

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

Most of us have long thought starting *a church* was the first step and shortest path to *reaching a people*. We were wrong.

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

In **my** words, McGavran:

- observed that peoples are reached through *groups*, not evangelism of *individuals*.
- showed that “traditional” church planting *hinders* such movements, and
- stated (twice, for emphasis) that 90% of missionaries use this traditional approach.

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 fellowship together (as strangers to one another, gathered by and around 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* people groups perceive Christianity as a threat to their identity as a people, and
- therefore have a deep-seated *fear* of losing their children to this “dangerous” outside influence (much as Western believers might fear “losing” their children to cults such as Mormonism).

Traditional church planting drives unreached peoples toward being *more* fearful, and thus *movements* develop most freely where:

- there has been the least traditional church planting, and
- words and practices perceived by locals as “Christian” (such as “church” and “baptism”) are **not** introduced by outsiders but left for the Holy Spirit to speak about to local believers in *His* time.

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 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [MultMove.net/church-every-people](#)

See my adaptation of McGavran’s article, with modern terminology and perspective: [MultMove.net/movement-every-people](#)

- By contrast, today’s Church Planting and Disciple-Making Movements (CPM/DMM):
  - 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.”

Winter and McGavran both perceived that:

- One defining characteristic of unreached peoples is widespread *fear* of losing their children to Christianity (as *they* perceive Christianity through their experience, their history of crusaders and colonialism and portrayal of Christianity in the global media, etc.).
- This fear is only overcome through indigenous movements blessing whole *families* in each people.

Movements are also the only way 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 in mission field practice:

- an emphasis on *where* laborers are needed without attention to *movements* as how peoples are reached,
- 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 more expatriates facilitates movements,<sup>2</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 first on *where* missionaries are needed (country x or people y),
- *to* guiding any “outsiders” who go to unreached *ethne* to:
  - let go of practices which inhibit movements (like traditional church planting).
  - find/train local apostolic agents (with gifting and openness to learn) in movement principles, and
  - teach them to listen to Jesus and follow Him<sup>3</sup> in discipling existing relational networks.

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<sup>2</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."

<sup>3</sup> John 10:27: My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.