder, 98.

⁵⁸³ Coffey and Gibbs, 71.

⁵⁸⁴ Moynagh, 155; Mannoia, 146.

⁵⁸⁵ Hay.

Fintan was pleased at how his denomination seemed to accept that in new congregations it was the people on the ground who were probably best placed to decide what was needed to enhance the development of the plant. While they asked that the end result should have some tangible connection with the denomination in terms of core values, ethos, and history, the plant would not be expected to conform to cultural expectations, nor was the denomination expecting uniformity of practice or polity in areas where such practice would be irrelevant or even detrimental to the plant's development. This may sound radical and new. The surprising thing is that something virtually identical had been proposed within the PCI itself as long ago as 1996: "To be considered a Church plant of the PCI a fellowship should be in sympathy with the standards of this Church though with considerable liberty from usual congregational norms as to form."⁵⁸⁶

Creative Facilitator or Guardian of the Status Quo

For some, the politics of ministry becomes a distraction, as the planter's time and energy may have to be channeled into either drawn-out political negotiations and the cultivation of time-intensive politically sensitive relationships (of the type in which Murray realized he should have engaged), or into resolving conflictual situations with the parent body (which Marcus experienced), or into dealing with local territorial issues (like Ian). It is worth noting that the three interviewees who found themselves most distracted with such political discussions were all Presbyterians. Those from other denominations or networks spoke either of proactive encouragement (Ruari and Declan) or laissez-faire passivity (Fintan). This does not mean that these other methodologies are without their problems. Fintan, for example, spoke of how he feels his denomination could have been

⁵⁸⁶ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Reports to the General Assembly*, 334.

more directive and involved. However, the apparent need to have “everything sorted out beforehand” often left the Presbyterian planters feeling disempowered and with an impression that the denomination only got involved in order to expose problems or put the brakes on progress.

Representation Without Distraction

Being a connectional denomination with democratic structures requiring a high level of local representation in order to function well, means that involvement in wider denominational affairs can be an additional and sometimes time-consuming responsibility for church planters – all the more so if the planter is bivocational. This was actually highlighted by Terry as one of the reasons why his pastor could not have been bivocational for very long. He commented, “I think it has clearly helped that he is now full-time when you overlay denominational connectedness...if we’re going to remain connected, it has to be through him.” It is true that new plants cannot afford to be unrepresented on, or absent from, such bodies – bearing in mind the interview data which suggested that central structures and legislators often displayed a lack of understanding of the realities facing new plants. Nevertheless, we must ask whether or not the planters themselves are the best ones to take up such positions, or whether involvement in wider denominational bodies should instead be the responsibility of either a plant member or another colleague or “church-planting champion” from the wider network/Presbytery.

Some of the ways in which central policy adversely affected plants ranged from a lack of clarity in terms of goals, objectives, and timelines, to the investment of money in property, stipend, and pensions, leaving virtually nothing in the allocated funds for the actual ministry itself. From the outside, and from the perspective of all the literature on

planting, this is ludicrous, but it is unavoidable as long as plants are regarded in exactly the same way as any other ministry and the peculiar needs in terms of set-up, publicity, launch, and staffing are not taken into account.

Courage to Take Risks

As opposed to Ruari, who believed that it was an essential characteristic of good leadership that planters had to be involved in “responsible risk-taking” in terms of finance and strategy, Presbyterian interviewees observed a particular bias towards risk-aversion within their denomination. Bearing in mind the cultural stereotype – even self-identity – of the Scots-Irish as “thrifty savers,”⁵⁸⁷ one may not be surprised at this in terms of finance, but it clearly runs deeper. The desire to have “everything sorted out” beforehand has already been noted, but it could also be seen in a lack of enthusiasm to embrace new models, even when steps had been taken to address some of the fears. So Murray’s team, for example, had built in to the model some anti-dependency measures and had planned for sustainability, and yet it was still too new a concept for many on the sponsoring Presbytery. Using the language of Heifetz and Linsky, Murray identified a fair bit of “anxiety in the system,”⁵⁸⁸ and a preference for the “familiar and failed” over the untried and potentially fruitful. Marcus got waylaid by administrative minutiae, Ciaran ran into obstacles in the process (as opposed to the principle) of leadership elections, and Ian encountered initial enthusiasm waning when what emerged did not

⁵⁸⁷ This was a phrase used in a resolution passed by The PCI General Assembly and used by the General Assembly representatives to the Government of the United Kingdom in 2011 after the Presbyterian Mutual Society collapsed during the financial crisis. “[Presbyterians] were thrifty savers, not risk-taking investors.” See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-13005181> Accessed 19 January, 2013.

⁵⁸⁸ See Heifetz and Linsky.

conform early to traditional expectations. All of them bemoaned the lack of any good role models within their branches of the reformed church.

Flexibility

As far as more established denominations are concerned, Fintan, a non-reformed pastor, seemed to fare better. His denomination had both a more realistic time-frame and a more flexible understanding of what may emerge at the end. He shared, “In at least ten years, there should be a Christian community established, made up primarily of unchurched people...with some kind of [theological] connection with the denomination.”

It is difficult to see how such an approach could not be possible within Irish Presbyterianism. While the precise nature and level of the theological connection will eventually need to be unpacked, there is no reason why those with vision should not be given the freedom to develop plants that are flexible enough in practice to be culturally relevant, and yet clear enough in belief to sit firmly within the historic and confessional tradition of Presbyterianism.

Irish Presbyterians: Escaping From Our History; Returning to Our History

Speaking of England, Harry Weatherley said:

There are large areas of this country which have little or no vital Christian witness...The evidence of churches having existed in the past is plain to see, but many of those buildings are now warehouses, offices, private homes or simply left in a derelict state. A growing number, particularly in the cities...now serve as Mosques, Hindu temples or Sikh gurdwaras.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁹ Weatherley, 5.

The fact that one Dublin Presbyterian church is indeed now a mosque⁵⁹⁰ should guard the Irish church against complacency and alert us to the fact that Ireland has for some time now been facing similar challenges.

The paradox is that the history of Irish Presbyterianism can both explain our ineffectiveness in this area, and offer glimpses of a solution. Holmes⁵⁹¹ recognized that we are essentially an immigrant church, while McCrory, Bruce and Kirkpatrick⁵⁹² have all shown how Presbyterian planting has followed demographics. Bruce has suggested that perpetuating this gives the impression that we are escaping from something, and that not only are we unsure about what contemporary mission might look like in the South and West of the island but, as Dunlop has written, migration statistics indicate that we seem uncomfortable even sharing common space with those who are different from us.⁵⁹³ Nothing short of a supernatural work of God's Spirit is needed to reverse this and inject the church with renewed missionary zeal.

Kennedy dates the institutionalization of church planting to 1928.⁵⁹⁴ From then onwards, greater centralization meant greater conformity and inflexibility and the introduction of a host of other regulations that succeeded in burying what should be a vibrant and dynamic process under a veritable bureaucratic paper-mountain. So, in Marcus's early days, everything from pension provision to conformity with

⁵⁹⁰ Donore Presbyterian Church on Dublin's South Circular Road closed and became a mosque in 1983.

⁵⁹¹ Holmes, *The Presbyterian Church in Ireland: A Popular History*, 53.

⁵⁹² Keith McCrory, "New Church Development in the Greater Dublin Area" (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001); David Bruce, "Confident in Christ in the face of social change", address given to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Special Assembly, Coleraine, August 2010; Kirkpatrick and Costecalde.

⁵⁹³ Dunlop.

⁵⁹⁴ Alistair Kennedy, "Church Planting in Irish Presbyterianism: 1600-1992 and into the Third Millennium" (Part 2), *Presbyterian Herald*, December 1992/ January 1993, 18.

accommodation regulations were raised as potential obstacles. Even if these issues were at heart generous and existed to protect and provide for pastors and their families, in practice they slowed down a church planting process where, very often, time and the principle of “carpe diem” are of the essence.

However, like Colin who was helped in his strategy by returning to the pre-Roman Celtic Christianity that first evangelized his county, it is by looking to our history that we may also find some answers to help us. The Connaught Mission of the nineteenth century, whatever about the controversy surrounding it at the time, shows how new reformed churches, even whole Presbyteries, were able to be established in territory well beyond the traditional Presbyterian hinterland. As Kennedy says, even in their pursuit of the Ulster-Scots “to the remotest parts,” our forefathers exhibited “a sense of mission...in their dogged and successful work.”⁵⁹⁵ That same spirit needs to be extended to all parts and peoples in the same way as Edgar and others behind the Connaught Mission extended it in the 1870s. Kennedy also mentions how, prior to 1928, there were a variety of ways in which churches could be established without having first to go through central structures: spontaneous barn meetings, the patronage of a sympathetic sponsor, and Presbytery initiation, to name but a few.⁵⁹⁶

Similar to what Scotland and Beckwith did in an Anglican context, it was out of a desire to recapture the vision of these historical patterns that Kennedy and others brought several Strategy for Mission Reports⁵⁹⁷ to the church in the late 1990s where they outlined the ways in which, within Presbyterian polity of the time, church planting could

⁵⁹⁵ Kennedy, “Through a glass darkly: a look at the future of church planting” (Part 1), 24.

⁵⁹⁶ Alistair Kennedy, “Church Planting in Irish Presbyterianism: 1600-1992 and into the Third Millennium” (Part 2), *Presbyterian Herald*, December 1992/ January 1993, 18.

⁵⁹⁷ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Reports to the General Assembly*.

be made not only possible, but easier. It was some of these reports, particularly where they referred to tentmaking⁵⁹⁸ that Marcus quoted, without success, to denominational leaders when he was asking for permission to plant. However, it is difficult to see how, unless we persevere with such experimentations, the denomination can adapt to the realities of modern Ireland and complete what R. J. Rodgers referred to as the “Vision Unrealized” of the nineteenth century Presbyterians.⁵⁹⁹

Inevitably there will be important theological nettles to be grasped, not least in terms of appropriate levels of involvement and interaction with the majority Roman Catholic community. Brendan spoke specifically of how his own fellowship’s increased legitimacy within the community paralleled his willingness to resolve his own internal tensions regarding those who came to him from Roman Catholic backgrounds and their various levels of continued allegiance to the “faith of their Fathers.” This resolution, which led him to be totally open regarding where people made their spiritual home, while simultaneously being no less evangelistic, reduced the “emotional trauma” in his own life. Bearing in mind how Irish Presbyterianism’s perception within Roman Catholicism has been damaged by the various politico-religious alliances of the last 150 years, in contrast to the much more fraternal eighteenth century relationship, any Presbyterian planter is going to have to give advanced thought to such issues as proselytism, ecumenical relations, evangelistic methodology, and even, as Marcus and Ciaran discovered, names and labels.

⁵⁹⁸ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Reports to the General Assembly* (Belfast: Church House, 1994), 319. See also Kennedy, “Through a glass darkly: a look at the future of church planting” (Part 1), 25.

⁵⁹⁹ R. J. Rodgers, “Vision unrealized: the Presbyterian mission to Irish Roman Catholics in the nineteenth century”, *Bulletin of the Irish Presbyterian Historical Society*, Vol. 20, March 1991.

Noting northern Presbyterians' reluctance to share space with their Catholic neighbors, Dunlop's challenges, "If we are intending to stay, let us do so in peace."⁶⁰⁰ This is admirable as far as it goes, but is there not a greater vision – one for the whole island? One that will seek to build, under our name, communities of allegiance to the Prince of Peace, transcultural communities of Presbyterian and Catholic, from East and West, North and South, Irish and immigrant, and where there is exhibited not just peaceful co-existence but true unity and shalom through the gospel of Christ.

Emerging Themes Concerning Vocation and Ministry Which Are Relevant to Church Planting

A New Culture of Work

Compared to the "one person – one life – one job" context of previous generations, an increasing number of people today are serially multi-vocational. This can be seen, for example, in the rise throughout most of the Western world in the number of mature students retraining for second or third careers. Working simultaneously in more than one field is also more common, and many people are experiencing on an individual level the type of diversification encouraged on the corporate level. While much of this has to do with economics, it could also be due in part to a more networked marketplace where expertise in one area enables someone to take easily transferrable skills (in IT, or teaching, or writing, or project management, for example) into a completely different field. Furthermore, the technological revolution means that many jobs can be completed much more quickly, and that tasks that would have filled a working week previously, may now only take half that time, thus opening the way for "secondary employment." Murray commented in his interview, "We are clearly in an economy worldwide now that

⁶⁰⁰ Dunlop, 144.

may mean that ‘business as usual’, at least for us, is no longer ‘usual.’” He, Richie, and Colin all referred to the fluidity of changing work patterns and the opportunities for the self-employed, home businesses and even semi-retired to be involved in pastoral or planting ministry alongside their other career.

Many of the general benefits of bivocationalism outlined earlier apply equally to planting, however there are also advantages specific to the planting context and reasons why bivocationalism, in spite of the perceived problems, may be particularly attractive to planters. For a start, the type of personalities drawn to bivocationalism – entrepreneurial, self-starting, potential workaholics – are also drawn to planting. In addition, while time-scheduling may be a problem, it is less of a problem than planters having too much time on their hands and finding themselves under-employed and set-up for disappointment when the results do not come as thick and as fast as they had hoped. For men, particularly, this can give rise to internal struggles with issues of self-worth and identity.

The Funding Issue

It has already been emphasized that bivocational planting should not be seen as a panacea for all the financial problems of the church, nor was it the prime reason for interviewees choosing that route. However, if the foundational missional values are in place, and the church culture is free from any unhealthy hierarchy of ministry or sacred/secular divide, then the funding advantages can be looked at clearly and money that would normally be spent on stipend released for other aspects of the plant’s ministry. The problem with looking at the funding advantages first is that not having a stipendiary minister can be treated simply as savings, and the unspent money used for maintenance,

administration, or even to pay off debts, rather than being strategically redirected into the plant's mission.

Ruari rightfully reminded his constituency that although the wider network of churches may not be paying his salary, they did still have a responsibility to financially support the work of the plant. Given that Bickers and others make a strong practical and theological case for the church paying something to the pastor,⁶⁰¹ saving money should never be the main reason for bivocationalism. If it is, one would be concerned both about how this undermines the importance of the gospel work being done by the planter, and about the breadth of the church's missional vision.

Neither should it be the main reason for the planter being bivocational, since it may lead to him or her "de-vocationalizing" their other work, seeing it merely as a job to pay the bills.⁶⁰² Such an attitude is contrary to a true reformed theology of work as something good to be redeemed and enjoyed under God. Furthermore, if the planter sees the workplace primarily as the place to make evangelistic contacts, but has not got a sense of vocation or positive work ethic, then the gospel can indeed be brought into disrepute.

A more common way of financial provision is through fundraising and support-gathering. Marcus mentioned how his North American colleagues often operated within a system of a third salary, a third fundraising, and a third personally generated by work or other means. However, bivocationalism has many clear advantages over fundraising. Fred discovered this and, although he had come from a sending agency where fundraising

⁶⁰¹ Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister*, 3.

⁶⁰² It was interesting to see in Nerger and Ramsay's work that a significant number of the interviewees who told their stories in the second half of the book regarded their non-church jobs in this way. So, one of the few documents given over exclusively to bivocational planting actually reinforced a divide between the sacred and the secular.

was the norm, he believed it unwise in an Irish culture suspicious of patronage or paid proselytism. Colin also mentioned this, and these two men appear to be reflecting the attitude and reasoning of Paul (as outlined by Lohr, Hock, and commentators Fee, Barnett,⁶⁰³ Ciampa, and Rosner)⁶⁰⁴ who, in not dissimilar circumstances chose to be bivocational to avoid misunderstanding in the receiving community.

Is it not possible that a too-ready acceptance of support-gathering within Christian circles has blinded the church to the missional and personal growth benefits of bivocationalism? Has it perhaps prolonged the process of planting unnecessarily, since it can take several years for a planter to garner the support necessary for several years, especially to the level suggested by some of the literature? Has it even unwittingly promoted workaholism in some (“People have given money for me to be here, I feel guilty taking time off”), and idleness in the ministry of others (“My support is safe for a number of years, the pressure is off”)?

Stetzer issues a strong call to visionary planters to allow neither finances nor denominational hesitancy to stand in the way of their call. He says that denominations do not call planters, God calls them, and if finances are not provided centrally, “The planter must help make a way where there is no way – by working at bivocational employment, at least for a period of time until the church has grown to support the pastor.”⁶⁰⁵ While this raises wider ecclesiological issues in terms of the denomination’s role in a call, and while it presumes a transition into full-time (which we will examine later), it at least acknowledges the contribution bivocationalism can make and refreshingly encourages

⁶⁰³ Barnett, *1 Corinthians*.

⁶⁰⁴ Ciampa and Rosner.

⁶⁰⁵ Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, 226.

planters not to be prematurely dissuaded from their vision on the grounds of finance alone.

However, the financial implications impact not just the budget of the plant (where the benefits are clear), but also the planter's own personal resources (which could be more problematic). In the United States, theological education is not cheap, debts are easily accumulated (on top of earlier college debts), and if a certain number of hours need to be worked in order to qualify, for example, for medical care, it may appear unwise to go down the costly route of bivocationalism. Carol Merritt tackled this issue and asked provocatively, "Will we be setting up a system where the white guys with good teeth and nice hair will be the only ones with a full-time position with benefits?" However, the focus of her article was (rightly) around the need for equality amongst full-time ministers, and a fear that if bivocationalism is seen purely as a cost-cutting measure, then there could be a wider justice issue to be addressed if, as present, women and ethnic minorities over-populate the bivocational positions (or rather, underpopulate the full-time ones).⁶⁰⁶

The costs and context may be slightly different in Ireland, but Will pointed out that there is an expectation among seminarians that full-time ministry jobs will be provided, and it is not easy to sell bivocationalism to those who have given several years to full-time study. The answer, though, is surely not to discard the bivocational options, but to restructure theological education so that it can become accessible and useful for those choosing that route.

So, while finance should not be the determining factor in going bivocational, there can be no doubt that if it is embraced for its missional and other benefits, many more

⁶⁰⁶ See Carol Merritt, <http://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2012-07/should-bivocational-ministry-be-new-normal> Accessed July 15th 2012.

churches could be planted effectively than are currently being planted by denominations or organizations limited to a fully salaried, or even fully-privately-funded planter. Nerger and Ramsay are surely right when they say of North America, “We will never keep up with the population growth...by our existing model – finding an educated church planter, moving him (sic) to a new area, and sponsoring him for three years.”⁶⁰⁷ David Jones makes an identical plea to the Australian church, “I doubt that we will effect any great advances in mission and church planting without developing an authentic Australian expression of this ancient ministry form [of bivocational ministry].”⁶⁰⁸

Missional Advantages

Although Lohr argues that the possibility of evangelistic encounters did not seem to feature in Paul’s explicit reasons for being bivocational,⁶⁰⁹ many folks immediately presume this to be the main reason for choosing that route. It certainly can’t be ignored. Fred, Fintan, and Marcus all spoke of how conversations at work had enhanced their planting in various ways. However, if someone is truly bivocational (in the sense of being called to that area of work), then the positive role that their non-church-based work can play in their gospel ministry is in fact much wider. Sherman and Keller⁶¹⁰ have both outlined the limitations of various “Faith and Work Movements” that have restricted the integration of faith and work to one particular area (e.g. the making of evangelistic contacts), and they have sought to show that a holistic Christian and redemptive approach to work can in itself be a form of gospel witness.

⁶⁰⁷ Nerger and Ramsey, 11.

⁶⁰⁸ David Jones, art.cit., 4.

⁶⁰⁹ Lohr, "He Identified with the Lowly and Became a Slave to All: Paul's Tentmaking as a Strategy for Mission," 181-182.

⁶¹⁰ Keller and Alsdorf.

Having said that, there is no doubt that living and working among the community you are hoping to reach brings with it great advantages in terms of natural evangelistic conversations. It can also help with contextualization, enabling the planter to become more quickly integrated into the community. While Ciaran was unsure about this, Marcus believed it should be the preferred option for any planter who was not indigenous to the area. However, it was significant that one of the first things Ciaran did was to become involved centrally in the Community Council, for the very same reasons that some choose to be bivocational. Location seems to be a key factor here. Declan, for example, was skeptical about bivocationalism, mainly because he worked in a different community from the one in which he was planting, and he therefore struggled to see how his work was having any impact on the church. Similarly, part of Ciaran's uncertainty could be traced to the fact that he was planting in a commuter town where most of the people he was trying to reach were not around the town during the day. Experienced and pioneering Irish bivocational planter Fergus Ryan is not dogmatic on this issue, but on balance feels the missional opportunities outweigh any inevitable difficulties:

So much depends of the perspectives, insights, personal traits and giftings of the individual Christian church-planter that it would be difficult to say one role or other is essential for those in a start-up situation, but on balance, I would say that bivocationalism would give a more natural context for relationship and communication of the message.⁶¹¹

There is also the issue of certain people-groups in contemporary Western culture, such as those mentioned by Stetzer⁶¹² and on the Church Planting Village website,⁶¹³ that will probably only be effectively reached in smaller groups and by bivocationals.

⁶¹¹ Fergus Ryan, "Research" (brief initial message); "A Few Typo Corrections – Use This Version" (subsequent expanded and corrected message). E-mails to the author (1 October 2012).

⁶¹² Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, 289.

⁶¹³ www.churchplantingvillage.net

Will believed that one could not make hard and fast rules, because so much depended on the missional gifts and vision of the planter concerned. For those like Fred, who transitioned into bivocationalism, such were the missional opportunities, increased contacts, and credibility gained, that he doubted whether he would ever want to go back to full-time, even if the plant could afford to pay him. Brendan too found his teaching work an invaluable asset to his planting, and it was only the changes and challenges of adapting to new circumstances within the profession that made him glad to leave it behind at retirement.

Sjogren and Lewin⁶¹⁴ saw the explicitly missional advantages as part of a wider context, where the corporate life of the plant as a whole was enhanced by the planter's bivocational status. They mentioned at least four other advantages to bivocational ministry which have also been highlighted in this study: it gave integrity to the idea of work and destroyed any sacred/secular dichotomy; it exploded any myth that the planter was living off others; it discouraged congregational dependence through enforced unavailability at work times; and it helped the planter identify with those in and outside the church.

Transferrable Skills

Luther Dorr writes that "A bivocational pastor today needs a secular skill that is portable and marketable."⁶¹⁵ If the planter drew some benefits from his other work, the plants too benefitted from having someone who was still at the frontline of a particular profession and able to transfer some of those skills into the leadership of the plant. For Ruari it was his business mind and entrepreneurial experience, for Fintan his financial

⁶¹⁴ Quoted by Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, 226-228.

⁶¹⁵ Dorr, 11.

abilities, for Marcus it was his management and leadership gifts. Terry referred to his pastor's "share of hardships: staying up all night doing an order and getting it completed; customers not paying him after the order being delivered...coaching (people) into doing something different" if they were unsuitable. While many would see these as difficulties, indeed possible arguments against bivocationalism, Terry, without underestimating the cost, saw them as net benefits, pointing out, "He was able to relate to people." Will spoke of the "authenticity" of planters who bring skills honed in other areas into the church.

While this might be equally true of pastors who transition from full-time teaching or medicine into full-time ministry, there was a feeling that those who are dealing day and daily with some of the same workplace issues faced by their congregations can have an added dimension to their preaching, evangelism and pastoring. While one often hears comments about the sacrifice of those who go into full-time ministry or who "live by faith" (i.e. on the support of others), Terry's comments show that bivocational ministry is also not without its sacrifices.

Difficulties

As mentioned above, there is sufficient evidence from both interviewees and the literature to suggest that burnout need not be the lot of the bivocational planter any more than the full-time planter. A healthy balanced lifestyle and spiritual discipline can sustain both. If the former may be tempted towards workaholism, the latter may be equally tempted in that direction, or may struggle with issues of identity and self-worth if they have no other outlet, or if things are going badly and the project into which they have poured themselves is not bearing fruit. Some of the full-time interviewees, like Ciaran, spoke of how there was always the temptation in the very early days to have to justify

their existence, and Fintan spoke of how having another job made it easier when progress on the actual plant was at an embryonic stage.

Nevertheless, bivocationalism is a hard calling in many ways. There were periods of genuine exhaustion for some of the interviewees. Brendan struggled with it particularly as he aged and as circumstances outside his control led to him losing his passion for his other vocation. He even referred to the transition from Sunday to Monday in his final few years as being like from light to darkness; from the truths of Christ to devilish insults and opposition.

The toll taken on family also needs to be factored in. Brendan said he would fear for those whose marriages are not strong. Paul Stevens wrote, “For tentmakers to survive three full-time jobs (work, family, and ministry), they must also adopt a sacrificial lifestyle. Tentmakers must live a pruned life and literally find leisure and rest in the rhythm of serving Christ.”⁶¹⁶ Likewise, it seems that the spouse would need to be an integral part of the team, completely committed to the project. Marcus, Colin, and Ruari all spoke of ways in which their wives were putting in many hours in ministry as well as home-making and, in Marcus’s case, the home business as well. It was Colin who specifically talked about how he was only able to be bivocational because his wife was fully committed to all the strands of their joint ministry at home, at work, and in church.

Isolation and the lack of adequate pastoral support was an issue in some places. Ruari was fortunate, referring to the link with his agency as “a lifeline.” Similarly, Ciaran was energized by the thought of so many people around the island praying for his work, and Ian was encouraged by those who came from abroad to spend time with him and assure him of their ongoing support. Others struggled. Fintan acknowledged that greater

⁶¹⁶ Stevens, 147.

face-to-face support and accountability deadlines could have made him focus more sharply on objectives and goals. He felt that the bodies set up to oversee him and manage him were perhaps a little too “hands-off” and, while that communicated trust, and he was not experiencing any difficulties, if someone was struggling they could flounder. Marcus expressed concern that, “We can let people languish for years, almost giving the impression that the church is ashamed of them.” Speaking from a Presbyterian context, he believes that if we are to embrace bivocationalism, then we need to have the pastoral support structures clearly in place first. If it is difficult to support isolated pastors generally, it will be doubly tough supporting bivocationalists adequately, particularly since, as Bickers points out⁶¹⁷ and as Brendan experienced, most of the methods we might turn to first – retreats, conferences, – take place during the day and usually at a place many miles from where they are working and ministering.

Transitions and Teams

Although the church planting literature of the twenty-first century contains a little more on the bivocational option than the earlier material, there is still a strong bias towards seeing it as a stepping-stone, a necessary stage in the move towards full-time leadership. Stetzer recognized the difference between bivocationalism as an intentional lifestyle or ministry choice and as a stepping-stone. He regarded both as valid, but only elaborated on the latter.⁶¹⁸ That position was well-articulated by Weatherley:

The overwhelming majority of new churches start with part-time leadership in the sense that the leaders have a full-time secular job. But the demands of a growing church are such that full-time leadership soon becomes a necessity. This may be exercised by the formation of a team of part-time people, each bringing their own distinctive gifts, or a full-time minister... or a mixture of both.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry*, 25-26.

⁶¹⁸ Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, 228.

⁶¹⁹ Weatherley, 53.

This quote is significant on a number of levels. First, it recognizes (as early as 1994) that the vast majority of churches began with bivocational staff, and one wonders why, if this is the case, so little attention has been given to it in the mainstream literature. Second, it favors a transition towards full-time leadership. Third, it recognizes that the extra leadership hours needed may not have to be worked by one full-time person, but that a team approach could be best and preserve many of the advantages of bivocationalism. This is exactly the model proposed by interviewee Murray, and which is championed by Dorsett in his book (albeit not aimed exclusively at planters).

However, it was a step too far for Murray's Presbyterian structures. He said it was ironic that, "As Presbyterians, we don't do team very well." Ciaran too, recognizing that it would not be easy – or necessarily wise – to replicate his full-time model, suggested that the denomination think through a bivocational team approach in the future. This is in line with Tim Chester's conviction that, "There are plenty of young Christians today with commitment to Christ. But they do not want to be the omni-competent minister, leading churches on their own. They want to be part of a team, partnering with gospel companions. And this is how it is in church planting."⁶²⁰ Resourcing and supporting such teams adequately is, of course, vital.

This was Declan's very practical problem. There can be a leadership deficit in many young churches and, although the theory of delegated leadership and teamwork sounds impressive, the reality on the ground is that that leadership can be very hard to find, especially if one is working with broken and hurting new believers. While the pastor may not want to be the one doing all the work, it may often be that he or she is the only

⁶²⁰ In Roberts and Thornborough, 75.

one trained and qualified to do much of it. One solution, of course, could be that a bivocational team (à la Murray) could be there from the outset, while indigenous leaders of the sort envisaged by Dorsett are being trained. It is interesting that, after this study was complete, two Irish planters intimated to the author in correspondence that a team approach was key to development in their situation.

While transitioning is advised, even presumed, in much of the literature, not all subscribe to the belief that it is an inevitable consequence in every context. Fitch⁶²¹ warned against the tendency for full-timers to spend an inordinate amount of time perfecting the Sunday event, and to schedule more space for internal rather than external relationships, with the inevitable loss of evangelistic contacts that this brings. Ian, Ciaran, and Richie all testified to this. While Ian and Ciaran were both full-timers, they spoke of how the preparation for the weekly worship event robbed them of strategic thinking time and more regular contact with outsiders. As Richie said, “The more ministry work develops, the less connection I find I have with unchurched people.”

Will acknowledged that transitioning to full-time was the model favored by the majority, but he challenged it and asked whether it would be better to stay bivocational and plant somewhere else. If it was right for the first plant, why not be a serial bivocational and replicate the model, especially when the type of person needed to stabilize and grow a church is likely to be very different from the one used to plant it? Will went as far as to say the transitional model could be “unhealthy” because of the loss of missional momentum in going full-time. Very often, he said, the extra pressures to prove the need for a full-time leader come from within – pastoral visitation, organizing a

⁶²¹ David Fitch, <http://www.reclaimingthemission.com/bi-vocational-or-go-on-staff-at-a-large-church-suddenly-bi-vocational-ministry-doesnt-look-so-bad/> 7 October, 2009. Accessed 2nd January 2012.

worship service, administration – and the “social capital” that was gained through bivocational work in the early days is lost. The experiences of both Fred and Fintan would support this, as both had to deal with traditional expectations within the plants, including people immediately reverting to presuppositions about buildings and staffing and programs and services rather than majoring on “ordinary life with gospel intentionality.”

What Type of Job?

So far, this chapter has dealt with bivocationalism as a generic entity. However, the data revealed the involvement of a number of variables. The issue of location was mentioned earlier, as was family stability and support, but by far the most significant one has to do with the nature of the work itself. What types of jobs are more suited to bivocational ministry? Richie, Colin, and Will all spoke of the advantages of home-based work like farming, e-working, home businesses, semi-retired, or jobs with regular hours and generous holidays such as teaching. However, high-pressure jobs, or those with unsociable hours such as law, medicine, some journalism, or shift work are never mentioned. Declan’s experience in retail also proved too time-consuming and too bound to one specific location for bivocationalism to be a realistic long-term option. Richie summarized the issues, outlining again the sacrifices involved:

I think one of the key challenges [for denominations] is finding people in jobs which naturally lend themselves to bivocational planting. Ones where you can continue working, perhaps at a consultancy/advisory level, will work best. But, by nature, those are jobs that often require a high level of specialized training and therefore are well paid, so for someone to move from that into a part-time role to facilitate church planting would require a high degree of sacrifice. One church leader was a qualified pilot, but he needed to be at senior level so that he could have a significant say in his scheduling. Nevertheless it was a job with a lot of “dead time,” “down-time,” which suited reading and preparation.

Will's observations were similar:

My experience is that there tends to be occupations that lend themselves much more easily to the process of being bivocational. So for example you are involved in education or training and you have lengthy summer holidays, or a degree of flexibility around your role, then certainly that would be much more conducive to (bivocationalism). Community-based work and managerial roles tend...to be much more flexible.

He raised an interesting issue of whether the job itself mattered so much as the training and personal gifting of the planter. For example, can a well-disciplined person in a demanding profession be much more suitable than a disorganised person in a less demanding one? Working his entire ministry in education and with planters, he noticed:

You tend to be much more able to manage your time if you have been trained at third level, so...is it the flexibility of the job or is it the academic underpinning of the people in the jobs? I don't know the answer to those questions...whether it is their training and education that enables them to more effectively organize themselves, or whether the job is just more suited. I think it's an interesting question to ask.

In the literature, Stetzer listed fifty-seven suitable types of jobs.⁶²² Sjogren and Lewin claimed that the best jobs were those that pay an hourly rate, have daytime hours, are not excessively draining physically or emotionally, and put you in touch with a good cross-section of the city. Interestingly, they write that “jobs in sales or education tend to be ill-suited for planters,”⁶²³ but don't elaborate on why they believe this to be so, bearing in mind that, of the eight interviewees who had been bivocational for at least part of their ministry, over half were either in education or family businesses.

Sabbath

One issue that the literature appears to overlook is that of Sabbath and rest. Is it likely that bivocational ministry appeals to those with a tendency towards workaholism?

⁶²² Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, 227.

⁶²³ Quoted by Stetzer, *ibid.*, 228.

If so, it will be a constant danger that they engross themselves in their two vocations and, if they are so wired, find that one energizes and fires them up for the other, without ever taking time out to reflect, rest, and be renewed. It may also be symptomatic of, and indeed feed, an unhealthy activism. Ruari, the interviewee who appeared to have the biggest current workload in terms of his ongoing business (although his church was at an embryonic stage), spoke of having a “high capacity for work,” and “taking less unintentional rest.” He was careful to affirm that he still rested, but one wonders if this would be the first thing to disappear should his church workload get bigger. Even accepting Stevens’ claim that bivocationalists have a natural energizing rhythm to their lives, if bivocationalism (which someone referred to as “suicidal”)⁶²⁴ does become a more common and realistic option for planting, then the need to prioritize such intentional Sabbath rest will be essential, and the emerging literature will need to cover this.⁶²⁵

In *Every Good Endeavor*, Keller writes of the importance of Sabbath to a biblical view of work, not as a section, but almost as the climax of his book. Speaking of how time away from work helps us get perspective and puts work in its proper place, he continues,

But the relationship between work and rest operates at a deeper level as well. All of us are haunted by the work under the work – that need to prove and save ourselves, to gain a sense of worth and identity. But if we can experience gospel-rest in our hearts, if we can be free from the need to earn our salvation through

⁶²⁴ LA Hope website:

<http://lahope.wordpress.com/2008/09/15/rethinking-the-possibility-of-bivocational-church-planting/> Accessed 2nd January 2012.

⁶²⁵ Bickers does mention it briefly at the very end of *The Bivocational Pastor*: “When I worked in a factory that required me to be at work five days a week, it was very hard for me to have a Sabbath day. In all honesty, I didn’t have a Sabbath, and I paid the price in burnout and spending a year clinically depressed.” Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs, One Ministry*, 141.

our work, we will have a deep reservoir of refreshment that continually rejuvenates us, restores our perspective, and renews our passion.⁶²⁶

Bivocationalists will need to “work hard” at keeping work in perspective, embracing Sabbath rest, and ensuring the “reservoir of refreshment” is regularly replenished.⁶²⁷

Freedom to Fail

Ruari mentioned how, in his business context, responsible risk-taking was encouraged as an integral part of good leadership. In that context, he said, that failure to try was a worse sin than trying and failing. Marcus also commented on a “fear of failure” paralysis that can disempower people from taking bold steps for the gospel in church planting. Ciaran found this, not in himself so much as in his core group. It appeared that the fear of failure was endemic within the culture. He felt that his presence as an identifiable leader relieved them of some of that pressure to succeed; someone else would take the hit if it failed.

It is not hard to see how, if such mindsets remain unchallenged within the wider church culture, growth will be slow and limited. And yet it would seem that there is a fear even stronger than the fear of failure – the fear of exploring new untried models. Murray was frustrated that although there had been “ten years of failed church plants” in his context, the denomination was still willing to sanction a couple of similar attempts, while remaining skeptical about his team bivocational model. Rather than saying “These traditional models are not proving useful here, let’s look at something different,” it was almost as if they were saying, “If the tried and tested models are failing, what chance does this new method have?”

⁶²⁶ Keller and Alsdorf, 234.

⁶²⁷ For other helpful reflections on Sabbath and ministry see the works of Eugene Peterson; especially, Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), 109ff.

The interviewees made tentative suggestions as to what lay behind such fear. Marcus felt the denomination was “gagged by precedent.” Ian thought that “the difficulty of planting into existing structures is that those structures are so rigid.” Murray felt that it was a case of square pegs in round holes. The existing administrative tools for selection and assessment didn’t fit the new model so, instead of changing the tools (and he did offer alternative tools to the Agency), they rejected the model.

Church planting is risky. Bivocational church planting may be seen as even more risky, although the financial and personal cost of perceived failure may not be as high. However, no kingdom advances are made without risks, and Christ was born, lived, and died in a risk-infested world. Nothing in his teaching suggests that Christian ministry should be comfortable or risk-free. Nevertheless, the risk should not be embraced thoughtlessly or without a clear understanding of what is involved. Those who have had to counsel and advise failed planters know only too well of the emotional, spiritual, and psychological effect failure can have on them, and the cost involved to their future ministry. However, one wonders how much of that damage and cost is a result of unrealistic and unbiblical expectations re-enforced by peers and a church culture that expects much but supports little, betraying its message of grace by making failure in worldly terms a matter of shame and disgrace. If that was dealt with, then there might be more people willing to try, knowing that things might not work out, and that even if they don’t, so long as they seek to remain faithful to their calling, there will be other opportunities ahead, and they can try again without feeling that they have somehow been disqualified from future service. After all, it was the PCI Committee that reminded the

1998 Assembly, “Mistakes will no doubt be made...but we need the freedom to make mistakes so that we may discover what God honors with success.”⁶²⁸

In the 2005 movie *Elizabethtown*, starring Orlando Bloom and Kirsten Dunst, the Bloom character is responsible for a multi-billion dollar loss for his company. The plot centers around his meeting Dunst on a trip back home for his father’s funeral. In one of the critical moments in the film, as he eventually reveals his past and the extent of his failure, he expects Dunst to break up with him as his previous girlfriend had done. Instead she laughs and says, “So? You failed!” As he tries to interrupt, she says repeatedly and sarcastically, “You failed, you failed, you failed, you failed,” before finishing, “You’re an artist! Your job is to break through barriers. You want to be really great? Then have the courage to fail big and stick around.”⁶²⁹

This is not said lightly to church planters who have been bruised by hard experiences, but it is the way of grace. Presupposing Keller’s comments noted earlier on success and competence, if the failures lie in circumstances outside the planter’s control – in the anxiety within the system or the dysfunctionality of the church culture – then past failure dare not dissuade those who have a calling in this area from having the courage to “fail big and stick around.”

Emerging Themes Concerning Vocation and Ministry Which Are Relevant to the Irish Presbyterian Context

Permission to Try

Because of the disparity of contexts examined, the research unsurprisingly exposed some significant differences in methodology and strategy. For example, in terms of vision, there is a marked contrast between the full-time planters within the

⁶²⁸ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Reports to the General Assembly*, 253.

⁶²⁹ *Elizabethtown* (2005), directed by Cameron Crowe.

Presbyterian tradition who were following a denominational policy decision to plant and who were therefore going into a situation where a core group pre-existed, and the more entrepreneurial model of other denominations or agencies who planted a visionary leader into a virgin area. This difference in approach – “sort everything out first” versus “try it and see” – meant that the latter were going to be more amenable to bivocational options. It is noteworthy that the Presbyterian interviewee who came to the denomination with a bivocational vision and core-group “ready to roll,” was unsuccessful – not because he tried and failed, but because he never got the chance to try. This was also Marcus’s experience: “For seven years, we were not able to start, and all we wanted was permission to try.”

Current Changes in Ministry Within the PCI

However, the signs are that change may well be afoot. The part-time, and auxiliary ministry options that are currently at draft and pilot stage would be ideally suited to bivocational ministry. Although there are some structural limitations still in place that prevent these being used by those most likely to be planters (for example, the fact that seminary graduates cannot go straight on to part-time ministries) these restrictions are due to the fact that, in Sam’s words: “[The PCI] brings in schemes very tightly, and apparently restrictively, yet they then become looser as the denomination becomes more comfortable with them.”

Table 5.1 Full list of Recognized Ministry Options available within the PCI

	Position	Training	Salaried?	Ordained ?
A	Evangelist	Evangelism Course	None, unless employed under C	No*
B	Accredited Preacher	Accredited Preacher Course	None - supply fee paid as appropriate	No*
C	Additional Pastoral Personnel	None specified: Job-specific: likely to be required to have B if word-based element to job	Yes as decided by local congregation and approved by central body	No*
D	Auxiliary Minister	Auxiliary Ministry Course; must also have B	Possibly: stipendiary or non-stipendiary	No*; and no direct route to ordination
E	Part-time Minister	Same as F; must be F first. Cannot go straight to E	Appropriate stipend	Yes
F	Full-time Minister	Recognized Theological degree and training	Stipendiary	Yes

* - the person may of course already be ordained as a ruling elder

As Table 5.1 illustrates, there is now no structural impediment to bivocational planting. It could be accommodated under D or E, or even under A, B, or C if supervised by a local congregation and minister. The issue of ordination will still be relevant within the PCI for the foreseeable future: Why do we ordain certain people and not others? What are they being ordained to? How much has to do with “functionality” and how much with what Will called “positionality” or “office?” What constitutes being a formally recognized minister?

Michael Griffiths was strong in his criticism in this area. He may resort to stereotype and overstatement, but he speaks as an experienced planter overseas, and the challenge is one that does need to be heard repeatedly:

The “ordained ministry” seems a great hindrance to church growth, because it is supported by the “collusion in dependence” between one-man-band individualists who like to run everything themselves, and lazy congregations who would rather delegate everything to the dedicated professional. How can we win the race when ministers would rather teach themselves, than teach faithful persons who will then teach others also? It is as though the first runner in a relay refuses to pass on the baton, but insists on attempting to run the whole distance solo.⁶³⁰

But, while Will and Griffiths are right that there may still be important questions to ask regarding our theology and polity surrounding ordination, and a need to be more intentional in our equipping ministries, nevertheless they should not hold up change, and structural progress can still be made while those issues continue to be discussed.

In critiquing the *Church Without Walls* report, Dewar also raised the issue of Presbyterian ordination and asked a similar question: “What kind of authority does leadership need?”⁶³¹ He warned against perpetuating unbiblical concepts of ministry by simply transferring certain expectations and status from “Minister” to “Staff.” Dewar’s example, drawn from the Presbytery of Caithness in the far north of Scotland,⁶³² is not unlike the auxiliary models being proposed by the PCI, and it is interesting to see two neighboring Presbyterian denominations independently coming to similar conclusions regarding the structural flexibility required for the current climate. The test will be to what extent these are introduced to manage decline, and to what extent they can create an environment conducive to mission.

Grass-Roots Resistance

The answer to that will almost certainly lie outside the confines of the denominational administration because, while it is gratifying to see these changes, the answer must involve more than changing structures. Sam mentioned how cultural

⁶³⁰ In Hill (ed.), 131.

⁶³¹ Dewar, 3-4.

⁶³² Ibid., 8-9.

realities such as a sacerdotal view of ministry could hinder new models from being accepted on the ground within PCI. Marcus, too, believed that the resistance to effective every-member-ministry was cultural rather than theological. He expressed, “[Every member ministry] is engrained in our theological position, but not in our practice. Reformed people should not have a problem with this: it is in our theological tradition. But I don’t think it’s in our cultural tradition. The culture of our churches is very professional and that affects how they look at ministry.”

So the resistance is not necessarily – or even mainly – from the top. Sometimes the denominational or agency headquarters is simply reflecting the reality on the ground and the real resistance is from the bottom. Murray mentioned the common perception that somehow becoming bivocational was “a downgrading,” while Fintan was encouraged by colleagues and bosses, but misunderstood by those in the pew who considered his choice to be bivocational “a loss to the denomination” when he could be doing “real ministry.” In fact, Murray referred to “an innate conservatism” which necessitated him stepping down from some traditional, expected roles in order to give himself the freedom to be engaged in the type of ministry to which he felt called.

This is very close to what Hudson in his book calls “Redefining the Contract;”⁶³³ that is, that instead of conforming to the unwritten but powerfully expressed expectations that many fellowships or congregations have of their pastor, the true leader will begin to model different priorities in ministry that will enable the congregation to discover their ministry rather than he or she “doing ministry for them.”

In a plant, this is equally relevant. The planter may think he or she has a clean slate but if the founding core bring with them from their previous churches some of those

⁶³³ Hudson, 113.

traditional expectations of ministry unevaluated and unadapted, then work will need to be done in the early stages to correct those presuppositions and set an agreed course for the plant which will reflect a theology of ministry more appropriate to the context. Nor is it just congregational expectations that may need to be reassessed, but also denominational ones, in terms of the level of involvement in boards and committees to which planters may be expected to commit. Distractions from the main focus of the work may come equally from above or below.

If, in some contexts, the “churched grass-roots” may be guilty of perpetuating the status quo, in other situations, perhaps in urban areas, or on the fringes, or populating the various “social spaces” referred to by Kennedy, the “new grass-roots” may play their part by providing a fertile field for planters and leaders to begin forming orthodox Christian communities “from the bottom up.” This is the very context in which Kennedy advocated using “tentmaking missionary elders.”⁶³⁴

We’ve Been Here Before

It should be an encouragement to any prospective bivocational planter within the PCI to learn that, although this is virtually virgin territory in terms of recent practitioners, their case has not been without recent advocates. Predating this study, there have been a few other Presbyterian “voices in the wilderness” in the past couple of decades. In addition to Kennedy, McCrory’s findings included this: “A few of the churches contacted through our research felt strongly that new church developers themselves would be best advised to start their ministry by getting a job in the local community.”⁶³⁵ Most intriguing of all, and invaluable to the prospective bivocational planter, is the fact that this concept

⁶³⁴ Kennedy, “Through a glass darkly: a look at the future of church planting” (Part 1), 25.

⁶³⁵ McCrory, 180.

has already been included in official reports passed by our General Assembly in 1994, 1996, and 1998, even if, as Marcus discovered when he quoted chapter and verse to the authorities, there has not until now been the will to act upon them. The 1998 Report was quite specific in its call, stating, “As Church Planting is ideally suited to ‘tent-making’ ministries and non-stipendiary ministry, the Union Commission should draw up suitable rules to make it possible for ministers or licentiates of the PCI, who volunteer to work without official salary, to be called and installed to such work.”⁶³⁶

The fact that we have not acted upon this in seventeen years is a cause for concern, given that the present study could find no theological or practical reason for further procrastination, or for resolutely sticking with a monochrome model for ministry or ministry training. Hopefully emerging models like auxiliary ministry may help change the landscape a little but, as another PCI researcher noted, our “glacial pace of change”⁶³⁷ means that as the planting need increases exponentially, other churches and groups respond more quickly and effectively, leaving us far behind. We may have questions about the methodologies, strategies, and even theologies of some of these groupings, but until we match their vision, imitate their zeal, and emulate their energy, we have little right to comment, and much cause to be humbled.

⁶³⁶ Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *Reports to the General Assembly*, 257.

⁶³⁷ David Moore, “What significance does the ecclesiology of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have for mission in contemporary Ireland?” (M.A. diss., Irish Bible Institute, Dublin, 2010), 57.

Bivocational Planting as a Viable Model Within the PCI?

At Tipping-Point?

Speaking of the Western church generally, Coffey and Gibbs refer to the current era as “a strategic inflection point” or “a kairos moment.”⁶³⁸ Michael Moynagh writes, “It is not hard to imagine church in the West sprawled like a beached whale, eventually dying because it has been cut off from society. All that needs to happen is for congregations to persist with what they do now.”⁶³⁹ Or, in the words of Stetzer and Putman, “Churches that need to grow think they can do it without change...by doing the same things they have always done.”⁶⁴⁰

It is likely that the PCI, as Kirkpatrick suggests,⁶⁴¹ is at such a “strategic inflection point.” There is no doubt that the practice of simply following population shift must be reversed, not least because the traditional Presbyterian population is no longer shifting anywhere but out of the churches altogether. Likewise, restricting ourselves to a maintenance ministry is no more than planned obsolescence. As Kennedy said: “To be a Scots-Irish ethnic Church is no longer a sufficient ecclesiological base for mission.” Marcus, in his interview, displayed an understanding of the resourcing realities facing the denomination and how, in such an environment, asking for money and personnel to plant new churches was going to be an uphill battle:

We have congregations that are vacant; we need ministers to fill those vacant congregations. [When we asked to be church planters] within the Republic, there were loads of places in Monaghan and Donegal where they couldn’t get people to go and fill existing churches. There was already huge financial strain beginning to appear in the church...the central coffers were getting lower and lower, and so I was coming in asking for more money because, in our system, it has to be entirely

⁶³⁸ Coffey and Gibbs, 37-38.

⁶³⁹ Moynagh, 66.

⁶⁴⁰ Stetzer and Putman, 137.

⁶⁴¹ Kirkpatrick and Costecalde, 82.

funded centrally. To go somewhere where there is not even a church when there were these other pressures all around...? As I look back I can understand [the reticence].

Of course, Marcus saw bivocationalism as a ready-made answer to this dilemma. If the reformed church is to have a future role in the ecclesiastical landscape of Ireland, if there are people with a vision to move out into new territories with the gospel of grace, and if they are not in need of central funding, then the denomination must find ways of releasing them and encouraging them. This is no less than the 1998 Report recommended.⁶⁴² The fact that there are currently vacant churches elsewhere is irrelevant. Let those churches find creative ways of recruiting suitable pastors – perhaps looking to bivocationalism – because the likelihood is that the pastors with the vision and aptitude for planting would not have been the most appropriately gifted people to serve in those other vacant churches anyway. To default always to servicing what exists, before looking at new opportunities, is to ensure demise. Stetzer and Putnam warn, “Leading a church beyond a strategic inflection point requires the reallocation of resources to facilitate experimentation.”⁶⁴³

However, having an authentically missional mindset does not just have implications for struggling financially-unviable churches. Stetzer also observes critically that, “Many leaders think the most efficient denominational strategy is to help medium churches become large churches.”⁶⁴⁴ Perhaps we need to heed the words of Ruari and

⁶⁴² See footnote 452 above.

⁶⁴³ Stetzer and Putman, 39.

⁶⁴⁴ Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, 6.

others who speak of replication being in the DNA of the denomination so that the natural question is not always “how do we grow?” but “how can we reproduce?”⁶⁴⁵

Moving Forward

How do we do this? Not every method will be realistic or even desirable. Marcus and Terry both referred to “the fraud” of a “dots on a map” strategy. This coheres with writers Murray, Chester, and Timmis who, while they disagree in some key areas, are united in the belief that there needs to be theological vision underpinning the planting vision. McCrory, writing into the PCI context a decade ago, suggested beginning with “islands of strength,”⁶⁴⁶ and it is significant that, in line with Snapper’s findings in the CRC, PCI plants that have relied on that strategy have been more fruitful than those that haven’t. McCrory also called for more resources and a “flexibility of approach,”⁶⁴⁷ and that call also needs to be repeated, since change has been minimal in this area.

The “Expectation-Support Four-Quadrant Diagram” is a popular tool used by educators, counselors, and others to assess experiences and effectiveness in a variety of disciplines. Sadly, as a number of interviewees testified, too many planters have found themselves in the high-expectation/low-support quadrant (which, according to the literature, leads to stress, burnout, and short-termism) as opposed to the high-expectation/high-support quadrant (resulting in motivation, challenge, and

⁶⁴⁵ I addressed this in 2007 in an article for the Irish Presbyterian magazine *Reachout*; outlining, among other things, the ways in which four churches of two hundred, say, could be more missionally effective than one church of eight hundred. See David J Montgomery, “Before you go... and before you fill those vacancies”, *Reachout: Magazine of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland’s Board of Mission in Ireland* (June 2007).

⁶⁴⁶ McCrory, 101.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 101.

achievement).⁶⁴⁸ The key to getting this right has to lie with the sending agency or denomination.

Works such as those by Roxburgh, van Gelder, Crabtree and Roozen and Nieman outlined the role denominations can still play in the renewal of the wider church, provided they adapt their structures and polity and continue being a resource rather than a drain. For church planters, it will be the denomination that can offer accountability and connexionality in what can be a lonely ministry. It will be the denomination that can provide a repository of wisdom and guidance in an area where so many planters are feeling their way. And it will be the denomination that is best equipped to ensure the planters it calls and installs will have the high-expectation/high-support that will provide the nurturing environment for fruitful ministry.

A proper understanding of the context will be integral to this transition. So much of the literature is written for the North American or even the United Kingdom market. Ireland is littered with examples of planters arriving and failing because they thought they could replicate Texas in Wexford or bring “the Creek up the Glen.”⁶⁴⁹ Moynagh⁶⁵⁰ was particularly critical of the way the mega-church model was parasitic on nearby smaller churches and only succeeded in disillusioning the vast majority of pastors who could never aspire to recreate what they see modeled there. It is worth noting that Ireland is virtually devoid of anything that might qualify as a “mega-church,” and that in the post-Catholic context, with increasing suspicion of hierarchies and institutions, this is going to remain the case, certainly in terms of reaching the native Irish of whatever

⁶⁴⁸ See Paul Z. Jackson, *Impro Learning: How to Make Your Training Creative, Flexible, and Spontaneous* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England; Brookfield, Vt.: Gower, 1998), 91.

⁶⁴⁹ C.f. <http://www.willowcreek.org/> and <http://www.northantrim.com/theglensofantrim.htm>

⁶⁵⁰ Moynagh, 13.

cultural tradition. Fred's experience supports this, and in many ways his ministry was rescued because of his grasp of the time needed to gain credibility in the Irish context, the unreality of expectations imposed from elsewhere, and his choice to go bivocational and persevere.

PCI planters have no such disadvantages. As a national Irish church, it is imperative that we take hold of the advantage this gives us, along with the credibility based on several centuries of history, as testified by Brendan, Ciaran, and Fintan, and as mentioned by Clawson.⁶⁵¹ In the early 1990s the first wave of Anglican church plants succeeded only because, rather than waiting for the structures to catch up with the vision, they were prepared to get on with it and "tear up the rule book,"⁶⁵² Twenty years later, is that still the only way for Irish Presbyterians? Hopefully not.

There are green shoots of change emerging that show that many perceived structural obstacles in the way of creative planting initiatives, including bivocational ministry, can indeed be surmounted. The auxiliary and part-time ministry schemes can be adapted for bivocational planting. The problem, as was evidenced recently in a Presbytery discussion,⁶⁵³ and as Sam hinted, is that the changes must be both structural and cultural. Hearts and mindsets must be won over to the advantages of these new models. There is often a failure of imagination, a residual defeatism, what Hudson calls

⁶⁵¹ David Clawson, "Presbyterian Churches Are Well Suited For Missional Church Planting in Belfast: A Comparative Study" (M.Div. diss., Queen's University, Belfast, 2007), 59-61.

⁶⁵² See Bayes, 4.

⁶⁵³ As this study was nearing completion, the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster had an opportunity to back a proposal to recommend a bivocational ministry for a recently vacated charge. The context was immensely suitable and the structures were in place under the Part-time Ministry Scheme. In the end the proposal fell because too few within Presbytery could envisage what this would look like. It was said: "No-one will go for that."

“toxic despair,”⁶⁵⁴ that is averse to risk and will be reluctant to try any new model because it is perceived that “no-one will go for that.” Such an attitude can of course become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This is why, to use the categories of Heifetz and Linsky,⁶⁵⁵ what is needed is not a technical but rather an adaptive change. However, Roxburgh warns, “The energy, time, and commitment demanded...cannot be met by adding this adaptive work to already existing workloads.”⁶⁵⁶ He fears that many denominations are suffering from “a loss of legitimacy” and cites the PCUSA as an example of a top-heavy bureaucratic “corporate denomination” whose structures served the twentieth century well but failed to adapt to new realities.⁶⁵⁷ Although much smaller in size, the PCI should take note and heed the advice.

In Need of Further Research

A number of issues have been raised which lie outside the scope of this study but which merit further examination in order to add to the bank of emerging data concerning church planting and vocation.

Theologically, are there elements in a reformed ecclesiology, perhaps issues of catholicity or sacramental theology, which place greater restrictions on Presbyterian church planters than are faced by those with a “free market” gathered church ecclesiology?

⁶⁵⁴ Hudson, 164.

⁶⁵⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, 13ff.

⁶⁵⁶ In Van Gelder, 103.

⁶⁵⁷ In *ibid.*, 89.

Contextually, are there clear cultural or historical reasons why bivocationalism may be a better option in some places? Are there specific contextual issues in post-Catholic Ireland that might mean that this is one such context?

Financially, how much need a church plant cost? Are the five and six-figure sums in much of the literature exaggerations, presupposing a certain attractional model? For those who do employ full-time planters, what percentage of turnover goes on salary in the early years, and how does this impact the effectiveness of the plant in comparison with those who spend a higher percentage of their budget on outreach and ministry? Similarly, of those who plant through support-gathering, how long does it take to raise this support, on average? How much time is subsequently spent on retaining and expanding that support?

Missiologically, how is the plant impacted by the planter's need to raise support regularly, compared to those churches which are planted by bivocationalists who have no need to raise support? Do those who have to spend time on deputation, raising support, administering personal fund-raising, have a lesser missional impact than those who "raise" their funds through salaried work in the community?

In terms of leadership, what work has been done on bivocational teams, and would a comparative study of plants founded by solo bivocationalists and those formed by bivocational teams reveal significant differences in terms of missional impact and congregational growth? Has planting by bivocational teams even been attempted in Britain or Ireland?

Similarly, what data exists concerning planters successfully remaining as pastors of the community they planted, versus moving on to become serial planters? What

variables exist that determine the wisdom or effectiveness of this? Are there geographical or denominational differences in expectations here?

Conclusion

So what would an authentic Presbyterian church planting movement look like among the post-modern, post-Catholic, post-Christendom people of Ireland? Dare we dream? Coffey and Gibbs maintain that:

Those most aware of the cultural shift from modernity to post-modernity are people who are not locked into the power structures. Those who shoulder the responsibility for the functioning and survival of hierarchies and local churches tend to be too preoccupied in bailing out the boat to be setting a new course. Change agents are more likely to be pioneering church-planters who have no congregational history to deal with and who are immersed in the cultures of the people they endeavor to reach.⁶⁵⁸

Forney is right. “Entrenchment or evacuation”⁶⁵⁹ is not the only option for a denomination. We can seek to uncover such visionary and pioneering change agents in our churches and colleges before discouragement or disillusionment or despair kicks in and the idealism of youth is tempered with cynical and tired realism. We can encourage a new realism, paint a new reality, and look to a new generation to lead the way, and the use of bivocational planters could have a powerful and effective contribution to make to this new reality.

Ultimately, however, we must look even beyond this to find our real inspiration and incentive to change. The God who planted himself on this earth issues the call, and his followers who successfully planted themselves around the known world, forming radical, vibrant, sacrificial communities wherever they went, also call us to follow in their footsteps. Let nothing: not fear of failure, not uncertainty over the future, not lack of

⁶⁵⁸ Coffey and Gibbs, 38.

⁶⁵⁹ David G. Forney, “Living in the City - Journeying outside the Gate: A Missional Approach to Polity”, in Van Gelder, 73.

funding, not denominational polity, not lack of precedent – not anything – deter us from heeding that call and planting similar communities of faith around this island.

Communities of carpenters and teachers, doctors and lawyers, artists and economists, laborers and shopkeepers, homemakers and students must minister to one another in word and deed, both at work and at worship, and they must do so out of love for the carpenter-teacher who came to redeem our life and work for his glory.

APPENDIX ONE

Table 1.1: PCI Church Plants 1960-2000 by year

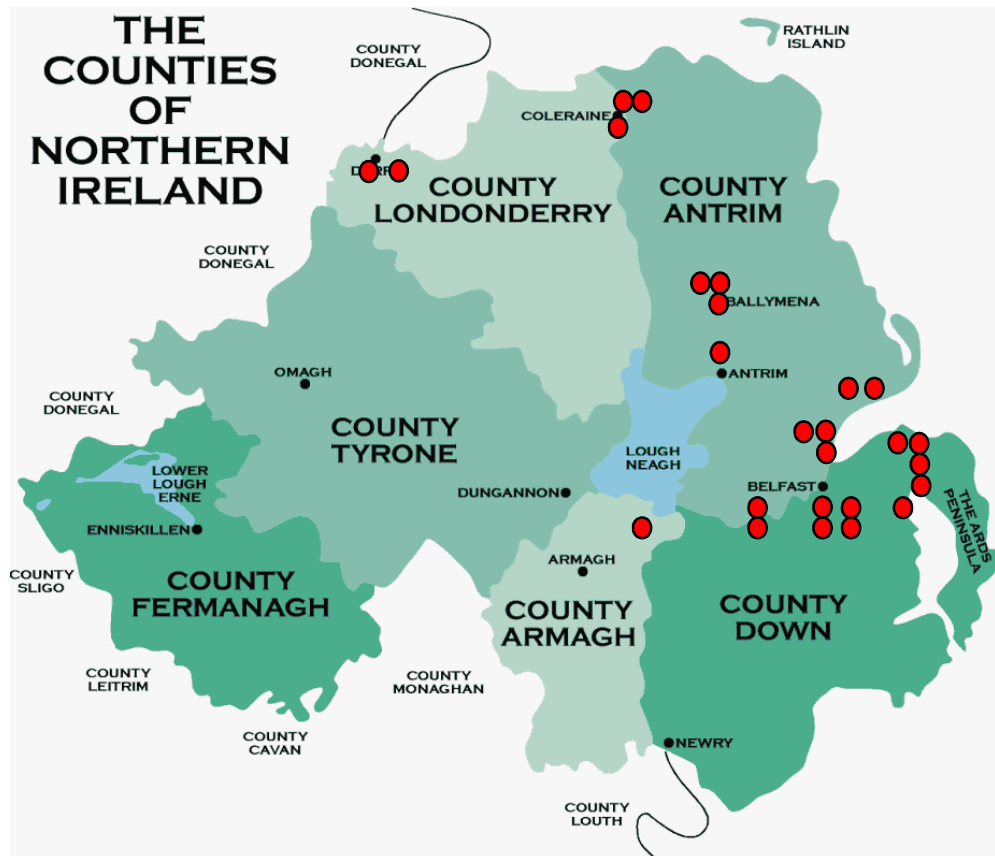
1960s (8)	1970s (15)	1980s (2)	1990s (1)
Saintfield Rd 1960 Belvoir 1963 St Columba's 1964 Dundonald (Christ Church) 1965 Abbey M'tn 1966 Tullycarnet 1968 Kilcooley 1968 G'stone Rd Antrim 1969	Lisnabreen 1970 Elmwood 1976 Craigavon 1971 Ballysally 1977 Ballee 1971 Woodlands 1977 Ballykeel 1971 Downshire 1977 Scrabo 1972 Strathfoyle 1978 Ballyhenry 1972 Hazelbank 1973 Burnside 1974 Ballyloughan 1974 Ballycrochan 1974	New Mossley 1980 Kilfennan 1982	Movilla 1995

Table 1.2: PCI Church Plants 1960-2000 by location

Greater Belfast (7)	Saintfeld Rd (1960), Belvoir (1963), Christ Church D'Donald (1965), Abbey Monkstown (1966), Tullycarnet (1968), Ballyhenry (1972) , New Mossley (1980).
Lisburn (2)	St. Columba's (1964), Elmwood (1976).
Bangor (3)	Kilcooley (1968), Lisnabreen (1970), Ballycrochan (1974)
Newtownards (2)	Scrabo (1972), Movilla (1995)
Carrickfergus (2)	Woodlands (1977), Downshire (1977)
Antrim (1)	Greystone Road (1969)
Ballymena (3)	Ballee (1971), Ballykeel (1971), Ballyloughan (1974)
Coleraine (3)	Hazelbank (1973), Burnside (1974), Ballysally (1977)
Armagh (1)	Craigavon (1971)
North West (2)	Strathfoyle (1978, now closed), Kilfennan (1982)

APPENDIX TWO

- Map 1: Geographical distribution of PCI Church Plants 1960-2000



- Map 2: Geographical distribution of PCI Church Plants 2000-2010



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