

Mission Viruses

That Can Kill Disciple Making Movements

BY ROY MORAN

Roy Moran, author of *Spent Matches and Hybrid Church*, is chairman of the board and North American Regional Director of New Generations and has been with New Generations since they were Cityteam Int'l. He also serves on the board of Beyond. He leads efforts in his hometown, Kansas City, through DiscipleKC an effort to fulfill the Great Commission.



C. J. Peters' life is the stuff of legend.

For 30 years he traipsed the world's most remote places hunting hot viruses and then chronicled his Indiana Jones life in a fascinating book (<https://www.amazon.com/Virus-Hunter-Thirty-Battling-Viruses/dp/0385485581>). Hot viruses are the ones known to be lethal to human life, like Ebola. It is more obvious today than ever before that we need people like C. J. on the dangerous front line identifying threats to human life before they are allowed to ravage through populations, indiscriminately extinguish human lives.

Not only are there viruses that can extinguish human life, but there are also viruses that stop dead in its tracks the movement of the Good News of Jesus. Wait, I know what you are thinking, "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation." We are not saying that there is anything wrong with the biblical gospel, but often the very methods

we use to plant the gospel are counter-productive to it reaching the commission Jesus gave us.

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Whether it was Baron Justinian von Welz, a Lutheran noble of the 17th century, or Hudson Taylor in the 19th century who coined or popularized the term "Great Commission," it has become synonymous with the mission of Jesus' followers. We are called to "make disciples" of every *ethne*. Regardless of the etymological

arguments surrounding *ethne*, it is universally accepted that we are called to give every man, woman and child a repeated opportunity to see, hear and respond to the message of Jesus.

With the Great Commission as our primary mission, it seems necessary that we would want to hunt those things that keep this Good News from spreading. And spread it has over the past twenty years; we are seeing an increase in small outbreaks of the Good News spreading virally through populations even in the most difficult of circumstances (see Justin Long's blog for details). There are over 1,350 church planting movements currently being reported and at New Generations we are involved in 127 movements that have spread far and wide enough for us to be able to identify "virus killers" of these gospel movements.

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Just as C. J. Peters' work is valued by all sectors of society, especially in the midst of a pandemic, so must the work of our "virus hunters" be seen as paramount in gospel ministry. Why? Because there is nothing more important than eradicating gospel poverty. Early in Jesus' discipling of the Twelve He taught them to pray, "may it be on earth as it is in heaven." There is no gospel poverty in heaven. In the kingdom of heaven everything is ordered on the character of the King. The glory of God our King, in His experienced goodness, orders heaven because He is the king and it is His kingdom. Everyone there is a child of the King because of the gospel.

As we seek to fuel the efforts of fulfillment of the Great Commission we see that that fulfilling the promise of Habakkuk 2:14—finding and extinguishing everything that hinders, creates friction and stops the movement of the gospel—becomes our priority.

Biological viruses are classified on the basis of shared properties and grouped at different hierarchical levels of

order, family, subfamily, genus and species. More than 30,000 different viruses are known today and grouped in more than 3,600 species, in 164 genera and 71 families. Disciple Making Movement killing viruses also come in families with a variety of expressions. Let's look at five families of viruses and the species that find their way into some movements of the gospel.

Exceptionalism: a dependency on individuals with exceptional passions, enthusiasm, temperament, skill and gifts.

Materialism: the naive practice of allowing money into the wrong places in movements.

Professionalism: the inherent belief that the trained, qualified or certified are more dependable than those who lack formal training.

Mechanicalism: a belief that movements are a matter of physical effort rather than spiritual power.

Partialism: the practice of fusing several different movement strategies together.

Exceptionalism (not in order of priority) is a cultural phenomenon that plagues humanity. Whether it is a set of letters before or after a name or public acclamation for talent, we have a fond affection for the exceptional. It doesn't matter if it's music, athletics, academics or the Church, those with exceptional skills are often elevated to positions of influence or counted more valuable than the rest.

Exceptionalism in movements arises when we become dependent—for instance—on highly gifted trainers. Training rubrics that require better than average presentation skills eliminate ordinary disciples from passing on the training. The problem is not with having some gifted practitioners, but for the gospel to consistently multiply through ordinary people everything has to multiply at every level. That means that all activities that foster movement must be available to the everyday people. If outreach strategies require special skills, if training can't be delivered by ordinary people, if coaching regimes can't be accomplished by ordinary people or then a movement will experience friction due to the dependence on exceptionally talented people.

The theological antidote to exceptionalism is found in the concept of the priesthood of the believer. Peter calls each

follower of Christ a royal priest (1 Pet. 2:9) and declares that we have everything pertaining to life and godliness. (2 Pet. 1:3) Not to mention that Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations is given to every disciple since the first. However we organize the progress of the gospel, it must be bounded by the truth that every disciple gets to play, not just for a few exceptionally gifted ones. It is very common for people who seem very ordinary when they experience Disciple Making Movements (even oral learners or people who have not seen themselves as leaders before) to become extraordinary disciple-makers and church-planters.

Materialism addresses the relationship between money and movement. There is no argument that it takes resources to get the gospel where it is not. The controversy arises with how much, when and from whom does the money come.



Money paid to those involved in movement activity challenges the motives of those receiving the money and potentially creates a dependency between giver and receiver. The question arises: if there is no money will there be movement activity? Often, there is not.

Frequently money is best used to further activity that was already in progress. When you find a movement activist who could go further or faster with an investment toward transportation or Scripture resources for example, you have a situation where money and movement work. Since most movements are started by movements it is not unusual for movements to send workers to nearby neighbor groups that don't have the gospel available. Financial investment is necessary for these activities.

Not only is money and dependency an issue but also the use of money by "outside actors." More than once fruitful leaders of movement activity have been lured away with

money to another organization. The result is that the bad actors have surprising numbers they can report to their donors for a while because they have purchased them, but eventually the virus of dependency rises and often the movement slows or dies.

Professionalism is a two-edged sword. Certainly, gaining greater excellence of knowledge and skill is a worthy cause. When professionals appear, however, the masses begin to develop the attitude of leaving it to the professionals and it unintentionally creates passivity.

One of the maxims of movement is that an untrained insider is always more effective than a trained outsider. This cuts against the grain of a culture that values subject matter experts. It especially challenges cross-cultural workers and those who love to "do ministry" in foreign fields. In movements there are no heroes nor hero-makers, only ordinary people responding in obedience to Jesus.

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Jesus, upon healing the Gerasenes demoniac, refused to allow him to accompany the disciples but instead sent him home to speak of what God had done for him. This was a far cry from the route of qualifying, certifying or even the ordaining practices that we use today. Even at the site of Jesus' last command in Matthew 28, we are told in verse 16 that while some doubted, Jesus didn't hesitate to commission both doubters and worshippers. Jesus' practice was to release the willing rather than trust the qualified.

When the West hears of viral movements of the gospel in the east, the scientific thinking of the West kicks in; dissect, isolate, formulate and repeat. The desire to spread spiritual revolution globally is innocent and virtuous. Unfortunately, movements are God ordained and even though we can isolate certain practices that contribute to movements, they are in no way mechanical.

Mechanicalism denies the supernatural nature of the Spirit in the movement of the gospel. With great regularity we can correlate impressive movements of the

gospel with equally impressive outpouring of prayer. It would be a mistake to think we can simply raise the amount of hours we pray to generate movement. I live in a city that has had 24/7 prayer for years and yet have only seen short glimpses of gospel movement. We cannot bribe God with our prayers. But when extraordinary prayer and radical obedience meet with God's heart for the lost, He tends to do amazing things.

Similarly, many have gone through Disciple Making Movements training and become enamored with Discovery Bible Study (DBS). Mistakenly believing that Disciple Making Movements are synonymous with the obedience-based discovery Bible processes, they aggressively pursue the implementation of DBS believing a movement will break out. Again, God rejoices when His followers are obedient to His wisdom, but this one element rarely spawns a movement.

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There may be a set of irreducible minimum habits found in gospel movements but they are not a mechanical process that can be reproduced at human will. When God ordains and humans cooperate, movements



can break out.


Partialism is the last family of movement viruses we will address here. More than once I have watched very smart individuals from historic institutions sit in training by experienced movement catalysts, only to leave the training and during implementation add, subtract or self-style the habits of movements.

There is something deep, especially in Americans, that when confronted with something exciting responds, "I have a better idea." In the face of experience and proven results, we often believe we can make it better. Rather than practice what we are taught and let experience be our teacher, we practice an ignorant hubris by changing well worn practices.

Another species of this virus in the western tradition is fusion. A rage in the food world now, you can find any mixture of ethnic cuisines smashed together. Oftentimes, out of naïveté, new practitioners of movement strategies take a little from here, a little from there and self-style their own version of a movement strategy.

Despite the fact that most movements end up at the same place, they don't always take the same route to get there. The reasons may reside in many different variables, but denying the differences robs practitioners of different tools they can use to be more effective in varying circumstances.

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The word "movement" describes a gospel-phenomenon that signals changing from addition thinking to multiplication thinking. This thinking moves the potential of the progress of the gospel beyond population growth and bringing into view the prospect of fulfilling the Great Commission. That potential should be shepherded as aggressively as humanly possible. Viruses that threaten to kill movements must be brought into the light and killed as quickly as possible. 

MOVEMENT KILLERS

BY **JIM YOST**

Jim Yost and his wife Joan pioneered a church-planting in Irian Jaya, Indonesia (now Papua) in February of 1977 among the northern Sawi tribe located in the southern lowlands of Papua. After 20 years in that tribal location they moved to the north coast city of Sentani where they are now involved in ministry to troubled youth as well as to broken families. The power of God to transform broken lives has been evidenced in disciples making disciples who in turn are making disciples. Jim's growing burden is to catalyze Disciple Making Movements in Papua, throughout Indonesia and beyond.

For the last 20 years “movement thinking” has gained attention in the missional world. Whether you call it Church Planting Movements or Disciple Making Movements or Exponential Discipleship, it's undeniable that we are witnessing the book of Acts unfolding afresh with 3000 coming to faith in one day, 8000 in one week, 20,000 in just a few weeks. Movements are happening everywhere and if God is doing it in one place, it probably means He wants it to happen in all places!

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I am a DMM Catalyst and often I am contacted by folks who ask me, “Would you show us how to make a movement happen?” It's almost like people think I have a bag of secrets and all I have to do is put my hand into the bag and pull one out and give it to them and then a movement will take place. I always answer, “No man or woman can make a movement happen. Only God can cause a movement to happen. But when God is on the move, we can sure get in His way! Unknowingly we can thwart or slow down what God is doing. These are called “movement killers.” Here are five movement killers that we have recognized in recent years.

POPULARITY

When something we're doing is proving successful, the word gets out and it becomes popular and everyone wants to get on the bandwagon. Then innovation begins to stall because we've started focusing on things in the past or trying to “package” something for the general public. It seems like movements continue longer when they are kept a secret so we try to keep them under wraps until they are quite obvious.

In the last few years Disciple Making Movements have become quite popular in the region where I live and serve. Books have been published, seminars conducted, and it's been marketed as the new way to grow a church! A lot of attention has been given to one element of DMM—the Discovery Bible Study. A number of churches have plateaued in their growth, so when they hear about Discovery Bible Study they grab hold of it and turn all of their cell groups into DBS groups. They succeed in turning their church into a “Discipleship Church.” However, the end goal of not-yet believers coming into faith as part of a movement is never realized.

TRADITIONAL CHURCH CRITICISM

There are times when a spark of something very “contextual” begins and starts taking off, but when news of this reaches influential traditional church leaders they condemn it as heretical because it is not under their power or control. That criticism makes emerging leaders in a new movement question what they are doing.

In one fairly isolated rural area, a movement developed with hundreds of local people coming to faith. One of their emerging indigenous leaders suggested that as they showed their allegiance to Jesus in baptism that each person should carry a piece of firewood down to the river. They would make a big fire at the side of the riverbank and each baptismal candidate would lay a piece of wood into the fire stating, “This is my sin to be burned up to ash and the wind to take it away never to be seen by me again.” Then they would go down into the water and be baptized. It was a demonstrative way that they all would “feel” how their sins were forgiven by Jesus' sacrifice. News of what they were doing traveled to a nearby area where a church had been in existence for over 10 years. When the leaders of that church heard this news they were upset. They traveled for two days to get to this location where the movement was happening to tell everyone to stop. They said, “We received the Good News about Jesus before all of you so you must do this the same way we do it.

This wood burning stuff is not of God and must stop.” For a period of time, it did stop. But when these leaders returned to their region, the local emerging movement leaders started up again! So even though the movement slowed down, it didn’t completely stop.

LACK OF SPIRITUAL “FATHERING AND MOTHERING”

This is really connected with the previous movement killer. Despite criticism and even some faltering first moves, these emerging leaders can still make it *if* they have someone backing them up in a spiritual parenting role. This is huge. There are no movements without spiritual parenting.

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I am a product of the Jesus People Movement in California some 50 years ago. It was during that hippie era when God really got ahold of my life. It was very messy and seemingly out of control. People were coming to faith rapidly but people were falling pretty fast, too. There was only one mature leader named Pastor Chuck Smith. He raised up leaders from the harvest—young people coming out of bad backgrounds—and put them into leadership positions only to see them fall. But Pastor Smith had a “father’s heart” and would pick the fallen back up and say, “I believe in you. You can do it.” That was the engine behind the Jesus People Movement. Movements are messy and they must have spiritual parents to succeed.

INAPPROPRIATE FUNDING

This is a tightrope that we always have to be walking. But the bottom line is this: if a movement isn’t happening without money, then it won’t happen with money. Whatever kind of assistance is needed, the timing and the people involved should always be determined by those in the middle of movements on the ground. When this type of information is offered from the outside then movements begin to stall.

A bottom-line value of movements that I’m associated with is this: no financial proposals are allowed. We take Luke 10 and Matthew 10 quite literally—the person inviting you into their house or *oikos* should provide shelter and food for you—so the not-yet believers are the

ones subsidizing movements! Why would they do that? Because they see the added value your presence makes among them. All ministry in movements is holistic and brings the kingdom of God to earth in practical ways that people see and want to get behind. People on the ground know where funds are most needed and how to get the assistance to where it’s needed without outside organizations insisting on foreign procedures.



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A growing movement was beginning to gain attention from the local government because many street children were turning their lives around through the multiplying of restorative discovery groups over a large urban area. The government then gave a financial gift so the leaders of this movement could build a building and have a place to conduct their activities. The leaders received the funds from the government and then got together for a meeting to decide how to proceed. They were in a dilemma. They asked, “If we build a building, does that send the wrong message to all the young people we serve? We are about building lives and not buildings. We must give the money back to the government.” They returned the funds back to the local government who was shocked and said, “This has never happened before! No one ever gives back money we give to them. These funds are from last year’s budget so it’s too late to return them to us.” The movement leaders asked, “Could we use the funds to build a medical clinic for the poor instead?” The government officials thought about the request and finally agreed. A medical clinic serving 200 people every day is now functioning



because of appropriate funding and many people are finding faith through these medical services.

LACK OF LEADERSHIP RENEWAL

In a healthy movement, leaders are being created at all levels all the time. However, when some experienced and gifted leaders stay in positions for too long then movements will stall. We've actually started creating time limits for leaders and an age limit in our youth movement. Leaders can't be over 25 years old!

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For the past number of years, we've been seeing a youth movement happen in the region where I live and work. Some people say movements have to be based on the nuclear family in homes, and ideally that is true. That's why in rural areas where movements are recorded, the Good News about Jesus travels through the

relationships of family members. But the reality in urban areas around the world is different. When people migrate to urban cities their families come under lots of pressure. Urban lifestyle pulls husbands and wives apart and it also pulls parents from children. In these urban centers, young people look for community among their peers instead of their nuclear family so the Good News travels through these peer communities. We have many different types of movements: hip-hop movements, punk movements, sports movements, motorcycle gang movements and more and they all produce their own leaders.

Recently, when I was speaking in a church in South Korea, I noticed that the number of young people in attendance was very low. I offered the advice to the leaders to start a hip-hop ministry with young people, but they did not receive my advice very well. They responded, "You can't gyrate your body and spin on your head like that in church!" I replied, "If you don't then you will lose a whole generation." I went on to explain how South Korea was number one in the hip-hop world and that would have more influence on young people than anything else in their country.



A year ago I gathered with 20 of my top leaders from our youth movement, both guys and gals age 17 to 25. All were highly involved in hip-hop, rap and DJ lifestyles. I asked them, “How many of you when you were still a child growing up at home had both parents with you? Raise your hand.” No one raised their hand. Then I asked, “How many of you had one parent around when you were younger?” Seven of them raised their hands. Finally I asked, “How many of you had neither a mom nor a dad at home when you were growing up?” 13 raised their hands. This is normal today for this generation. They are finding their way to a new way of doing church and seeing movement happen among them and a key is always reproducing leaders. It was at this meeting that they told me the current leaders must “pension” at 25 years of age to make room for the next generation of leaders.

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