

This process took almost eight years but it has finally stuck. Our leaders are strong on this one.

This illustrates the importance of the five steps, working carefully through a decision and making time to re-evaluate. This process allows new movements to develop their knowledge and application of Scripture. It gives them a process, a habit and experience in using the Bible instead of always depending on an outside expert.

I deeply believe that the Spirit of God will use the Word of God to teach the people of God.

But....

I get mixed reactions when I share this case, and understandably so. For some it is an encouragement that God and the Scriptures and God's people are together able to steer things in good directions, even if it may take time.

But I also get asked: "Kevin, why didn't you intervene sooner? Look how long it took. How much difficulty could have been avoided?"


It's a fair set of questions.

Let's face it: outsiders exhibit lots of influence whether in insider or other movements and whether we want to or not. But that influence can be helpful, or unhelpful, and can result in growing health of a movement or its leaders, or not.

Had I exerted more influence, it is possible that the final decision about Plan A would have surfaced sooner. It is also possible, I would say probable, that having done so, more leaders would have proceeded to do what they thought best in spite of that but would have done so secretly. The process we followed allowed for an environment in which leaders could share openly, search Scripture without a pre-decision about what they ought to find, and thus allowed for a movement in which the Scriptures could, did and do, shape things.

But, finally, was this the right approach? Yes, it is my conviction that this is healthy. But what if I was wrong to wait?

What gives me renewed assurance as I ask this is that even if my approach was wrong in part or in whole, my confidence grows that even so, if I work at keeping people grounded in the conviction that they can expect to receive guidance from the Lord as they search the Scriptures together in the face of tough issues, God will bring them to where they need to be.

The Spirit of God will indeed, and does indeed, use the Word of God to guide, teach and shape the people of God. 

"Insider" Movements: Where Does This End Up?

It has become more and more common in my experience for people who have questions and concerns to arrive at a point where they can see a space for insider movements, and for individuals or small groups of believers to remain "inside" as a stage of their journey, with the assumption that at some point a break will need to be made and should be encouraged.

And so, in this article I want to raise the question about the long-term future, vision, and hopes for insider movements.

I have my own thoughts on this, but ultimately what matters will be the answers that leaders of various movements give,

and what their fellow leaders see and understand and discern. Within the circles I am aware of and the leaders I relate to there are really three ways different leaders see the future of the movements they are part of.

Critical Mass, and then Separate as Christians

There are some I know who hope their movements can stay within their religious communities, accepted as such, until the movements are large enough to step out, or more likely, be persecuted out. At that point they would be able to stand and perhaps be too big for large scale persecution.

I want to raise the question about the long-term future, vision, and hopes for insider movements.

Let me hasten to say that none of the movements I know of are able to fully avoid persecution at present, or ever. As vocal witnesses for Jesus, our brothers and sisters face rejection, abuse, and some have been martyred.

However, the hope of such leaders I would see in this category is that their movement's numbers would become big enough eventually to survive as a more overtly Christian movement. They imagine this outside of their religious heritages, but not tied to current denominations explicitly. More on that later!

I know of one such movement personally. It began as very much an "insider" movement in the older sense, meaning that believers maintained religious forms, rethought how the holy books and traditions of their people could be understood or re-understood in the light of Jesus, etc. But at some stage along the line, *as they continued in Scripture and in conversation with alongside friends*,¹ they determined that God's preferred plan for them was going to include getting to a point of critical mass in terms of size, and then separating from their birth community's religion in more fundamental ways.

Yeast in the Dough

This is the viewpoint of leaders of movements who sincerely believe that their version of adhering to the religion they were born in, now shaped by Jesus and the Bible, is in fact the truth; the true way not only to be a disciple of Jesus but the true way to adhere to their religion.

This conviction has emerged as these leaders have *continued in Scripture and in conversation with alongside friends*.

This is the version of "insiderness" that has most typically been the focus of the controversies and debates among Christians and mission workers. It has been the most hotly disputed. But as I am trying to point out, it is not the only position taken by leaders of insider movements.

Wheat and Tares

In some ways this category is a bit of a hybrid between the first two. The leaders I am thinking of want very much to stay inside. But they are aware that the likelihood of ever getting to the size and influence needed to change their religion itself from the inside is slim to impossible.

They are realistic that it is very likely that eventually sometime soon that they will be targeted by the majority and persecuted more overtly and consistently than at present.

They know that, although *they* can articulate their understanding of what they see as the true version of the birth religion, in a way that matches their faith in Jesus and the Scriptures, the reality is that others will not, and will eventually see them as heretical at best, apostate more likely, and seek to persecute them into extinction.

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¹ See the article related to "alongside" and its meaning in this edition of *MF*

In that element they share the hope or expectation of the first example I gave.

But, their expectation is to be persecuted out as an unacceptable version of what it means to be an adherent of whatever their birth religion may have been, which is what they would still claim to be (an adherent, though one who follows Jesus and the Bible).

In that element they share the aspirations of the “Yeast in the Dough” example.

As with the other two, this conviction has emerged as these leaders again have *continued in Scripture and in conversation with alongsider friends*.

Implications?

First, it has probably become obvious from the previous that there is a common thread for how the future is being determined in these movements. Or a thread with two strands, the first of which is: continuing in Scripture.

Elsewhere in this edition I talk about the importance of continued Scriptural input and digging, and I refer the reader there. Suffice it to say here that when I say that Scripture will help leaders make these decisions, I am not suggesting a simplistic view of pointing to the Bible and leaving people on their own or proof-texting, etc.

Second, in the second strand in the thread I just mentioned there is the question of the role of alongsider friends in determining future directions. One of the criticisms leveled at advocates of insider movements is that we are really the ones shaping them, that without our input and influence they would be very different.

My response would be: undoubtedly true. And I would add, this is true of the role and influence of outsiders in any sort of movement. The question then should be, what sort of influence is best or right?

I will answer that here by making a simple observation. The three types of future I describe above have in common that insider leaders are turning to Scripture. They also have in common that they have had input from the same alongsider: myself.

As such, the point I want to make is that alongsiders can serve and help movement leaders without necessarily putting the stamp of the alongsider’s preferences on a movement. That does happen of course. But it is also possible for the role of the alongsider to be that of helping leaders use Scripture in healthy ways to come to their own decisions and visions.

Third, I want to highlight something just stated about these decisions. It has been said but is important to repeat: they are all made by the leaders themselves. They go in different directions but the leaders are making these decisions (elsewhere in *MFI* talk about this factor as one of the three defining marks of “insider movements”).

I repeat that here in part to prepare for the fourth comment.

And that fourth comment is that the same leaders who arrived at such different conclusions are not only connected by the same alongsider, but they are in fellowship with each other. They meet, they share, they talk, they study Scripture together, they pray, they know that they differ, and they sometimes question each others’ wisdom. But they are committed to each other.

In Romans 14 and 15 Paul writes to encourage the Romans to respect the sincere differences held by brothers and sisters among them. These were not merely issues of preferences or culture.

Something We Can Learn?

And *that* last point suggests to me that perhaps we can learn some things from insider movements. Yes there are questions. Yes there are concerns. But, at least in the instances I have shared here, we can at a minimum learn and be encouraged to pursue a deeper sort of unity than mere agreement.

In Romans 14 and 15 Paul writes to encourage the Romans to respect the sincere differences held by brothers and sisters among them. These were not merely issues of preferences or culture. They were divided over what their consciences dictated to them about religious issues of food and specific days of observance. These were religious matters. And Paul’s advice on these was to pursue a more difficult and challenging type of unity than uniformity and agreement.

Paul believed they could rise to the maturity needed to be able to remain in unity while disagreeing profoundly.

His foundational principle was that the kingdom’s essence was in “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17)

May we all be marked by such maturity, and may these three foundations be strong among us! 