Editorial

"Kingdom Movements": Perceptions, Analyses, and Realities

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Since Evangelical Christianity further consolidated itself organizationally a half-century ago and distanced itself—on global, regional, national, and local levels—from the World Council of Churches, certain key themes have galvanized Evangelicals' missions attention. "Unreached People Groups" (UPGs) took center stage after Ralph Winter's "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism" presentation at Lausanne I in 1974. By 1990 the "10/40 Window" had begun to provide more geographic and strategic focus to reaching UPGs, and the "AD 2000 Movement" dovetailed with many Evangelicals' eschatological hopes to give further urgency, plus a target date, for "finishing the task" of world evangelization. Upon entering the new millennium, "Diaspora Missiology" soon became a prominent theme of many missions conferences and publications.

The most recent theme that has drawn the attention of many evangelical missions leaders and groups has been labeled "Church Planting Movements," "Disciple Making Movements," or "Kingdom Movements"—the theme of this issue of *Global Missiology – English*. Several other publications have taken up this theme over the past several years, including multiple issues of *Mission Frontiers* (MF). For example, MF's March-April 2020 issue theme was "Movements: God's Way of Reaching Entire Peoples" (Frontier Ventures 2020). In his editorial, Rick Wood notes that "movements [are] the new popular thing in missions" (Wood 2020), while in the same issue Kevin Higgins quips that "we are in the midst of a 'movement movement'" (Higgins 2020). Throughout evangelical missiological publications, many authors point to David Garrison (particularly his 2004 *Church Planting Movements*) as having brought the notion and reality of "movements" to the forefront of evangelical missions strategizing.

It should be noted as well that *Global Missiology – English* has previously carried several articles concerned with movements, including feature articles pro and con in the October 2014 issue (Global Missiology 2014). This January 2022 issue is devoted solely to the "movements" theme, while of course in no way attempting to give the subject an exhaustive treatment. The seven articles here all take a positive, participatory stance and address such facets as socio-economic factors, methodologies, objections and misunderstandings, and leadership. Extensive and special research projects underpin several of the studies presented.

Critics and skeptics may see the current evangelical missions "movement movement" as little more than the latest fad that will soon morph into the next decade-long obsession. Proponents counter with, "Movements to Christ have always been the way that God has reached entire peoples. While movements have become much more frequent in our day, they are not new. They have been a continual reality for two millennia..." (Wood 2020); and, "Movements are not new. And indeed, one way to understand and read the New Testament is as a combination of case studies of the earliest movements to Jesus: the headwaters of all subsequent movements" (Higgins 2020). Once you catch on to how prevalent Kingdom Movements are actually occuring, advocates assert, you begin to see that such movements are indeed "God's Way of Reaching Entire Peoples"—a goal

which, the exhortation goes, is not only the ultimate goal of missions but should be the keystone of biblical hermeneutics and Christian living.

Once claims are made about new keys to understanding Scripture, Christian history, and living as followers of Jesus Christ—in this case a "movement" key—Michael Stroope's caution about *eisegesis* can be a helpful corrective: "The primacy of the Word of God demands we begin with the revelation of God rather than extra-biblical language freighted with modern ideas of organization, strategy, and funding" (Stroope 2019, 164). Stroope is speaking here about the even more basic notion and language of "mission" (and presumably he would concur with noting the importance of *vernacular* Scripture, à la Kwame Bediako, in working through whether certain language is "extra-biblical" or not), but the caution to examine underlying notions of "movement" is relevant. Just as "The ethos and spirit of modernity, with its unexamined values of progress, individualism, cause and effect, and commodification, are hardwired into mission" (Stroope 2019, 167), might it also be the case that evangelical mission leaders' perceptions and analyses of "movements" are fraught, to varying and nuanced degrees, with some of that same modern ethos and spirit? Thankfully a helpful overarching banner comes from the explicit conviction, shared among proponents and critics alike, of the Holy Spirit's sovereign initiative and work in bringing the good news of Jesus to all peoples so that Christ's entire, universal body of peoples throughout the world may be gathered and built up.

One area of further study (not taken up in either this issue of *Global Missiology – English* or, apparently, other relevant literature) is the overlap between how "revivals" and "movements" both are understood and in actuality occur. One or the other category is regularly used, sometimes about the same event—e.g., the rise of Methodism under John Wesley, the early-twentieth-century explosive growth of Korean Christianity—but hardly ever with an awareness of how the two notions might mutually inform each other. For example, could contemporary large-scale, multi-generational movements of Muslims to Christ also be understood as "revivals"? Would trying to do so cast light on the "pre-Christian" status of Muslims and indeed of all peoples throughout the world? Or what benefits might come from categorizing the 1920s-1930s East African Revival also as a "movement," using that current label's marks, catalyzing factors, and evaluative analyses?

Regardless how they are perceived and analyzed, recent "movements" to Christ will continue to affect the perceptions, analyses, and actual landscape of World Christianity and the worldwide Christian movement. Just as the multinational collection of Jesus's followers in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26) came to be called "Christians" instead of "Galilean," new descriptions of groups will be employed rather than such contextually outdated and irrelevant labels as "Protestant," "Orthodox," "Catholic," and even "Pentecostal." Perhaps the growing realization, among "Western" or "Western-trained" missions leaders, of how the Spirit of God is drawing vast numbers of "non-Western" peoples to Jesus will somehow stretch the limited but still prevalent skewed, predominately "Western" understandings of both Christian history and Christian missions: after all, if God is drawing and using various kinds of people today, couldn't he have done so in past generations—and did he not in fact do so beyond just northwest of Jerusalem? Moreover, if descriptive and organizational categories of Christians can become outdated and contextually irrelevant, and if God has been at work more widely among the world's peoples than heretofore has been assumed in many Christian circles, how might we who are "Evangelicals" come to reconsider our hidden (and perhaps contextually outdated and irrelevant) assumptions about who, including which traditions, actually make up the oft-referenced "global church"? In addition, to

whom else besides our own circles might evangelical missiologists and missions leaders look for learning about the nature and practice of Christian mission?

Learning more about recent "movements" and "revivals" should spur all of Jesus's followers to pray and otherwise participate in how God is at work around the world. Humility comes from realizing the surprising initiatives God takes. Worship becomes more genuine upon realizing the vast scope of God's work among the peoples he has made and loves. Compulsion to serve, in whatever humble ways God may lead, arises from realizing how God uses his people in gospel ministry. May God use this issue's set of articles to spur us all in gospel service.

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