

George Patterson and the Movement-Movement

BY KEVIN HIGGINS

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In this issue we are remembering and reflecting on the life of George Patterson. I take this as an opportunity to reflect as well on the movement-movement, that is the reality that we are in the midst of—a movement in which more and more emphasis is being placed on movements.

Today there are more movements to Jesus than any time in history so far as we know. Many are documented with reliable updates and reporting. Today there is more training available than ever to help form movement catalysts. There are more varieties of such training, with more varieties of principles and approaches.

And one of the most influential pioneers of this movement-movement is George Patterson.

My purpose is not to dig into his principles or history. Instead, I will take a more personal approach to his impact, meaning his impact in my own thinking and application over the years.

I first came across George's work when I was serving in a Muslim context and looking for "models." While George's work was primarily in Latin America, he was on the radar of others who sought to apply what George had been learning, and do so in very different contexts, such as where I was.

In fact, several colleagues from another organization were proactively trying to apply George's Phases and "Seven Commands of Christ."

I had a mixed reaction. On the one hand, it seemed simplistic and reductionist to say "there are seven commands." In fact, my whole approach to Scripture in the context of discipling movement leaders is to allow *them* to discover such things. They might find eight commands, or twelve, or four, for example. They might categorize things differently. I prefer that approach because it prevents the idea that an outside expert has been able to discover a definitive number of steps, or principles, or truths and now we need to depend on that expert to give them to us.

I am not saying there are no steps, or principles or truths to be discovered, and I am not saying a missionary should not help others discover them. But I am more happy to discover them together. And in the process, I often see some I would not have seen otherwise!

But, as I say, it was a mixed reaction. There is value in a simple, summarized, easy to recall set of tools or principles or steps. And George did that brilliantly. The simplicity can give a great deal of confidence to the *worker*. It offers the realization, "I can do this. It is not rocket science."

I later encountered George again, this time in the form of a computerized training program created to try to help more workers like myself learn what he had discovered and developed. Keep in mind,

when I say computerized I am looking back to the early 2000s and this was training not available “in the cloud,” but in physical material that had to be inserted!

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Be that as it may, it was an early attempt to help training go viral.

Again, a mixed reaction in me!

I found myself asking about the missing elements, the hands-on, person to person, incarnational dimension needed (in my experience) for this kind

of training to really take root. So, I was skeptical. Still am skeptical when this human element is missing in training.

However, George was creatively pioneering attempts to overcome a training barrier. I never met him but based on what I know second or third hand, my guess is that he would read my comments above and my reticence about the human touch and reply, “well, of course! I don’t intend this computerized training to replace that but to supplement it.” And with that, I would agree.

In conclusion I want to applaud, and in this case I have no mixed feelings. I applaud a pioneer on whose shoulders many in the movement-movement stand. I applaud a man of God who stayed focused on his sense of purpose, a long obedience in the same direction, as it were. I applaud the willingness to take the heat of criticism in the earliest days of the movement-movement.

Thank you George Patterson, and thank you Father for all you enabled to be done through him. ☑

