

Review

Jones, Peyton. *Church Plantology: The Art and Science of Planting Churches*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2021. 415 pp. ISBN 9780310135883

By Bernard Mukwavi, DMin

Peyton Jones, the author of *Church Plantology: The Art and Science of Planting Churches*, is a highly experienced and qualified practitioner in the field of church planting. The book is part of the Exponential Resources series, published by Zondervan. It was written in response to the plateauing and in some cases declining church influence in North America. “The author feels that the church in North America is in trouble and therefore needs to respond to the observed expansion crisis” (Jones 202, xv).

Jones earned his MA Theology, Pastoral Studies, in 2010 from W.E.S.T. in the United Kingdom (UK) and has since taught Old Testament and Church Planting at the graduate level in two different universities. He is a well-regarded church planter, author, speaker, and outreach consultant, and is the founder of New Breed Training, an organization that specializes in training and mentoring church planters. Jones has served as a youth pastor, assistant pastor, and interim pastor in various churches. In addition, he has successfully planted multiple churches in both the UK and the United States, including one from a Starbucks.

Jones' approach in his book, *Church Plantology*, recognizes that a rapidly changing cultural landscape demands new approaches to church planting. As such, *Church Plantology* is a vital resource for those seeking to engage with the challenges of planting churches in the modern world, providing both inspiration and practical guidance for church planting.

The author rightfully identifies the pressing need for trained leaders in church planting and church revitalization, thus reflecting a growing awareness of the critical role that missional churches play in contemporary society. As the spiritual landscape in North America continues to change, the Church must be equipped to respond effectively to these shifts, and to provide a meaningful and transformative presence of the Gospel in the communities it serves. The reviewer agrees with Jones, that investing in the development of leaders who are capable of fostering biblically and theologically sound, culturally relevant, and missional churches will ensure that the Gospel message remains vibrant and compelling, even in the face of shifting societal trends.

Jones' book, *Church Plantology*, is highly relevant in the twenty-first century, as it responds to the urgent need for church planting by drawing on the methods employed by the early church, particularly those used by the Lord Jesus and the

apostle Paul. Jones views church planting as an art and a science and presents it as an endeavor that requires both creativity and innovation, as well as a grounding in the proven methods of church planting found in the book of Acts. By skillfully blending these two approaches, Jones provides a comprehensive and practical guide to church planting that is both relevant and effective in today's world.

In this regard Jones is in agreement with Garrison who writes, "...[A] Church Planting Movement reproduces rapidly." Within a very short time, newly planted churches are already starting new churches that follow the same pattern of rapid reproduction. The reader may ask, "How rapid is rapid?" Perhaps the best answer is, "Faster than you think possible." Though the rate varies from place to place, church planting movements always outstrip the population growth rate as they race toward reaching the entire people group (Garrison 2007, *2. Church Planting Movements, How God Is Redeeming a Lost World*. WIGTake Resources, LLC. Kindle Edition).

The book, *Church Plantology*, consists of 20 chapters that comprehensively examine the ten principles that Jones identifies as helpful to contemporary church leaders as they learn from the early church leaders who were successful in evangelism and discipleship. Mainly the ten principles focus on what the early church apostles did as they obeyed God in the mission of spreading the Gospel and demonstrating it wherever they went.

1. They planted churches instead of starting churches.
2. They modeled their ministry after Jesus's apostolic model.
3. They rejected top-down leadership and embodied Christ on mission together.
4. They resisted stationary entrenchment and formed apostolic strike teams.
5. They forsook pragmatism but listened to hear God's heart for the community.
6. They refused to enable solo performers, but rather chose to equip team mobilizers.
7. They shunned bravado in favor of the Spirit's empowerment.
8. They didn't compartmentalize evangelism but lived as sent.
9. They sacrificed full funding for apostolically agile mobility.
10. They didn't build upward but spread outward.

The result of all this was kingdom expansion, or God's original intent to cover the earth with his glory, through his people. (Jones 2021, 21).

Jones' observation is that the mission work of the early church apostles produced results and, if followed by today's Christian leaders, will still produce results. Part of what today's church leaders have to know is that apostolic church planting is a calling and those who are called should focus on character development. They should understand the importance of family and the spiritual health of the apostolic church planters, and the spiritual dynamics of church planting. Jones addresses topics such as understanding the contemporary culture,

contextualization, and funding for missional church planting. He also discusses the importance of partnerships, collaboration networks, and rapid multiplication for the sustainable growth of churches.

According to Jones, seminary leaders are proficient in discussing the apostles' activities chronicled in the pages of Acts but are unable to replicate them in practice. He differentiates between church planting and church starting, challenging readers to aspire to become church planters rather than mere church starters (Jones 2021, xvii). He posits that church starting is focused on initiating a church rather than a multiplying church. The main objective of church starting according to Jones is establishing a church that is primarily concerned with numerical growth, which can result in it becoming insular and lacking an evangelistic outlook (Jones 2021, 4).

Jones thinks that church planting in North America is too expensive. The global south church planters are planting more churches and at a faster rate with less money than North America. According to Jones, seminary and university theologians are not adequately preparing leaders for church planting as they themselves are detached from missions. He argues that they lack personal experience with missionary realities and are skeptical towards the information presented in the book of Acts (Jones 2021, 8).

Jones' discussion on team leadership, based on Ephesians 4:11, resonates with the reviewer regarding team-led church planting. Jones emphasizes that apostolic planters are one of the five types of leaders outlined in this passage. The reviewer concurs with Jones when he argues that the APEST ministries (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, and Teacher) are essential for successful church planting, as each brings their unique gifting to the team. The team leadership model is essential for successful church planting. This was the strategy modeled by Jesus and the apostles. Jones has identified the deficiency in North American based church planter assessments as they are not designed to assess teams but individual church planters. He writes, “Unfortunately, because we fail to assess planters alongside their church planting teams, we also fail to equip and deploy them in teams” (Jones 2021, 120).

Jones's book, *Church Plantology*, contains some assertions that may not be agreeable to everyone. For instance, he singles out the church growth movement and megachurches as movements that prioritize numbers over discipleship and evangelism. He argues that “leaders who want to catalyze movements must challenge the status quo and hit the self-destruct button on their cushy ministries” (Jones 2021, xvii). The reviewer observes that while this perspective may be valid in some cases, it is important to note that not all megachurches and church growth movements neglect evangelism and discipleship. Some have shown great success in these areas, and it would be unfair to generalize their approach based on a few negative examples. Additionally, the criteria for evaluating the success of a movement may

differ from one context to another, and therefore, it is important to consider the unique circumstances of each movement before making broad statements.

Jones argues that mega church and church growth leaders have been more interested in filling rooms and gathering crowds than in truly following the example of Jesus and Paul, who prioritized emptying rooms and sending people out into the world to make disciples. According to Jones, this focus on numbers and critical mass can lead to a lack of true evangelism and discipleship and can ultimately be counterproductive to the mission of the church (Jones 2021, 2-5). However, there are certainly examples of megachurches and churches that are able to balance both growth and discipleship. Additionally, while Jones is critical of marketing skills in church planting, it is possible to use contemporary technology and communication skills in a biblical and effective way. Despite this minor critique, the book is highly recommended and would make a valuable addition to seminary reading lists.

The work under review is notable for its light and engaging style of writing, which sets it apart from typical technical texts on church planting. Notwithstanding the reader's initial expectation, the author skillfully communicates his arguments in support of the book's recommendations and suggestions. The presentation is well-organized, and the author's assertions are backed by ample research and a comprehensive understanding of the literature on church planting. The book compares well with books that have been written on the subject matter.

Of particular interest is the author's language usage, which is in line with related literature on this subject. The author demonstrates a firm grasp of the subject, utilizing his exegetical and theological expertise to provide a compelling and comprehensive exposition of the key arguments underpinning the book's thesis. The book offers a rich and detailed exploration of church planting, and the author offers a deft and nuanced analysis of its complexities.

The book's biblical and practical theological justifications are a salient feature of the author's argumentation. Jones effectively demonstrates how the proposed recommendations and suggestions are rooted in sound biblical principles and are practically applicable to the realities of church planting. This is indicative of the author's deep understanding of the theological implications of church planting and its relationship to the biblical doctrine of missions.

Any institution involved in the education and training of church planters and pastors would benefit significantly from this book. Its accessible style, thorough research, cogent arguments, and strong theological underpinnings make it an essential resource for those who seek to engage meaningfully with the subject of church planting.

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