

# The Potential for Church Planting Movements in the Western World

By Ed Stetzer and David Garrison

## The Holy Grail

When Ed<sup>1</sup> served at the North American Mission Board (NAMB) several years ago, a team of church planting strategists returned from a meeting in London very excited about the prospect of rapidly reproducing Church Planting Movements (CPMs). The excitement was contagious, and Ed, as well as others from NAMB, began the process of locating and reporting on movements occurring in the United States. They began to hear about movements in Colorado, California, Rhode Island, and Texas.

While conducting research for the church planting group, Ed contacted or visited each of these locations and engaged in conversations with leaders serving in the field. Talking with the folks in Colorado, he said, "I hear you guys have a church planting movement." Their reply was curious. "No," they said, "We don't have a movement, but they do in California." So Ed called California and they said, "We don't have a movement, but you should call Texas." So Ed called Texas, and they said, "Nope. Try Colorado." The reality turned out to be very different than the rumor.

Everybody hears the buzz about a movement, and everybody thinks there is one. However, when we begin to investigate, it becomes a lot like looking for the Holy Grail in the middle ages. Everyone *knows* that it exists, and everyone *knows* someone who has seen it. But, the Grail always ends up two villages away, and when you search two villages away, the treasure never materializes.

Should we conclude, then, that CPMs, as we are jointly characterizing them, can't occur in the Western world? Can they take place in Western contexts such as North America, Europe, Australia, etc.? Are we destined to keep chasing this legendary Holy Grail of church planting down obscure dusty roads without ever being able to see the elusive treasure? Or can real, explosive, exponential, Acts-like church growth happen in our corner of the world, like it is happening in other places around the globe at this very moment?

In this paper, we will introduce the nature of true CPMs, as they are already occurring, and then discuss how we might begin to see such movements take place in the industrialized West. David is the author of the groundbreaking book *Church Planting Movements* and one of the world's leading authorities on global CPMs. Ed is the author of *Planting Missional Churches* and considered an expert on North American church planting. Together, we hope to synthesize our experience and agreements, analyze the difficulties and differences, and theorize how the church in the West can cultivate indigenous CPMs in North America, in particular like the ones we have seen around the world.

We do not believe that Church Planting Movements are the only way that God is at work in the world. However, we do believe that He is at work in such movements. Many have called for such movements in the West. Our intent is to consider what such movements might look like if they took place in a North American context.

---

<sup>1</sup> To make reading easier, the authors will avoid using first person "I," and instead will use their first names.

## **What Is a Church Planting Movement?**

In the Two-Thirds World—parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America—millions of people are coming to faith in Jesus Christ through the startling reality of CPMs. These movements do not appear to be limited to one geographical, cultural or sociological sector of the world. They have been documented in relatively affluent and impoverished urban areas, as well as rural, pluralistic, Hindu, Buddhist, communist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, animistic, and even post-Christian secular contexts.

A CPM is “a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment.” We will outline some common characteristics of CPMs that we both detect, but the wording of this nutshell definition is intentional. CPMs are rapid and multiplicative in their starting of new churches because they move quickly to plant, and their planting produces exponential growth. Two churches becomes four, four becomes sixteen, and so on. And such movements are indigenous because they grow up from within, even if a missionary or planter acts as the initial catalyst.

However, this is to be distinguished from individual planters saturating an area with new church starts. In this individual planter model, churches only get planted if the church planter is heavily involved, and it takes much, much longer to start any significant number of churches—it is definitely more of an addition model. With CPMs, the gospel always enters an area from the outside, but when it truly takes root, a movement blossoms from and within the locals.

From David’s hard-earned expertise based on years of hands-on work within CPMs in the Two-Thirds world, he has identified “Ten Universal Elements of CPMs”:

- 1) Prayer;
- 2) Abundant Gospel Sowing;
- 3) Intentional Church Planting;
- 4) Scriptural Authority;
- 5) Local Leadership;
- 6) Lay Leadership;
- 7) Cell or House Churches;
- 8) Churches Planting Churches;
- 9) Rapid Reproduction; and
- 10) Healthy Churches.

These factors are descriptive of actual CPMs, not hypothetical elements that might be present. This is an important distinction: this list is based on observation and not hope.

Ed’s decades-long work as a church planter, pastor, and missiologist has led to his drafting of “Ten Marks of Movemental Christianity,” presented at the 2007 Exponential Conference in Orlando, FL and subsequently listed on his blog, [www.edstetzer.com](http://www.edstetzer.com). The focus of the list was on what movemental Christianity might look like if it took place in the West:

- 1) Prayer;
- 2) Intentionality;
- 3) Sacrifice;

- 4) Reproducibility;
- 5) Theological Integrity;
- 6) Incarnation;
- 7) Empowerment;
- 8) Charitability;
- 9) Scalability; and
- 10) Holism.

Ed's list is intentionally hypothetical—it must be as there are no Church Planting Movements to analyze in North America. Furthermore, Ed has expressed some reservations if church planting movements, as Garrison has defined them, can be found in Western industrialized democracies.

As one can see, some overlap exists between David's elements and Ed's marks. Some of this overlap, as well as the ambiguity of some of the labels, will be fleshed out below. In addition, it probably bears mentioning that we do not agree on all points. Naturally, our experiences are not identical nor our areas of ministry emphasis. Nevertheless, our differences are not as profound as our agreements. We have a unified hope that CPMs can take root in the industrialized West, particularly North America.

### **The Western Dilemma: Institutionalization and Ecclesionomics**

Thirty-four western, industrialized democracies exist in our world. *Not one* CPM can be observed among majority peoples in any of those democracies.<sup>2</sup> It has been years since true CPMs have graced the North American continent, most noticeably in the remarkable movements that swept frontier America from 1700 to 1900. This CPM resulted in multiple churches in virtually every county, city, town, and hamlet in North America.

Since 1900, however, we have not seen a CPM in the US but, rather, an internal churning of American churches in the lower socio-economic sectors of society. Particularly, this has been the case in the rapid proliferation of Baptist and Pentecostal churches, coupled with the institutionalization and resulting ossification of mainline Protestant denominations—Episcopalian, Presbyterian and Methodist—that were the dominant traditions of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Why aren't CPMs of the two-thirds world variety occurring in the Western world now? Why haven't we seen a rapid, multiplicative growth of evangelistic churches in over a century? We are haunted by the reality that CPMs have transpired on North American soil previously, when America was a developing nation itself.

Between 1795 and 1810, the Baptists and the Methodists won the Western frontier in what can be characterized as the only effective CPM ever to occur in the United States. The questions arise then: Why haven't we seen it since? And is the answer due to other external factors that have yet to be adapted to or dismantled, or is it simply that nobody in the US has really even tried to create the environment for a true CPM?

Many will claim the former, because plenty have indeed tried to create momentum for movemental Christianity out of their multiplying house church ministries.

---

<sup>2</sup> We recognize that there are groups that are experiencing strong multiplication and evangelism. However, they do not meet the definition of a CPM as described in David's book.

Many of these indigenous missionaries have tried to implement everything they've seen in CPMs in other parts of the world to no avail. Perhaps, some factors cannot be imported. Perhaps, some can be imported, but must be adapted or tweaked. Or perhaps, some factors hinder the reproduction of CPMs in the West that are yet to be identified.

Certainly, no movement will take place apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, and none of this speculation is to presume that the Spirit will, unlike the wind, blow where *we* please. Still, it does beg the question—why are faithful, gospel-driven, Spirit-filled planters and pastors, who are prayerfully and evangelistically implementing CPM elements in Western indigenous populations, not seeing CPM results? Conceivably, we have seen pre-movements in the West, but why no breakthrough? Even if movements have been *tried*, why haven't they thrived?

The answer may not fully lie in what the church is or isn't doing, but rather what the church in the West has become. Intrinsicly, nothing is wrong with the institutional church, and she is often criticized for all the wrong reasons. However, inherent weaknesses result from institutionalization—and churches that are stylistically contemporary, proclamationally relevant, and aesthetically casual are still part of the institutional church—that must be accounted for in this discussion.

### **Institutionalization**

The term *institutionalization* is widely used in social theory to denote the process of embedding something—for example a concept, a social role, particular values, norms or modes of behavior—within an organization, a social system, or a society until it becomes an established custom or norm in that system. Churches become institutionalized as they embed themselves in a society as an established norm within that society. The process they use to achieve this is both unconscious and conscious.

The unconscious process of institutionalization occurs as church members experience the socioeconomic uplift of the gospel, which may occur within one generation or may take place over several generations. As the Christian lifestyle removes the convert from patterns of sloth, family neglect, gambling, alcohol abuse, and womanizing, both the individual and his family are elevated from poverty-inducing habits into an environment where steady employment, consistent child rearing, education and general social stability become the norm. A byproduct of this socioeconomic lift is a natural drift away from those who continue in the non-Christian lifestyle.

While this sort of socioeconomic uplift is desirable for the individual and his or her family who experience it, this uplift will naturally hinder evangelistic access to the lost. Moreover, rapid multiplication is impeded because the second and third generation Christians are distanced from the community of their non-Christian forbearers. That is unconscious institutionalization—it leads to churches and Christians separating themselves from unbelievers, the culture, the world, and the community at large.

Conscious institutionalization occurs when brush arbor meetings are institutionalized into brick and mortar buildings. Uncredentialed revival preachers give way to seminary trained and, eventually, doctorate-enhanced pastoral leaders. Furthermore, as the institution grows, churches accumulate staff to meet a growing array of congregational needs, thereby making the congregation more and more internally self-

sufficient and less reliant upon non-Christians with whom they might otherwise have redemptive contact and relationships.

The full flowering of this conscious institutionalization occurs as children are born into suburban mega-churches far removed from the multi-ethnic, non-Christian confines of the urban center. They are christened or dedicated at infancy, nurtured in graded Sunday school programs, which are then supplemented by the church academy of grades K-12, followed by admission into a regional Christian university. All of this is done in the name of Christian nurture and excellence, but the toll is a deeper and deeper insulation of the evangelical individual, family, and church from the non-Christian community that exists outside of the evangelical institution.

The point of this discussion is not to say that all institutions, like, for example, evangelical mega-churches are intentionally anti-evangelistic. (Ed preaches to one every week.) Rather, it is to point out that they must consciously work harder and harder to engage the lost due to the supplanting of a more natural evangelistic impulse by the comfort and familiarity of their own Christian culture. Too many of these churches have judged their success simply by lauding a growing membership, which actually reflects the attraction of existing Christians who are drawn to the wonderful offerings of the mega-church. These Christians end up choosing a cloistered version of the “city of God” over the opportunity to create “cities of God” throughout the culture—they could be a reflection of Christ by actually engaging the non-Christian or even anti-Christian world outside their walls.

The institution, which first ascended out of the culture, eventually became acclimated to the culture and lost its impulse for meaningful, evangelistic engagement. For example, momentum grew in the church among Latino immigrants, and the result was indeed a sort of socio-economic redemption. A “lift” took place, and if any proto-movement existed out of that momentum, it unfortunately became hindered by the body’s benefiting from the transformation of social status. In addition, momentum was lost as more Americanized versions of church were adopted to the extent that those expressions of church did not connect as well with unreached Latinos. The unconscious institutional transformation was created by the conversion to Protestantism and the immigration to the United States that resulted in economic uplift.

In his book *Reinventing American Protestantism*, Donald Miller described the shift presented by movements such as the Vineyard, Calvary Chapel, and others. Movements like the Vineyard were once multiplying exponentially but are now starting new churches at a rate of only 10% per year—a strong percent, but certainly a loss of exponential momentum. (Ed recently addressed the Vineyard church national leadership, were these issues and how to address them was the focus.)

### **Ecclesionomics**

Economics is another factor often overlooked in considering the absence of CPMs in the West—what we might call “ecclesionomics.” The economics at play in institutional churches may in fact hinder such a movement. Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner’s recent book *Freakonomics* reveals some of the invisible economic incentives and disincentives to human behavior. We can see these same invisible incentives and disincentives at work in CPMs.

The way Protestant Christianity “does church”—and this is true whether it's in India or Africa or America—typically means there's a building and there's a salaried pastor and/or staff. These two elements alone create an entire web of ecclesionomic behavioral responses that impede CPMs. In Protestant Christianity, “building” + “program” + “clergy” = “church.” (Rather than, as Ed has written: “body” + “mission” + “kingdom” = “church”<sup>3</sup>)

In the small group Bible study Ed wrote called “SENT: Living the Missional Nature of the Church,” he compared and contrasted the two approaches:

The biggest disparity between the two models can be seen in the focus. In the Constantinian model, the force is centripetal, moving inward. In the biblical model, the force is centrifugal, pushing outward...

Think of it in terms of a yo-yo. When you swing a yo-yo around, two forces are at work simultaneously. The centrifugal force (technically 'inertia') pushes the yo-yo outward, and at the same time, the centripetal force is exercised by the string, pulling the yo-yo inward. In the yo-yo, these forces are in balance at the same time.

The church's challenge is similar. At any given moment, there is a centripetal force pulling us inward, tempting us to care most about ourselves, our comfort, and our development. This strong force is actually part of human nature, and it results in things like the Constantinian model of church. What makes it even more complicated is that the thicker the string, the greater the force pulling inward. So the more stuff we have-- the more programs, buildings, and clergy we add-- the greater the temptation to focus primarily on ourselves. When that happens, the church becomes little more than a spiritual department store, a kind of Wal-Mart for Jesus, providing religious goods and services to Christian consumers.

The church must have tithers to pay for that building and to pay for that staff. With more tithers comes bigger buildings, better salaries, and more staff. These are the sort of “dirty little secrets” that we don't like to talk about because it implies that the pastor is somehow worldly or materialistic, when in fact this is just the reality of our church paradigm.

The strength of this paradigm can be that we end up with a church on every corner, and we can visibly see it taking up space in the community. “Look, there's the church,” people say. The paradigmatic weakness is that we can't do many things because of the limiting nature of ecclesionomics. Starting new churches would be like creating competitors. That's like sending your tithers and their tithes right out the door. This potential reality becomes a huge disincentive for the traditional church paradigm, which impedes the development of movements.

Conversely, positive ecclesionomics occurs when economic incentives spur church multiplication. David recalls when he had 30-40 people crammed into his living room for church. The sardine can impression alone created the economic incentive to start a new church. Further visible motivation came when the couch collapsed under the weight of the four men. It was time to start another church; the house couldn't bear the wear and tear of the present one. The house church had no paid staff, which meant that no critical need existed to keep pooling additional people and resources. In addition, the

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://blogs.lifeway.com/blog/edstetzer/2008/10/balancing-forces.html>

more people that gathered in that house, the more difficult it became to shepherd the whole group. Multiplying out into other homes was also economically advantageous because it was easier to have a fellowship dinner after worship for 15 people than it was for 40.

Ironically, the economic barriers to traditional, institutionalized church starting may be the very dynamics that will lead to a CPM emerging in the West. As mission minded churches look to start new churches, but simply do not have the money to purchase property, buildings, and hire full time staff, other methods may become more attractive. Using laity to start many different house churches could become a very attractive economic alternative in a cash-strapped society.

### **The American Dilemma: Discipleship and the Christian Subculture**

The Christian subculture, which is now distinct from the prevailing culture of the West, is a hindrance to the rapid propagation of the gospel. In the United States, we have equated discipleship with teaching our families to read James Dobson in order to raise their kids, listen to Dave Ramsey in order to balance their checkbook, listen to Third Day for their musical enjoyment, and read Tim LaHaye for their literary enjoyment. None of these are necessarily bad things, but we have effectively created this “Christian bubble” that makes it impossible to engage in the rapid propagation of the gospel. Discipleship has been redefined by many Christians as acclimating converts to the Christian subculture. Moreover, one can be fully immersed in the American Christian subculture and have no connection to God whatsoever.

Don Larson, a linguist from the Evangelical Free Church, worked for many years with the International Mission Board and was convinced that American evangelicals were becoming as much an ethnic group as Greeks or Italians or Haitians. After all, we have our own language, we have our own mores and values, and we set up barriers to keep outsiders from coming into our bubble, unless they are willing to adopt our bubbled lifestyle. We can be in a room, and as soon as someone lights up a cigarette, we know that he's not one of us. We could make a long list of our cultural indicators.

These cultural indicators then become more of our marks of holiness or communal morality. Even though many of them are not essential to salvation or intrinsic to a biblical lifestyle. Holiness becomes more than simply separation from sin for us; it becomes separation from sinners.

The Christian subculture is itself a symptom of another western cultural factor that may be inhibiting CPM development. Historically, the west is “culturally Christian.” A latent resistance to movemental Christianity may exist in areas and among peoples that already consider themselves to be Christian. This is precisely the problem facing gospel-driven, missional ministry in the so-called Bible Belt of the Southern United States.

The church in America also lacks intense self-reflection. Our discipleship paradigms insulate us from the world, rather than driving us to engagement. We are cocooning ourselves toward ecclesiological death. And the people driving the evangelical conversation right may be some of the most vocally evangelistic among us, but they tend to being very insular in lifestyle. To cite Richard Niebuhr in his classic book *Christ and Culture*, many of the dominant evangelical voices today are “Christ against culture.”

Consequently, their disciples insulate themselves at every turn. This process makes it a deep spiritual value to be a culture warrior rather than a culture engager.

This subcultural moniker of self-identified Christians is as poisonous toward the development of a CPM in the West as it would be in Lebanon, South Africa, or New Zealand. Further, the danger is that insulators will often battle the culture as well as anyone from within Christianity daring to engage the culture. A step outside of the “bubble” is perceived as traitorous to the faith and dangerous to the church—unless it is done on a different continent in the name of international missions.

Western Christians have yet to find a biblically faithful way to be a good sort of “in the world” without being “*of* the world.” A real breakout of CPMs in America will be a movement of the people and by the people, but we have distanced ourselves from secular culture in such a way that our Christianity looks more like a colony or commune. We’re like the colonial British living in India, inviting people to change and be imitators of our culture, rather than a group on mission to engage the outside world with the gospel. (This is where the missional movement gets so much right.)

Also, this Western view of discipleship requires a certain level of “maturity” before a person is allowed to lead in ministry. In a CPM, the leader of a house church may be only one lesson ahead of the people he is teaching. That means that a person that has been a Christian for two weeks can teach lesson one to others. The house church leader is the elder in that situation.

The question is, how do we help the Western church get culturally engaged while at the same time see it transformed to holiness by the power of the gospel? When the church engages the culture by serving others and sharing the gospel, people’s lives and the culture is transformed. Mission becomes the catalyzing principle of discipleship. True disciples will not emerge from just absorbing a lot of good information and enjoying good programs and doing church one way.

Jesus raised up and sent out His disciples—that’s how He taught them and trained them. He sent them out and challenged them to live by faith. He didn’t sit them down for three years to soak up a lot of information and give them a little something to do in the church until they earned a certificate. He sent them out to heal people, serve people, and love people just like He demonstrated by His own life. Rediscovering the pattern of Jesus would go a long way to helping facilitate a church planting movement.

### **The Cultural Dilemma: Of Peasants and Professionals**

So far CPMs have been found in predominantly tribal, peasant, and clan societies where a culturally-expected, labor-segmented mentality does not exist. Significant implications emerge here for hope that CPMs can develop in the post-industrialized West— implications, but not necessarily prohibitions.

We may be in an era when people don’t respond to the gospel in the way that they did in a pre-industrialized world. Or perhaps, something inherent within a post-industrialized world makes it more difficult for the gospel to be communicated in as many effective and dynamic ways as we would like.

A significant exception to the “rule” that CPMs are occurring only in tribal, peasant, and clan societies is this: the fastest growing CPM in the world today is radiating

out of an area of China that is an urban megalopolis complete with high rises, mass transit, and factories. This area was seeing two and three thousand new house churches started per month over the last two years. Since 2001 when the movement began, the number of baptized believers has grown to between one and a half and two million. It's very intentional, it's very urban, it's indigenous, and it's occurring among the very literate and professional.

Thus, while it is true that underemployed and non-professional people are more accessible to outsiders who want to communicate the gospel to them and while it is true that highly professional, twenty-first century, post-industrial, urban people are extremely busy and difficult to connect with, demonstrable proof exists of CPMs occurring in cultures that are radically advanced in technological progress. If such movements can occur in other industrialized societies, they may be able to occur here.

The difference, actually, may lie in what this progress has *not* impacted outside the West. In a post-labor industrialized society, if I'm sick I go to my doctor, if I need legal help I go to my lawyer, if I need automotive help I go to my mechanic, if I need household help I go to a repairman. And if I want spiritual help, where do I go?

In the West, a cultural reality is at work that the church has by and large adopted. The Western church actually propagates the professionalization and what Ed calls "the clerification" of ministry—contributing to what we could describe as the ossification of the church. Ed explained the term in an interview with Group Magazine:

[W]e have to recognize that we've created the system that we loathe. I don't think the reason 15 percent serve is because 85 percent are lazy. We've created a system that glorifies the clergy and marginalized the laity. We got the outcome we created programs for. We've become "clergified." There's a 3-tiered structure: laypeople, clergy and missionaries.

All religions tend to create a class of people who are above others so 1) they can revel in that and 2) the rest of us can say it's their job. Christianity was started without any of those structures, and ended up like so many false religions do when they create a ministry caste structure. When we see real movements of God take off, they happen when people are free.<sup>4</sup>

One of the reasons that we haven't seen CPMs among majority peoples in the West could be that people in the West have a post-industrialized, segmented mindset. Like everything else, people who want help with spiritual things have to go to the professionals. If you are not professional clergy, then you probably can't help. And the church goes along with this approach. This desire for labor segmentation in the culture, combined with the clerification of the church, provides a perfect way to disempower ordinary people from being involved in Church Planting Movements.

But post-industrialization has not always led to a more professionalized clergy outside of Western Europe and North America. For example, in Bangalore, India, the outsourcing capital of the world, countless individuals are employed to do American busywork, staffing, and telemarketing, with a plethora of call centers answering toll free calls from America. These people tend to work in shifts around the clock. When they're not working, they're sleeping, which means they are effectively insulated and hard to reach. Yet, all around them are thousands of Bangaloreans working in a myriad of related and unrelated jobs where we are seeing new churches multiplying. These

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rev.org/article.asp?ID=3113>

churches are fostered by lay evangelists penetrating their own social networks and relationships with a simple message of life transformation in Jesus Christ and shared discipleship in intimate home fellowships.

With Americans losing millions of jobs over the past year, spiritual receptivity may be on the increase within the professional class in the days ahead. However, if we're all living in our Christianized bubbles with our personal, privately ordered lives, gospel penetration won't happen, infiltration by media notwithstanding.

Outside of the West, real social communities are taking place where people interact on a regular basis. This is one of the first things Asians and Africans comment on when they come to America, as they move into the suburbs of places like Dallas or Nashville. They say, "I've lived here for 20 years, and I still don't know who my neighbors are." No one ever just goes out and sits on the stoop and talks to passersby.

Often, no central market or plaza exists where people can gather and interact, and the "third places" that pass for such centers—coffee shops and the like—really exist to provide a communal aesthetic, not actual community. They are places for all of us to be alone together. Not only is there dangerously little evangelistic conversation, very few conversational contexts occur at all. At least, not like the conversations that occur in the non-West. As a result, it's become difficult to overcome the insulation with our current way of communicating the gospel.

To re-state, this problem is two-fold: 1) Conversational contexts in the West are non-communal, and 2) The conversations themselves are not happening, because the Western church by and large has left this conversation to the professionals, and the clergy professionals are too busy running the institutions. Working to overcome and counteract these problems will be difficult and, naturally, countercultural.

### **The Evangelism Gap**

"Intentionality" is found in both of our lists outlining the marks of church planting movements. And the church in the West is often intentional about all manner of things.... except evangelism. In order for churches to grow and replicate, the crucial focus of church intentionality must be evangelism. *Aggressive* evangelism, to be specific. In his book *Church Planting Movements*, David points to the need for both "mass evangelism" and "personal evangelism." But the glaring omission of nearly every major mode of church growth and church planting in America today is intentional, *personal* evangelism. There may be church evangelism, mass evangelism, and other form of evangelism, but we are failing at intentional personal evangelism.

Many people think that as long as they are communicating the truth of the gospel and getting people to pray a sinner's prayer that they have done their job. However, it is quite possible to be faithful in gospel proclamation and still be failing in actual gospel communication. This occurs in preaching which makes the gospel either latent or inarticulate. It also happens when the body fails to take gospel communication outside the walls of the gathering to touch the lives of real people where they live. Abundant and aggressive evangelism—creating "buzz" through engagement with the lost—is crucial to the distinction between what could be movemental Christianity in the West and what has, to this point, been primarily church renewal movements. This is an important point, a

major failure of the American church's ironically myopic vision. It is simple math that massive and abundant evangelism equals lots of people hearing the gospel.

Evangelism in the East is aggressive and focuses on the reality of Hell. House churches in China are aggressive and relentless in their proclamation of the Good News. To them, it is good news because it means being released from the bondage of Satan and of approaching doom. In the West, churches have become afraid of being offensive. Attendance might go down, offerings might go down, and their pride may suffer. In the East, no reason exists to be conservative—other than fear of imprisonment. This releases the church to be fiercely evangelistic in a way that has not been seen in the West.

One reason that the house church phenomenon in the West hasn't turned into a church planting movement is because, rather than turn out to the lost world, it has often turned into itself, not focused on evangelism, and morphed into more of a restorationist-type movement. The aim appears to be on recapturing the early church (assuming that were possible), which is commendable, but the result is an inward focus on restoring the purity of the church rather than an outward focus on redeeming the lost. In some house church settings, they are more excited about the "house" than the "church."

The focus in the house church movement has, perhaps implicitly, become about pursuing personal holiness, but at the expense of our evangelistic ethos. Interestingly and frequently, the "holier" we get, the more removed from lost people we become (in most, if not all, North American ecclesiological models). Consequently, the house church movement has effectively retreated from the lost and burrowed into small communities that do otherwise honorable things like hold each other accountable and worship. In the end though, the brutal irony is that in the quest to become more biblical, they become less evangelistic (we think Jesus said something about being His witnesses somewhere in the Bible, too).

Were the house church movement to really become a true CPM, its restorationist fervor ought to be channeled toward a return to the original expression of evangelism, which was not the division of social work and evangelism, but the convergence of evangelism and social ministry. Such a harmonious convergence—of word and deed, but especially the word—could create momentum for CPMs. The movement we see among those self-labeled as "missional" is seeking to recapture the tie between the evangelistic and cultural mandates which Ed often speaks about based on Luke 4:16-21 and 19:10. But in this latest iteration of missional church, we are witnessing a splintering of theology on numerous fronts which may actually hinder a movemental CPM.

The modern evangelical separation of gospel proclamation from the call for societal transformation is an historical oddity. It is like divorcing Jesus' "Repent and believe!" command from his Sermon on the Mount proclamations. But movemental Christianity will practice holistic ministry much in the way of Jesus, who both preached peace and supplied it. This is nothing less than the exercise of God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. Current movements and historical awakenings are and were accompanied by societal transformation.

This returns us to the issue of discipleship. For the West, discipleship means gaining knowledge. In the East, it means learning how to obey. When the issue becomes obedience, many of the theological issues become clearer. When obedience means sharing the gospel, it's not time to argue over whether the new believers were pre-

ordained or if they chose for themselves. What matters is that they are told—someone obeys and shares the life changing message of the gospel.

Without exception, the CPMs in the Two-Thirds World that are experiencing exponential growth in conversions and making disciples are movements where intentionality is focused on training people to share their faith, and those people intentionally do it. They're trained to win people to Christ, and they hold each other accountable not just to holiness but for evangelism. This just doesn't seem to be happening in America, or it is happening in outmoded, non-indigenous ways or as a sales pitch for a particular gathering. No current Western phenomenon of aggressive person-to-person evangelism is apparent, and CPMs won't happen in the West without it.

### **Intentional Reproduction**

In the 1970's and 1980's, when Campus Crusade tried to create movemental momentum, they saw thousands of people come to faith in Christ. But the missing piece for them was a lack of intentionality in planting churches. Their institution survived but did not produce reproducing churches. The same math is true around the world. Many organizations like Campus Crusade have reported that they cannot find a huge percentage of the people in China that they know they've led to Christ and disciplined. That's because they didn't have an ecclesiology or a strategy for intentional church planting.

Now, Campus Crusade is working to identify church planting strategists within their ranks, and they're sending the strategists to the Best Practices Institute, which is basically Church Planting Movement training. In India, they are working to take the effective evangelism which they do and link it up to the intentional planting of reproducing churches. The difference is already noticeable.

YWAM (Youth With A Mission) began several years ago to couple their ministry work in India with intentional church planting. The result has been a proliferation of fruit that lasts. Increasingly, it is no surprise that organizations around the world such as Campus Crusade are now becoming intentional about factoring new church starts into their remarkable evangelistic programs. They are seeking to find ways to take their large evangelistic outreach strategies and tie them to small communities called churches.

Western evangelicalism will not want to hear this, but movements do not normally occur through large things (big budgets, big plans, big teams). They occur through small units that are readily reproducible. Those who want to see movements need to see reproducibility at every level. Movemental Christianity does not seem to emerge from big box programming. Nimble and flexible is everything. This will challenge the usual systems and structures to resist the grandiose in favor of the reproducible.

Structures must accommodate movements, not vice versa. This is wine and wineskins. Movements are often stifled within smaller communities because of the small-mindedness of local believers. They can also be squelched by larger communities when systems are too rigid. When God begins to move and believers allow movemental Christianity to grow, structures must rapidly adapt in order not to stifle such movements. In many cases, movements will break out of existing structures. More frequently, non-scalable structures (like some training programs or denomination structures) will actually

hinder the movement. Why? Because existing structures become bottlenecks rather than catalysts.

In the past, we thought that if we just did good ministry and good evangelism, churches would naturally result. But, it just doesn't work that way. Churches are planted by intentional church planting, and in the same way, evangelism doesn't just happen.

That's something Western missionaries have discovered all across South Asia. They started forming churches in their living rooms because that's what they'd seen in the CPMs, but a year or two later their churches still had not reproduced. They were expecting it to "just happen." They asked themselves, "What's going on here?"

It's one thing to practice the kind of church you see in CPMs, but if you look at those churches, they are intentionally sharing their faith—sometimes through holistic ministry, sometimes by simply engaging people and passing out tracts or by showing the Jesus film—but they're very intentional and deliberate. Moreover, they're holding each other accountable about actually reproducing disciples and churches.

That is the combination—reproducible church types with intentional evangelism and church planting. These elements are present in true CPMs, but this combination hasn't really been attempted in America. America hosts some wonderful evangelistic efforts, like Billy Graham's campaigns or Campus Crusade's efforts. In addition, we've seen house church efforts, but we generally do not see an effective combination of the two.

The Jesus Movement in the mid-to-late 70's and early 80's was very evangelistic—*passionately* evangelistic—and it actually became a proto-CPM. In spite of that, it never really exploded because its focus never moved from individual conversions to intentionally reproductive church planting.

In China, believers are literally winning the lost and then deliberately starting new churches in their own homes for discipleship, worship, fellowship, ministry, and missions. Now, they're mentoring converts in how to *be* church and *do* church. In one movement that we studied, they've seen 17 generations of reproduction from house to house to house in the span of a year and a half. The average church size there is 19 members, and the average church has baptized 13 new believers in any given year.

Anyone can do this, and it's just good ecclesiology. This intentional ecclesiology in the China movement has produced almost 2 million born again baptized believers over the last 8 years. To outsiders, the China movement looks spontaneous—it's not really spontaneous. It is rooted in intentional, accountable obedience that is fueled by the Spirit.

Unfortunately, many in the West have a disjointed perspective toward such a report. Many will celebrate the 2 million new believers but eschew participation in a church family of small numbers because of the perceived loss of ministry to the individual. Intentional, multiplicative reproduction dies a thousand deaths to the enculturated version of Christianity and the clerification of the church.

Some say that if we just pray more, if we just go deeper in the Word, if we just live holier lives, then we will spontaneously see the church erupt. The truth is that you can practice that lifestyle for generations and see little result. It is modern monasticism. Even if you're living in the middle of a city, you end up living a monastic life, and you will not see a Church Planting Movement. Without intentional evangelistic engagement and church planting, it has never happened, and it never will. We need holy lives, deeper

in the word, but we need that lifestyle to be passionately evangelistic and missionally engaged.

### **Recovering the Priesthood of the Indigenous Believers**

The revival of the laity will in part result from the reformation of the power structures of the Western church. This is why David lists “Lay Leadership” in his 10 Universal Elements of CPMs and Ed lists “Empowerment” in his 10 Marks of Movemental Christianity.

Consolidating power and merely delegating responsibilities are sufficient ways to maintain a single community, but they are terrible ways to exponentially reproduce Christian community. Movements only occur when the disempowered are given the freedom, and the responsibility, to lead along with accountability to make it happen.

In the West, the clerification of the Church has marginalized those that God has called—all members of the body of Christ. The disempowerment of the laity simultaneously satisfies and disturbs many pastors. They suffer frustration from not being able to get others to do the work of ministry *and* enjoy a sense of satisfaction that comes from ruling the roost. Such co-dependency is the death-knell of movemental Christianity. Pastors can help themselves and help the members of their local churches by being more intentional about equipping people to be the ministers and, as the pastors, not trying to fill too many ministry roles themselves. Granted, this can be a difficult transition to make, but it is a biblical one (Ephesians 4:11-13).

In many churches, the prevailing assumption is that unless one is formally educated and professionally trained, then he or she isn’t really qualified to properly interpret when God is or isn’t speaking. Moreover, these professional clergy are the only ones qualified to give direction to the ministries of the church. These assumptions give the professional pastorate its reason for being. Pastors are then ministers because “the people” unleashed are liable to believe or do all sorts of crazy things. We need pastors to keep people and things straight.

But, on the other hand, this assumption frustrates pastors because they wonder why the church isn’t alive, vibrant, vital, and out engaging the world. The reason for this stagnation relates to the assumption that church is what you do when the pastor speaks to you. Church has become only what we do on Sunday.

In missiologist Roland Allen’s influential book *Missionary Methods: Saint Paul’s or Ours*, he compares the rapid introduction of the gospel, the spreading of good Christian commitment, and the planting of churches. Conclusively, he implies that educational attainment and evangelistic effectiveness are inversely proportional. The more you get trained and get extracted from the culture to be able to serve that culture, generally the less able you are to reach that culture. So, the usual process of creating leaders often hinders those leaders from being effective at rapid church multiplication.

We are certainly not saying that we are against “education.” Training for the purpose of being a more effective minister of the gospel is not wrong and we are both connected to seminaries at differing levels. The better question may be—what is the best way for that training to take place? Is removing yourself from culture and context for long periods of time and study the best way to train for more effective ministry?

The reason for this inverse effect is not necessarily the education itself, but what having an education does to the person within the community. For better or worse, it sets the pastor apart as somehow now being more qualified, more capable, more professional, and therefore, more responsible for doing the work. The presence of an educated leader *can* mitigate the fact that the work of the church belongs to the whole community. In CPMs, we see that church leaders rely on all members of the body to make disciples within their web of relationships.

The solution is not just a pragmatic delegation of responsibility. It is a recognition of the great Protestant concept of the priesthood of believers, of the empowering for ministry that occurs when this priesthood is affirmed and launched.

In the historic movements of Baptists and Methodists on the Western Frontier, and later Pentecostals in middle America, terms like “anointing” are frequently mentioned. If one felt the anointing and the community embraced the anointing, permission to step into ministerial roles was a rather simple process: licensing and ordination took place. Now of course, this has become a complex process with seminary training, credentialing, and paperwork. In the end, the anointing has become much more regimented. At times, it seems as though we care more about credentials than whether someone meets the biblical qualifications outlined in Timothy and Titus.

The Baptists and Methodists were able to plant churches on the frontier without remunerated clergy and institutions of higher learning, and their success was unparalleled. Certainly, external factors were at work: the Second Great Awakening, the Westward migration, and the failure of the establishment to respond to the mission need. However, while the Baptists and Methodists exploded in growth, the established and entrenched denominations declined. New movements adapted and thrived and forced further adaptation. And these movements were led by church laity.

Currently, the closest thing to a CPM we have in the West is found in Cuba, where 2-3 explosive church multiplication movements among Baptist and Pentecostal groups have occurred, but these have also been jeopardized by professionalism. Church leaders in Cuba speak of some 100,000 people waiting for baptism. Why are they waiting for baptism? Because their pastors say that unless an ordained, recognized pastor baptizes them, they are not really baptized. A crude sacerdotalism is challenging the potential of a booming movement of several thousand churches because believers are not empowered to baptize each other.

Miller’s *Reinventing American Protestantism* looks back to this shift in the Vineyard and the Calvary Chapel communities, where the prime movers were not formally trained people. They had a new view of what it meant to be a pastor. Basically, if you were gifted, called, and anointed, you were ready to plant—they were given permission based on call and anointing, not education and credentialing. But something has happened in the professionalization and the clerification of the church that has impacted their movements, and they’ve lost much of that ethos.

When we lose the priesthood of believers, we lose massive impact for the gospel. The church’s believers are to be *incarnational* priests. The work of a priest is to be among the people, interceding and mediating between them and God. Churches should not merely empower the laity (as in a team mission situation) but empower the *indigenous* laity—the local believers who come to faith in Christ should function in a priestly role themselves, the role of bringing their own lost families and friends to Christ.

True reproduction occurs when people are given permission to function as God has gifted and directed.

Too often, we leave authority in the hands of the professional, or even the foreign (outsider) church leader. For example, if you see a responsive mission field, a common error is to pour energy and resources into it. This sounds logical, but in CPMs, we have discovered that the quickest way to close the door to responsiveness is to flood the work with outsiders. On this point, missiologist Donald McGavran may have been thinking logically when he counseled the deployment of resources to responsive fields. Nevertheless, it is no secret that this approach has, at times, hindered the work.

Though McGavran was logical, he was speculating on the basis of reasoning. He never experienced the results of his prescriptions. Now, we have the experience of nearly two decades of CPMs from which to learn. Unfortunately, we are still struggling to get missionaries to stop thinking that more responses results from pouring more missionaries and resources into an area, rather than training and delegating the indigenous harvesters to rise to the challenge all around them.

In Brazil, several million indigenous harvesters exist who don't plant churches because they figure that's what American missionaries do. Too many times, we hear the echo in some of our older mission fields: "Let the Americans do it" from our national partners. Because many national Christians believe it is the job of the missionaries to plant churches, they won't do it themselves.

We fall into the same pattern in North America when, for example, we want to see the cities of the United States won to Christ. We decide to encourage people from XYZ Church in Atlanta and ask them to go get jobs in Chicago and start a church there. That is *a* way to do it, and it's an appropriate start. But a movement won't start until native Chicagoans embrace the message and new life of the Gospel and begin reproducing the faith among their own neighbors.

Unfortunately, instead of taking a cross-cultural missionary approach, we tend toward the lines of colonization. We send in a little colony, and we build a little fortress. We then begin to radiate influence out from that. And what we end up with is a fortress mentality.

When David lived in California as a student at Golden Gate Seminary, the mission workers could easily identify who the Arkies and Oakies were in California. They sometimes called their churches "Grapes of Wrath Churches." One veteran California church planter said that if you wanted to plant a church in any city in California, all you had to do was walk around through the parking lot of any shopping center and put a flyer on the windshield of any car with a license plate from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Alabama, or Tennessee.

Ed once worked with a missionary professor who planted a church in Chicago by going to a store that sold grits, waiting for somebody to buy grits, and then telling them about the new church. This is not a "wrong" way to start a church. But it doesn't lead to a movement because it is not really fishing for men. Fishing is hard work. And the colonization approach to church planting is neither long-term sustainable nor precipitous of a CPM. The danger of colonizing is the perception that it creates of rapid church planting when in fact it's little more than beginning a franchise. CPMs would more likely be made up of local mom and pop coffee shops, as opposed to a million versions of Starbucks, Caribou Coffee, or Panera Bread.

Sun Tzu's *Art of War* contends that you cannot fight a sustained battle of occupation for a long period of time because there is no such thing as unlimited outside resources. And yet that's the pattern we sometimes see with our colonization mode of church planting. We think that if we can fund it from the outside indefinitely or if we can build a building even when it's not indigenously constructed, we will flourish. But without local roots and local empowerment, sustainability is limited.

When David lived in Richmond, Virginia, the counties around the city were booming with population growth. The local denominational office encouraged a new church plant in an affluent and prominent area with the promise of land for a new building, if a congregation could get established. The problem was that the folks who gravitated to the church were International Mission Board staff members, many of whom had years of experience in Bible teaching, evangelism, and church leadership. These were sweet, winsome, hard-working and passionate Christians, but after about two years, the church plant disbanded. The venture was totally unsuccessful, despite their hard work.

Ironically, the church's strength was also its weakness. The small army of church starters were professionals, well-trained and experienced. Any lost person who converted or even any non-professional Christian who joined the fellowship quickly felt intimidated to do much of anything in that church. Once they got to know the new people visiting their church, those new people realized, "Oh my goodness, these guys are professionals." They, no doubt, thought to themselves, "I could never measure up."

Whether someone is educated or not, dependence on outsiders is still a problem. Empowerment must go beyond de-clergification and extend to indigenous enlistment. If it doesn't, it's not going to work. The movement must grow up in the grassroots.

One of the exciting things that we're seeing right now is happening among the "biker churches" that are being started. With all of their flaws and all of their warts, it's bikers leading other bikers to Christ. They'll start a "Church in the Wind," and the church is made up of their own people leading their own people, as opposed to functioning as though all the major decisions have to be funneled through the guy with the credentials or formal training. Their motto is captivating—"Motorcycles and Jesus: A Way of Life." (See [www.churchinthewind.org](http://www.churchinthewind.org) for more information.)

Movemental Christianity recognizes that the gospel is unchanging, but the results of the gospel engagement will vary from culture to culture and the expressions must vary from culture to culture. It also recognizes that as the sent people of God we are called to appropriately identify with those to whom we have been sent.

All of this means that we must understand both the gospel and the culture in order to be the biblically faithful, culturally relevant, counter-cultural movement of God. Movements will look like, and be owned by, ordinary people in their ordinary settings. Ultimately, the crucial bit that we need to recover regarding the priesthood of the believer, as it applies to CPMs, has two aspects: empowerment and indigenouslyness.

### **Establishing Biblical Coherency**

Around the world, people are always asking about the danger of heresy spreading through CPMs. One reason de-clergification and radical empowerment of the laity does not occur is the belief that only a trusted few can maintain the theological integrity of the

movement. A fear exists that empowering the laity opens the door to theological error. Ironically, in the Western evangelical church, the professionalization of the church and its clerification has not effectively stifled theological innovation and even the influx of heresy. (It would be quite easy to start a list of well trained and credentialed leaders whose orthodoxy is problematic.) Indeed, even with a disempowered laity and a professional clergy, American evangelicalism has become more theologically murky, not less.

One of the main sources of heresy that we see in church history is the resistance to outside control within the church. Historically, heresy has coincided with foreign ecclesial domination. Arian heretics in Germany defined themselves against the religion of their political enemies, the Catholics of Rome. The same can be said of the embrace of Nestorian heterodoxy by Christians in anti-Roman Persia.

North African Donatists and Coptic insurrectionists in Egypt each exerted their independence from Byzantine Orthodoxy by embracing distinctive and, by Rome's definition, heretical practices and doctrines. Arians, Nestorians, Donatists, and Coptics each gave voice to dominated, subjugated people, and they made variations in their interpretation and expression of their faith, in order to be able to define themselves against those seeking to control them.

The point is this: people are either going to own their faith, or they're going to leave the church. No one is going to be spiritually dominated by another person indefinitely, and that's why part of unleashing these lay movements (not outside the realms of biblical orthodoxy but) outside the restrictions of outside control allows them the opportunity to adapt and own the gospel. In doing so, they will no longer feel a need to abandon their faith and go find spiritual immediacy with movements outside of Christianity.

Essentially, by imposing foreign theological and cultural patterns on non-essential aspects of the faith, we drive people out of more traditional expressions of the faith. But, the answer to this is not a pendulum swing to the other side. Instead, we must point new believers to the source of our authority, the Bible, and allow them the time and grace they need to adapt and apply its timeless truths to their own cultural distinctives.

The solution to theological laxity is certainly not to dilute the importance of faith or doctrine but, rather, to drive it even deeper into the authority of the Word of God. This is neither about academia nor dry doctrine. CPMs are found among people with robust beliefs, not generic belief systems. And nothing kills growth like doctrinal bankruptcy. Just ask most mainline denominations.

Churches wanting to be involved in transformative, movemental Christianity hold firm and passionate positions on biblical views. The Baptists and Methodists won the American frontier because they were passionate about their beliefs. The Pentecostals are not de-emphasizing what they believe to win Central America, for instance. Today, the Acts 29 Network has become one of the fastest growing, church-reproducing networks in America. This hasn't happened by downplaying their members' commitment to Reformed theology.

Almost all movements have very strong integrated theological systems. In David Hesselgrave's *Dynamic Religious Movements*, he points out that the movements have a passion for their beliefs. The way to create a CPM in the West is not to deemphasize

belief systems. Rather, it is to enhance the view that proper doctrine is the work of the all the saints, not just a special clergy classification.

One of the things that occurs in the West is that Christian people, in the spirit of unity and charity, begin to say, "Let's all get together and let's not quibble, because, you know, it's all about Jesus, not theological distinctives." It is the "Deeds, not creeds." However, this is not what we see happening among robust growing movements around the world. They do not de-emphasize what they believe is biblical in order to cooperate.

These Christians believe in the Bible. They believe in what they read in the Scriptures. They may not necessarily have training systems along the lines of the Western mindset, but they certainly have a great sense of theology and doctrine.

Again, this isn't about systematizing beliefs or creating an academic social class. Take African indigenous churches, for example. It is a movement with which we would have important differences, but their emphasis on ecstatic wandering prophets creates a great enthusiasm, and there's a great sense that what is happening is a restoration in some cases of New Testament Christianity, i.e. what they find in the Bible. They may not be defined by denominations or traditional labels, but they do have distinct, articulated doctrinal systems, which they can defend based upon their own reading of the Bible.

These movements are grounded in an array of doctrinal emphases, all of which are grounded in explicit interpretations of the Bible. Among some in America, particularly some that we see contending online on their blogs or in chat rooms, a tendency exists to try and fit everyone into a theological pigeon hole. That is a form of imposing outside control on the diversity that is the body of Christ.

In the process, we de-humanize our brother and sister in the Lord and substitute rigid theological formulas for the immediacy of a relationship with God. Yes, when we hear God speaking to us, it must be consistent with Scripture and sound theology which originates from Scripture, but scholastic formulas can dull our senses to "God led me, God called me, God saved me, and God intervened in my life." Whether it's miraculous healings like those that occur in some places around the world or whether it's something as simple as "God helped me find that job when I was unemployed," we can lose a sense of immediacy by constricting our theological parameters too much.

When Ed was 21 years old, he planted his first church among the urban poor in Buffalo, New York. At 21 years of age and with no seminary or pastoral experience, he was declined by the Home Mission Board. Yet, no one stopped him from church planting. He was untrained and many wondered about the decision. Yet the Bible is replete with examples of how God chose the untrained over the trained, the unprepared over the prepared, the obscure over the obvious.

If you go back through the history of CPMs on North American soil, you don't see that unhealthy scrutiny. If you were anointed—and they used that language, not considering it as we often do, "charismatic"—and you were gifted, then they told you to go out and plant. Their theology wasn't bad. It just wasn't sealed by the home office.

At the risk of redundancy, we must stress again that, when we speak of recovering theological robustness, we do not necessarily mean a recovery of the "theologian class." That is a stratification that further quickens church ossification and stagnation. In the first chapter of his "Manual of Theology," John Dagg stated that studying theology merely to advance knowledge, entertain curiosity, or prepare for a profession profanes that which is most holy.

Thus, when we speak of theological robustness, we affirm the root of theological pursuit—*knowing God*. For that is what *theos* plus *logos* means. And this knowledge of God, the immediacy of it, the soul-stirring and foot-moving immediacy of it, is something that will have incredible effects when it is connected to the empowerment of the laity to minister and witness.

### **Prescriptions that May Precipitate Change**

We have identified the challenges and peeled back some of the hidden barriers to church multiplication movements in the West. Now, let's talk about some prescriptions for positive advance. What is it going to take to see CPMs take root in the West?

We do not lack for programs and plans. But if you've tried everything there is to try and nothing seems to be working in terms of building momentum for a movement of rapidly reproducing church plants, you not only have a license to experiment but also an *obligation* to do so. We are in the midst of a missiological mystery here in the West.

However, we are fortunate that we know God desires multiplying new communities of disciples. The only question remaining is, "How does God desire to accomplish this?" Toward the fulfillment of this vision, we can rejoice and keep trying to find what God wants to use and bless. We don't have to satisfy ourselves with the same approaches that have proven fruitless again and again. After all, the definition of insanity is to keep repeating what you have been doing while expecting to see different results. If what we have been doing has not yielded fruit, then do not hesitate to innovate and adjust your methods. You just might find the key to the breakthrough that we all desire.

Let's review some of the difficulties we have identified:

1. The non-communal culture of the industrialized West.
2. The professionalization of ministry and the clerification of the church.
3. The lack of intentional, aggressive evangelism.
4. The lack of intentional reproduction of church plants.
5. The drift toward theological bankruptcy.

On the positive side of the ledger, we have identified indispensable principles that are derived from universal characteristics found in all CPMs currently occurring around the world. Previously, we have each written extensively on the practical applications for churches prayerfully hoping to precipitate movemental Christianity in their cultures.

These are some prescriptions for precipitating radical change:

1. Abundant, fervent prayer—prayer that builds bridges between the lost and the God who seeks relationship with them.
2. Abundant, aggressive evangelism—evangelism that is exercised in every sector of society, not primarily from the confines of the pulpit but within the marketplace, academy, forum and home.
3. Empowerment of the laity to be the people of God, a holy priesthood drawing the lost around them to new life in Christ.
4. Intentional evangelism and church planting—not leaving either to chance, but deliberately engaging every sector of society with multiplying new churches.

5. Biblically coherent, theological robustness—a theological commitment that is accessible and owned by every Christian man and woman because it is grounded in the faithful interpretation and application of the Word of God to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Much of this calls for a changing of the scorecard. The missional movement is offering helpful critiques of the consumer culture's sway on the evangelical church and helpful correctives toward incarnational ministry. However, the missional movement is not without its flaws and blind spots, particularly when it comes to intentionality, planning and evangelism. The implication is nevertheless daunting: to see a radical move of God, radical change is needed.

Evangelism and church planting are the normal activity of normal believers filling the normal practice of starting normal churches. The question remains: Why isn't it normal for us? It doesn't take a superhuman effort.

To be sure, it is a move of God, but it requires our active, intentional involvement as well. We have no problems exhorting the church in the West to embrace the move of God as it pertains to individual sanctification. Now sanctification is a worthy aim, but it also offers a double-edged sword, because the more we get into "discipleship" (the kind that doesn't lead to a whole lot of ministry or witness) the less we will identify with sinners . . . and the more we are inclined to disengage from a sinful world. We face the old paradox of being in the world but not of the world.

The solution to this conundrum is to shine the light on the problem. We have to make concerted—even calculated efforts—to build bridges to the lost, whether it's through ministry, proclamation, mission trips, or the discipline of going out regularly and doing evangelism. Whatever it takes. The church in the West must rediscover the skill of fishing. Jesus' announcement that he would make disciples into fishers of men isn't referring to some magical formula; it's a promise to teach us how to fish.

Jesus was always fishing, always reaching out, always on the move; he never settled in one place. If he had, he probably would have had an ashram or a commune of like-minded believers built up around him. By continually moving, he was always the stranger in town. He was always the outsider and, therefore, always engaging new people, new lost people. Jesus' example is instructive. We've got to awaken that dynamic in the American church before it goes to sleep in its cocoon of evangelical ethnicity. That is the danger we are facing.

### **A Challenge for the Future**

One of the unintended consequences of the evangelical church's sincere striving for cultural relevancy is that we have often ended up merely aping—and in some cases *enabling*—the increasingly insular culture of the West. Additionally, we have seen an influx of cultural measures of success into the church's measures of success. While the church's mission should be unabashedly about seeking and saving the lost and seeing their lives transformed with the gospel of Jesus Christ, it has been deceptively easy for the institutionalized church to buy into the world's values of bigger, faster, and shinier. Conversely, house churches and some simple faith communities feel justified by the measurements of simple, organic, and relational.

In addition to the prescriptions outlined above, what the church needs is a radical recommitment and unity toward the overarching purpose of reaching the lost prescribed by Jesus. Certainly, many challenges lay ahead of us should we endeavor to act upon the Great Commission anew.

In order for CPMs to occur in the Americanized West, we will likely need a separate but parallel track of new church expressions. New expressions of church community can emerge from existing expressions. In addition, if existing models and institutions steeped in Christendom want any hope of playing part in a CPM, they need these missionaries, and the only way they will get them is by allowing them the room they need to experiment within biblical parameters. Institutional evangelicalism should absolutely advise new expressions, but if that guidance becomes too controlling, overbearing, or stifling, it will kill any chance of CPMs emerging.

One of the enterprises which comes closest to a genuine CPM in America is that facilitated by the Church Multiplication Associates (CMA). In 2008, CMA figured those trained throughout the year at their Greenhouse training events planted between 3-5 churches a day. CMA planters are now in over forty states in the U.S. and forty nations in the world. But the CMA leadership is somewhat decentralized or, as they say, more “organic.” No concentrated effort is made to watchdog or oversupervise. As CMA director Neil Cole says, “We just scatter the seed and water and let it grow without any claim of authority over them.”

We believe that for a Church Planting Movement to come, the church must become a more “permission-giving” entity. In the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Anglicanism allowed Methodism to emerge, and Methodism flourished. In the American frontier days of the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Baptists and Methodists created guidance through licensing and ordination but gave tacit permission for churches to multiply, and they did. The Vineyard movement in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century rapidly spread because the multipliers looked for signs, not credentials. What expressions and institutions of 21<sup>st</sup> evangelicalism will follow the courageous course of sending out its members to create the chaotic context of a new CPM?

Of course, some of the newer expressions have already shown signs of not being able to precipitate a CPM. Much of the so-called “emerging church” has adopted the theological approach of the mainline. Much of the so-called “missional church” has focused on church renewal and lost focus on intentional evangelism and reaching the lost. Many of those inside the current new expressions are doing great at recruiting people for their cause but lousy at winning the lost to Christ. Such change movements are good as far as they go, but too many of them constitute the church on a soapbox rather than the church on a mission.

Nevertheless, writing them off will not do. And yes, while it is true that many of the pioneers of these upstarts are constantly casting their criticism at the institutional leaders and spokespeople, this should not spur us to further division. Against the spirit of retribution, imagine what might happen if the leaders and spokespeople of the institutions came alongside these pioneers and supported them, prayed for them, mentored them, loved them, and affirmed them. This has to go beyond throwing money at new ventures and must encompass personal investment and intentional guidance. We need more interaction between the established expressions and the newer expressions.

In that same spirit, the church will need more cooperation between the institutions and the new expressions, between the megas and the minis: the house churches, the storefront and coffee house churches, the open-air park churches, etc. The multi-site leaders will need to love and support and affirm the new church planters (and vice versa). But as a rejection of church affluenza (where having more is the priority), the evangelical church must celebrate multiplying more than it celebrates “the mega.” What we celebrate, we become, and one of the biggest hindrances to rapid church multiplication is largesse.

Our focus and our reason for being must become reaching the lost and planting churches that reach the lost. The bottom line is intentionality. A Church Planting Movement will not occur where churches are not intentional about reaching the lost and about planting new churches (that plant new churches). We can pray, we can dream, we can hope, and we can even write. But the simple math is that if we do not engage in those specific activities, nothing of any great significance will happen.

There are, as of now, no Church Planting Movements among majority peoples in the 34 Western industrialized democracies. Some of the reasons are cultural. Others are issues inside the church itself. However, we believe such a movement is possible and desirable. Our prayer is that we might facilitate, and not hold back, such a movement so that the name and fame of Jesus would be move widely known among the nations.

---

Ed Stetzer is President of LifeWay Research, Lifeway’s Missiologist in Residence, and the author of *Planting Missional Churches*. David Garrison is Global Strategist For Evangelical Advance for the International Mission Board. He is the author of *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World*

©2008, Ed Stetzer and David Garrison. This paper is for your personal use as an attendee of the Exponential Conference and should not be posted in electronic form on any web site or bulletin board.