

# Calling for a New Paradigm for Mobilization and Ministry to the Unreached

Since Ralph Winter first stirred awareness of unreached peoples, a large portion of the global mission effort, with its supporting mobilization, has:

- emphasized sending missionaries to unreached peoples, but often
  - sent them without adequate for cross-cultural realities, and
  - not challenged the traditional church planting models, which *hinder* reaching those very peoples.

Donald McGavran addressed this very directly in his (under-circulated) 1981 article in the [\*Perspectives Reader\*: “A Church for Every People: Plain Talk about a Difficult Subject.”](#)<sup>1</sup> In **my** words, McGavran:

- observed that *unreached* peoples only become *reached* through indigenous movements,
- demonstrated how the “traditional” church planting method *hinders* such indigenous movements, and
- stated (twice, for emphasis) that 90% of missionaries use this *counterproductive* “traditional” method.

In technical terms the “**traditional**” method described by McGavran uses extraction evangelism to form *conglomerate* congregations:

- A missionary family or team witnesses to many scattered individuals, and
- draws those who respond (often without their family)
- to follow Christ and fellowship together (as strangers to one another, gathered by the missionaries).

Such traditional church planting generally:

- fights *against* existing social structures—winning individuals away from their families, and
- patches these individuals, torn from their families, into new, unstable, “foreign” social structures.

This is problematic because

- most unreached peoples perceive Christianity as a threat to their culture or identity as a people, and
- as a result most unreached peoples have a deep-seated *fear* of losing their children to this “dangerous” outside influence (much as Western believers fear losing their children to cults such as Mormonism).

Thus traditional church planting usually drives unreached peoples to become *more* fearful. So the most fruitful *movements* typically develop where there has been the least traditional church planting.

Many missionaries have been allowed to naively assume that planting churches is the natural first step toward a church planting movement. However McGavran’s article makes it clear that:

- Not only are movements *not* a natural result of traditional church planting;
- but traditional church planting (as described above) is in reality a *major hindrance* to movements.

## **Clarification:**

- The “people movements” which inspired McGavran’s article generally:
  - involved group decisions to embrace Christianity,
  - required later foundational biblical instruction, and
  - did not spread easily beyond a single people.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://dropbox.com/s/z9gptcvza7pzaq4>

See my adaptation of McGavran’s article, with modern terminology and perspective: <http://dropbox.com/s/w312cqpotbgzcl8>

- By contrast, today's Church Planting Movements (CPM):
  - are grounded in discussion of the Bible and obedience to the God of the Bible,
  - tend to multiply farther, more spontaneously and more heterogeneously, and
  - often result in "spontaneous multiplication of movements" among other peoples.

Both forms of movement (people movements and church planting movements):

- work *with* and spread *within* existing social structures—winning families and strengthening existing relationships around the Bible,
- result in blessing *families* (fulfilling God's promise to Abraham), and
- generally lead whole peoples to become open to God's blessing through the "obedience of faith."<sup>2</sup>

Winter and McGavran both perceived that:

- a defining characteristic of unreached peoples is the *fear* of Christianity (as these unreached peoples perceive Christianity in light of their experience, the history of crusaders and colonialism, and portrayal of Christianity in the global media), and
- this fear can only be overcome through indigenous movements blessing whole families in each people.

Movements are also the only way that faith spreads faster than population growth.

In recent years many agencies have been training and urging their missionaries to pursue movements, yet strong influences perpetuate the traditional church planting model:

- a mobilization emphasis on *where* laborers are needed without attention to the need for *movements*,
- lack of awareness that Satan isolates whole peoples from the gospel through their *fear of Christianity*,
- neglecting God's emphasis on families in applying *individualistic* methods to *collectivistic* peoples,
- ignorance of *movements* as the biblical and historical means by which peoples become reached,
- lack of experience of *movements* among sending-base churches and believers,
- expectations placed on missionaries by national churches started through *traditional* church planting,
- the misunderstanding of traditional church planting as a positive step *toward* starting a movement,
- an assumption that larger teams working with national churches are better,<sup>3</sup> and
- classification of peoples by % Christian/Evangelical rather than the *presence/absence of a movement*.

These and other factors perpetuate *traditional* church planting, such that:

- most missionaries trained to pursue movements revert to *traditional* church planting on the field, and
- the greatest resistance faced by movement catalysts is often from believers in traditional churches.

## Conclusion

The time is long past for a clear shift in our mission and mobilization emphasis:

- *from* focusing on *where* missionaries are needed (country x or people y),
- *to* training believers to make disciples and start Bible discussions among unchurched families (right where they are),
- then guiding and supporting those who bear fruit
  - to relocate near the unreached
  - to discover and serve near culture locals with apostolic giftings
  - to start movements among the unreached.

---

<sup>2</sup> trusting obedience to God's will, as revealed in His Word

<sup>3</sup> Jim Haney of the IMB reports: "The percentage of outsiders on CPM teams we have assessed has a negative correlation to the likelihood of starting a movement. That is, the higher the percentage of local leaders and believers, the higher the likelihood that a movement is underway or will develop."