

Movements Fostering Movements

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Movements is the most frequently referenced topic in *Mission Frontiers*. In this edition of *Mission Frontiers* we take up the reality that in more and more contexts, new movements to Jesus are birthed by other movements, not always by new teams from further afield being sent to start from scratch.

This may seem like a recent trend, and in some ways it is. It is relatively recent in modern mission experience.

In fact, this dynamic was an element in the DNA of the original movements to Jesus in the New Testament. A quick read through Acts is sufficient to see this early trend.

When Jesus spoke of witness to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, He was not only referring to expansion (though He was). The narrative unfolds in such a way that we can trace how a movement emerging in one context got “near enough” to another context to jump the barrier. Sometimes this was providential, sometimes intentional (though I don’t see these as mutually exclusive).

An example:

The newly minted believers from the dramatic event at the festival of Pentecost in Jerusalem began to experience the dynamics of a movement. *Day by day the Lord added to their number*, we are told. They saw the dynamics of growth and they experienced the inner life of Acts 2:42-47.

Many of those believers were not from Jerusalem, so following the persecution described in Acts 7, we are told they began to make their way back to the many places from where they had come. Not

that they were fleeing the persecution; they were just going home.

We don’t know most of their stories. But we do know that some of them, for some reason, began to speak to Greeks of the Good News. It is unclear from the vocabulary if these were Greek-speaking Jews, or Greeks who had converted to Jewish monotheism but not Judaism (the “God fearers” described in Acts).

We don’t know if they knew about Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8, but they were certainly examples of what he spoke about: they were empowered as witnesses, and it bore fruit. The result was not just the church in Antioch, but a breakthrough in a new cultural context which, as we see in Acts 13 and following, is crucial in the leap into the Gentile world. The aspect of this I want to highlight is that the whole process can be described as a movement being fostered by another movement.

Later, we see that Paul’s dynamic apostolic band was made up largely of people drawn from very new, still-emerging movements. I think it is common for most readers of Acts and Paul’s letters to only see the specific churches that are named as the results of his work. But we have hints that these churches were not just isolated communities of believers. While this may be most explicit in Thessalonica, where we hear of the word expanding throughout a region, there are hints elsewhere that this was not an exception, but a norm (for example in the early verses of Colossians).

It does seem to be a norm, and it also seems to be natural. Natural does not mean automatic, but it does mean *by nature*. That is the key dynamic in movements fostering other movements: there is



something in the nature of a movement that carries with it more than expansion.

Movements carry a DNA that “naturally” causes more movements, because being a movement is part of the DNA itself.

I have seen this firsthand, but since you will read stories of such dynamics in this edition of *MF*, I won't tell my stories here. For some readers this will seem new. And, again, experientially it has been recent. But *Acts* shows us this is in the original blueprint, seed, and foundational DNA.

Why then is it new?

The most common experience most of us have with church is in our congregations. Most churches don't reproduce. In fact, most decline, and don't even grow by adding members! There are exceptions, and there are movements (house church movements, simple church movements, church-planting networks, etc.). But by and large, what we know of and experience in churches is far removed from anything like a movement.

It is such churches that most missionaries have experienced, so it is a challenge for most missionaries to catch the movement DNA. Until very recently few mission efforts have experienced *movements*.

That is changing.

And at the same time, it is still true that movements themselves frequently, and naturally, foster more movements. They carry the DNA. Movements are what they are, so movements are what movements give birth to.

This does not mean the day of sending as we have known it is over. Vast numbers of contexts will not be naturally bridged by current movements.

But the reality is that the best catalytic ingredient in fostering a new movement is a team or person or community or apostolic band that has been incubated within a movement, so that “like can birth like.”

May you be encouraged by what you read! 📖

