

EVERYONE IS

WELCOME

“Insider” Movements

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Dear Reader,

Blessings and welcome to this edition of *Mission Frontiers* (*MF*). In the following set of articles, we are knowingly taking up what continues to be a divisive and controversial topic: insider movements.

I say “we”, but as you will see from the articles, I am the author of the six different pieces we include here. That may need some explanation.

Before I get to that, notice several other articles as well. There are some significant pieces about movements and being a catalyst for movements. While not directly connected to the questions of “insider” movements, the issues discussed there are very relevant.

First, I have been involved with what eventually came to be known as insider movements since the early 1990s. I started writing about them in the late 1990s, and then more regularly after 2000. So, I am an insider to the insider conversation, you might say.

Second, having one author has made it easier to present a number of angles on the topic in an integrative way. I make no claim that I represent all insider movements, or their advocates, or even everyone in Frontier Ventures, but we do offer this edition as an important contribution to an important topic.

Third, I have been involved in the Bridging the Divide (BtD) conversations and meetings since they began just about 10 years ago. I am very grateful for what I have learned in that process from so many colleagues, both fellow advocates and sincere critics. A number of these brief articles will illuminate ways my thinking has changed over the years (this whole enterprise is worth a look, and BtD has a public website at <http://btdnetwork.org/>).

Fourth, I am the General Director of Frontier Ventures (FV), the organization that publishes *MF*, and as such I wanted to take this opportunity to articulate things from that seat and for our readers who also follow the progress of our organization. *MF* is not only a vehicle of Frontier Ventures’ ideas, of course. But since it is one of our channels historically, it seemed fitting to shape this edition around giving an FV voice to these important themes.

Finally, FV has recently completed a process of discernment about how to reshape and re-express our vision and mission for the next phase of our calling. And it seems a good place here to connect that process to these articles about insider movements.

Our vision and mission:

VISION: The fullness of God’s blessing for all peoples and the reconciliation of all things in Christ

MISSION: To nurture new ways for least reached peoples to experience the fullness of life in Jesus

For those who have followed us over the years, this should sound new but yet deeply familiar! And what I have seen in insider movements is a growing number of people experiencing God’s blessing, and experiencing reconciliation, because they are experiencing more and more of the fullness of life in Jesus!

So, six articles from me. And in this column I want to outline the six and show how they fit together:

1. Insider Movements: Should We Still Be Talking About Them? Yes and No

Here I take up the earliest definitions and my latest thinking about what insider movements really are in their essence. Rather than tying them to specific religious expressions, I propose a deeper core: who makes decisions, how, and why?

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2. Insider Movements: How Do You Know if You Have One?

I will address topics here that do not only affect how we understand insider movements. The whole question of measuring movements is a vital one, and one we espouse in *MF*. Look again at the front cover for an example: you will find the latest count of movements among the unreached. How “measurements” are applied in the case of insider movements may be a uniquely challenging question, but it is not totally separate from concerns about any movement.

3. Insider Movements: The Role of Being an Alongsider

Just as new vocabulary emerged to try to explain what was happening in certain contexts, and thus the term “insider” was coined, so too, there is increasing research and conversation about how to talk about the role of the missionary, or worker. The natural option, in the case of insider movements would have seemed to be outsider.

But that conveys neither the aspirations of workers nor the reality of how they work.

More and more the term “alongsider” is used and this is my brief attempt to describe that. Again, this is not unique to insider movements. The role of workers in mission in general is important to reconsider.

4. Insider Movements: How Do They Keep “Right”?

In this article I take up the concern people feel about how to assure that insider movements do not deviate into syncretism and false teaching. Yet again: a concern that is true for any movement, and indeed for us in the west (and us individually by the way). What I will share here in fact should help us all, I would hope. I have used the model presented there in church settings in the USA to solve questions as well.

5. Insider Movements: Where Does This End Up?

Typically, conversations about insider movements focus, rightly, on the past history, development, and present dynamics of a given movement. However, it is important to ask about their future trajectories. And here I describe, not prescribe, three main “futures” as those have been described to me by various insider movement leaders.

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6. Insider Movements: Common Concerns

No discussion of insider movements is fully complete without attempting to address some of the more common questions and concerns. My contribution is not comprehensive, but I hope it helps clarify and explain some concerns.

Conclusion, and Next

As I close, a few comments about the approach here, and about the future.

First, given the wide distribution of *MF*, I have tried to remove references that would make an observation specific to a particular region, country, people group or religious heritage. As such, the “feel” may be generic and not specific or incarnate. But be assured I am writing about and from experience with actual people, actual movements and real issues.

Second, the future. I feel keenly that three of the biggest looming missiological, theological and biblical questions for the mission movement to address as we move into a next era of mission, are all issues which have been clarified and surfaced in the process of addressing the insider movement controversies. I am not suggesting no one asked these before or saw them before, of course, but the insider movement debate and reality has caused some of us to begin to ask about these three issues in new ways, and to ask new questions about them. While there is not space to address them deeply here, the articles in this edition of *MF* will cause some readers to wonder about them. The three are:

What is church?

What in its essence is community in Jesus, and what is the interplay between this communal reality and the communal reality of one’s birth religion?

What is religion?

What is the relationship of religion, culture, humanity? How do religious identity and living in Christ impact each other?

What is a missionary?

What are we learning and discovering about the qualities and character needed in people called to serve cross-culturally in mission, no matter where they come from, or where or to whom they go?

I believe these things are imbedded, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, throughout this edition of *MF*. But they will be looming larger and larger in the mission movement, and in Frontier Ventures as we seek to follow Jesus into the coming next years.

May what we do and who we are result in the fullness of His blessing for all the families and peoples of the earth.

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