**Disciple-Making Movements\***

**A Golden Key to Missions in Africa**

By Younoussa Djao

**Introduction**

We continue to hear and read of Africa being described pejoratively as the “Dark Continent.” This can be found in writings by Christians and non-Christians alike. But by God’s grace and His sovereign intervention, things are changing and Africa is becoming a light in the world with a church that is growing.

Professor Andrew Walls wrote that the advance of Christianity in the world is a sequential process and in the providence of God. It is the Christians of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific that are next in the series. It means that the Christians of the southern continents are now the representative Christians, the people by whom the quality of the 21st and 22nd Century Christianity will be judged, the people who will set the norm, the standard. And the quality of the 21st century Christianity will depend on them. 2

Professor Philip Jenkins wrote, “Over the past century, however, the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia and Latin America. Already today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in Africa and Latin America. If we want to visualize a ‘typical’ contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria or a Brazilian favela.”3

In March 2001, I was in a gathering in Jerusalem where 320 African Christians from 36 African Countries came together to celebrate Jesus, the Messiah. We were reminded of the roles played by Africa in the realization of God’s purposes on earth in the past.

            Reuben Ezemadu of Christian Missionary Fellowship (Nigeria) used a relay race to describe what happened at that gathering: “We all renewed our pledge to continue to spread the Gospel in Africa and beyond and symbolically received the baton of world evangelization as a divine mandate to run the anchor leg of the relay race.”4 The mission implies the responsibility of the Church at every level and in every place to be part of God’s mission in the world. The Church in Africa is part of God’s team for world evangelization and has a unique but equal opportunity to make his own contribution towards the relay team’s goal of winning the race. Africa is now to run the anchor leg in the divine relay team for world evangelization.

\*Editor’s Note: This article was originally written with the title “Church Planting Movements”, which was the term City Team International was using. Later, however, they changed the term from CPM to DMM to indicate that making disciples is the leading edge of CP, not simply organizing existing believers into new churches. With the author’s permission, I have edited this article slightly to reflect this change. Note also that when Younoussa talks about DMM/CPM, he’s specifically referring to the Discovery-model of DMM that City Team International (today called New Generations) popularized.

            For the Church in Africa to fully and effectively run its leg in the race and brightly shine as the light of the world, there are problems and issues that must be addressed. The divine mandate will be effectively fulfilled only if these problems and issues are dealt with adequately. Some of these problems are lack of transformational discipleship, weak leadership, problems with the harvest force, etc.

           In this article, my main statement is that the Church Planting Movement approach is the golden key for the Church in Africa to address these issues and effectively run its leg of the relay race. I will try to show that by considering how the Church Planting Movement addresses some of the big challenges the Church in Africa is facing. I will not treat all of these challenges, but just five of them: weak discipleship; dependence; leadership; resistance to the Gospel and cultural relevancy.

            There are many places in the world where the Church Planting Movement approach is breaking through barriers of resistance, and bringing the glory of the Lord, the incarnate presence of Christ into communities and people groups.5

**What is a Church Planting Movement?**

            I have seen various definitions of Church Planting Movements articulated by practitioners, missiologists, etc. There are many initiatives today that are called “Church Planting Movements” (CPM). As Jerry Trousdale of City Team International states it, “Some can be categorized in terms of David Garrison’s carefully researched book Church Planting Movements, Garrison draws heavily upon David Watson’s church planting experience in Asia, as well as Watson’s ongoing global research and training.”6

             David Watson captures the essence of Church Planting Movements when he writes: “Local churches within a people group rapidly and regularly planting multiple new churches within the same people group as a normal part of being and doing church.”7

            David Garrison writes, “A Church Planting Movement is a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment.”8

            Jerry Trousdale gives the following description: “These movements, by definition, are based on highly transformational, “every-member” discipleship. They require targeted intercession, relentless rejection of foreign culture, focus on finding a man or woman of peace, family-based evangelism, and intentional local leadership development, among other critical elements.”9

            All these definitions contain the key elements that I see in a Church Planting Movement. They are:

• Reproduction – churches planting churches, churches that reproduce themselves

• Multiplication – it is not addition of new churches to existing ones, but multiplication

• Culturally relevant – churches that are culturally rooted in the local/regional context

• Transformational and every-member discipleship

• Local leadership

• Family-based evangelism

            It is important to add that any Church Planting Movement is entirely a sovereign act of God. It takes place where God is already working. One key element of a Church Planting Movement is finding a man or woman of peace (cf. Luke 10: 1, 5) among a given people group or in a given place. The presence of a man or woman of peace indicates that God is already at work there. We can only join God in a given place or people group and make sure that the movement happens. Some very resistant people groups in the world have been penetrated and movements of church planting multiplied.

            Today, God is at work in Africa. We just need to join Him where He is and make sure that this God-initiated action results in a Church Planting Movement throughout the continent.

            Now, in what ways does the Church Planting Movement approach help the Church in Africa effectively address the challenges it faces in running his leg in the God-given relay race? How can Church Planting Movements help the Church in Africa be better equipped for that race?

**1.**      **Church Planting Movements address the “one-inch-deep-one-mile-wide” phenomenon.**

            The Church in Africa has exploded quantitatively; but we notice that declining spiritual quality is the greatest challenge it is facing. This has been described as Christianity that is “a mile wide, but an inch deep.” The reason is because we have missed the key element in the Great Commission: making disciples. Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,10 baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (Mt. 28. 19-20)

            The Church has accumulated converts and organized them into local churches; however, it has neglected to disciple this great harvest of believers in Christ. This has resulted in a Church that has no impact or at the best a very weak impact on its environment. The countries where there have been wars in Africa are countries where the Church has grown. What is a pity to me is that during these crises, most Christians have demonstrated a behavior that is all but truly Christian.

            Another proof of the discipleship problem is that Christians are preoccupied with themselves and their personal well-being and not obeying the Word of God. The fashion in the Church in Africa for decades now has been miracles, prosperity, promises of the supernatural, social welfare, etc. Although these things are good and biblical, too much emphasis on them demonstrates a “self-serving” attitude.

            One essential element of Church Planting Movements is transformational discipleship for every believer. The Church Planting Movement is obedience-based, not knowledge-based discipleship. The believers are required to study and understand Scripture, but the focus is on:

• The practice of daily spiritual disciplines for growth

• Learning and growing by helping others learn and grow

• Discipleship as a process or pattern to pass on, not a body of knowledge to transfer

• Spiritual maturity is a function of obedience, not of time

• Every-member service, giving, evangelism, and discipling of others

            This is a process of transforming sinners into believers and believers into disciples of Christ. The Great Commission calls for evangelism that produces converts who are churched. The churches provide the environment for discipling the converts. And discipleship produces believers who are growing to spiritual maturity and who, because of that growth, evangelize and serve in other capacities in the local church.

The Church Planting Movement approach produces more than converts; it produces disciples. This is what the Church in Africa needs to not only obey the Great Commission, but also to live out Christ’s life and make a positive difference.

**2.**      **Church Planting Movements address the issue of dependency on outside sources for growth.**

            This issue has been discussed for years now. Many books and articles have been published; conferences, seminars, etc., have been organized and I think more is still to come. There are also many different reactions to this problem. Dr. Glenn Schwartz, Executive Director of World Mission Associates has dedicated many articles on this issue on the website of the World Mission Associates at: http://www.wmausa.org/artmain.htm.

            Theories on dependent and independent churches have been developed and discussed related to funds. The focus on dollars in missions has been too much emphasized. A dependency of a church is determined by how many dollars it received from the outside for living expenses and ministries. All these discussions have developed unhealthy relationships between western mission agencies and their related churches.

            I believe that we are all dependent on each other. The Church is a living body, the head being Christ. The different parts of the body depend on the Head, Christ, and on each others: 1 Co.12:12-27; Eph. 4:16; etc.

            A western missionary in Côte d’Ivoire who is a friend told me one day that it is the Christians in his country who support him; so I should also ask the Christians in my country to support me. If I am a missionary, I should not ask other Christians than those in my country to

support me. He was saying that because some western Christian friends were supporting my family. I didn’t reply, but just prayed because there are not many Christians who have the same theology. As a Christian I see myself as part of and dependent upon a body with members all around the world. Each member should obey the head which gives orders.

            Each member should avoid an unhealthy dependence Any member should maximize the resources God has given him locally. These local resources have been given by God to the Body as the Kingdom resources. As such, it can serve locally and also elsewhere.

            In the Church Planting Movement process, there is an intentional commitment to planting new churches which are self-supporting from the very beginning. I believe that the Gospel can be shared and people can come into right relationship with God without developing an unhealthy dependence on outside funding. This is an essential to a Church Planting Movement.

            One thing that creates unhealthy dependency is our conception of what constitutes the “church” that we are trying to see planted. Is it buildings and institutions? When buildings and institutions (seminaries, schools, hospitals, etc.) are seen as the norm of what a church is supposed to look like, it creates an unhealthy dependence upon external help. These things even leave a burden of maintenance that distracts from the momentum of evangelism and church planting. It is also when a mission agency uses its means to put in place buildings and institutions and then leaves them to the church that an unhealthy dependency is created.

            In the Church Planting Movement process, any buildings or institutions emerge indigenously and naturally within the needs and means of the local believers. This way these things undergird the work.

**3.**      **Church Planting Movements address the leadership issue**

            Some time ago I was having a discussion with the president of one of the biggest denominations in Côte d’Ivoire. He explained to me that he was having a problem with the denomination because they don’t have enough pastors for churches that have been started in different places. In one area, one pastor was pastoring 20 local churches. This pastor tries to visit each church once during the week. Churches have been planted, but there are no leaders. One of the results of that is that the growth of that church in that area has stopped. I have heard the same complaint in many places in West and Central Africa.

            Another problem that I have come across many times is that most of the existing leaders in the Church are problematic leaders. Talking about the crisis of leadership in the Church in Africa, Reuben Ezemadu described most leaders as baby kings, hirelings, wolves in sheep’s clothing, blind leaders, untested captains, generals who have never fought a battle, masters who never served others, teachers who were never taught.11 The state of the Church is determined by the kind of leaders that shepherd it. Like pastor, like church.

            Peter Wagner says “Many churches have confirmed the fact that the most important institutional variable for the growth and expansion of the local church is leadership…For the most part, existing churches have unconsciously placed a ceiling on both clergy and lay

leadership and, as a result, upward mobility of new people into positions of ministry is difficult. But new churches open wide the doors of leadership and ministry challenges and the entire body of Christ subsequently benefits.”12

            In Church Planting Movements, leadership development is consistently nurtured. A Church Planting Movement starts like one expect it to finish: local leadership taking charge. The development of leaders is done through on-the-job mentoring, coaching and problem-solving (pointing leaders in the right direction without giving the answer). Mobile equipping centers are started to ensure the Biblical integrity of each generation of leaders through continuous, non-extractive training.

            Curtis Sergeant described the leadership training cycle as modeling, assisting, watching, and leaving. He used the analogy of learning to ride a bicycle to explain this training process.

            Learning to ride a bicycle is a helpful analogy in regard to the training cycle. Typically a child, as she grows, will see people riding bicycles. This provides a model and gives her a frame of reference for what the activity involves. The parent is modeling.

            That child will not learn to ride a bicycle without getting on the seat herself, however. When she is old enough and big enough, the parents or some other person will assist that child. While she gets on the seat, the person assisting will often grasp the seat and the handle bars and help the child maintain balance while she learns to pedal and steer. The child gradually learns how to maintain balance. The parent is assisting.

            Then the parent will let go of the bicycle. Then the child will fall and get hurt, but she gets up again, gets on the seat, and the parent gets her going and lets go again. The child falls. This pattern continues repeatedly until finally the child is able to maintain her balance and rides successfully. The parent is watching. When the parent is satisfied that the child can do this by herself and understands the basic safety rules, the parent then leaves, and the child rides on her own where and when she wishes. The parent is leaving.

            The parent first provides a model by riding the bicycle, then provides assistance by holding the bicycle, then watches while the child rides the bicycle, and then finally leaves. This is an illustration of the training cycle.13

Church Planting Movements address the leadership problem because this issue is dealt with intentionally and at the very beginning of the process.

**4.**      **Church Planting Movements address resistance to the Gospel**

            When we look at the unfinished task in Africa, we see that the population is composed of 41.32% Muslims and 8.74% that are adherents of traditional religions. The population consists of people very resistant to the Gospel. I have met many missionaries working among Muslims and using the traditional missionary approaches. Most of them are frustrated and discouraged because they are not seeing any fruits from their efforts. I have even heard some church leaders saying that this remaining task is not possible. They have then decided to focus on maintaining what they have gained and have stopped trying to go further.

            Two elements in the Church Planting Movement address this issue: practical demonstration of the Gospel through compassionate service and the presence of a man or woman of peace.

            There are places today where very resistant people groups and communities have been penetrated by means of compassionate service. When the Church demonstrates the love of Jesus in practical ways it will have access to these resistant unreached people groups. In general, these people are the most impoverished and damaged people (e.g., victims of war, poverty, disease, etc.) Addressing their need with love will open their hearts. Then relationships of trust can be built that may lead to bringing them to Christ.

            Another element of the Church Planting Movement that addresses this issue is the presence of a man or woman of peace. This is the proof that God is at work in the area and also that He has prepared at least someone who will be willing to learn, teach, obey, and act as a bridge for the Gospel to his community.

**5.**      **Church Planting Movement addresses the cultural relevancy of the Church**

            Philomena N. Mwaura of Kenyatta University Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies wrote:

            African Christians are said to have multiple identities and to live in different moral planes; the traditional, Christian, state and business. Some theologians claim that African Christians do not feel at ease inside the church. Jean-Marc Ela (cited in Mpagi 2002: 195) says that the Christian belongs to a church which through its catechism and sacraments creates an empty shell, with no real influence on social problems. The African Christian still lives according to the traditions in the village or neighborhood. Without entering deeply into issues of the Gospel and culture, one is driven to ask why Africans find it easy to revert to traditional religious beliefs and practices in moments of crisis. Could it be that Christianity is too cerebral and does not address deeply felt needs of the people? Has it failed to create a holistic synthesis of all dimensions of being? The separation between Christian piety, expressed in church attendance and participation in other church activities, and a morally transformed character imbued with Gospel values has been blamed for the apparent hypocrisy exhibited by some people. The questions again arise: Why is there a deterioration of moral propriety at a time when Christianity is said to be growing? Why is there disregard for human life through perpetuation of ethnic violence, gender-based violence, sexual abuse of children, and drug abuse? Why, as has often been asked, did genocide occur in Rwanda, the home of the Great East African Revival and where 90% of the population is Christian?14

            It seems that, despite many years of presence on the continent of Africa, Christianity has not yet been rooted in the soil of the continent and become the religion of the heart of Africans. Christians often look like bats. When we look at a bat, it appears to be not totally a bird or totally a mouse. The Church has not succeeded in penetrating African cultures and transforming them. The reason, as Brian Woodford describes it, si that: “We have been planting bushes instead of sowing the seed.”15 The Church is a living body and because it is alive, it will adapt in any context.

            Because we have been planting bushes, we have transplanted what the church is in our home context to the place where we do church planting. A friend reported to me that in a local church in Haiti, the council is made up of Ivoirians, Americans and Haitians. They were having problem because of a marriage. The Ivoirians were requiring that the wedding be done by the mayor before the marriage is blessed in the church. For them, this way, they will be obeying the Word of God (Rom. 13.1-3). They were planting an Ivoirian bush in Haiti because in Côte d’Ivoire, this is how the church celebrates marriage. For any couple, there are three weddings: traditional (with families), at the town hall (to submit to the authorities and thus obey the Word of God) and then in the church. For Americans in this church in Haiti, the pastor has to perform the marriage ceremony and that is enough. I discovered later that in the USA, the government acknowledges the right of pastors and priests to officiate at a wedding and it will be legal. Americans in this church in Haiti were also planting an American bush in Haiti. Neither the Ivoirians nor the Americans asked how things work in Haiti. Instead of sowing the seed and letting it grow and have an adequate form, they were imposing their form.

            This way of doing things prevents the Church from being rooted in any context.

            Another problem is the way the Gospel is preached. One can still hear in Africa that Christianity is the religion of white people. And I think this comes from how the Gospel was spread on the continent. Christianity was perceived as the religion of people who read and write. Literacy was so prioritized that it gave the impression Christianity was only for people who could read and write. For people who learn and operate by verbal/oral interaction, identification with such religion was difficult at best. I am not saying that literacy is not good. Education is a key factor for socio-economic development. But when it is used as an essential part of evangelism among oral peoples, we are creating an obstacle to Christianity taking root in the area. We are sending a message that oral peoples will see as a proof that this religion is not for them.

            As Donald McGavran once noted, people come to faith best when they don’t have to commit “cultural suicide” in order to do it.”16In Church Planting Movements, we eliminate the inherent barriers of “Christian” culture. The approach is that in all cultures the church is relevant. When the Bible clearly promotes something, we must affirm it; where the Bible doesn’t say anything on a subject, we must feel free about it; and when the Bible rejects something, we must reject and fight it.

            David Watson wrote that the church planter, as a foreigner in the culture, must remain in the background and minimize cultural transmission. The church is encouraged to develop unique cultural expressions of love for and obedience to Christ. Christian behavior and Church actions fall into cultural norms when and where these are not explicitly limited by Scripture.17

**Conclusion**

            As the reader may have noticed, there is not any one specific new issue, challenge, or principle in what I have developed above. These issues are being discussed in conferences, seminars and writings on Church Growth, Saturation Church Planting, Cell Church Movements, etc. But the Church Planting Movement is different from all these other approaches in the way

these principles are implemented. The integration of all of these principles in the process and practices of the Church Planting Movement makes them more effective in addressing the challenges facing the Church in Africa. This is what yields the effectiveness of Church Planting Movements.

            “Look among the nations and watch—Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you. (Habakkuk 1:5). The Church Planting Movement is producing just that.

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**End Notes**

1 Mike Wakely, “The Search for the Golden Key” in EMQ, Vol. 40, No. 1; p.12

2 Andrew Walls

3 Philp Jenkins, The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 2.

4 Reuben Ezemadu, Africa 21, Document not published

5 Two books written by David Garrison testify to this: Church Planting Movements (Richmond: IMB of Southern Baptist Convention, 2000) and Church Planting Movement: How God is Redeeming a Lost World (Midlothian: WIGTake Resources, 2004)

6Jerry Trousdale, in a City Team International internal document.

7 David Watson, Workshop Notes, not published.

8Garrison, 2004, p.21

9 Trousdale, idem10 The emphasis is mine.

11 Ezemadu, idem

12 Quoted by Danie Vermulen, The Strategic Value of Saturation Church Planting, Notes not published.

13 Curtis Sergeant, Insights from a CPM Practitioner, http://www.wsaresourcesite.org/Files/CPMs/CLS-CPM%20mss.doc, p.3

14 Philomena N. Mwaura, Integrity of Mission in the Light of the Gospel: Bearing Witness of the Spirit Among Africa’s Gospel Bearers, Paper Presented at the 11th International Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies, Port Dickson, Malaysia, 31st July – 7th August 2004.

15 Brian and I were discussing Church Planting Movements and specifically the question: ”What is a church? What are we planting?”

16 Quoted by Jerry Trousdale of City Team International.

17 David Watson, seminar notes.