

Fruitful Practices: What Does the Research Suggest?

Paradigms and Praxis

Part II: Why Are Some Workers Changing Paradigms?

by *Leith Gray and Andrea Gray*

Background

In the Spring of 2008 we (the authors) were asked to take part in the Fruitful Practices Research Fellowship, an strategic interagency research project tasked with determining “fruitful practices” in church planting among Muslims. We were assigned to analyze 33 of the 115 interviews that had been conducted at a major consultation of church planters among Muslims the previous spring in Southeast Asia. The goal of our analysis was to assess what were “fruitful practices” among church planting workers, and how these workers identify such practices and adopt them. This paper is based on the analysis we submitted to the Fruitful Practices (FP) research team.

Two Models of Church Planting

In Part I of this article, in issue 26:1 of the *IJFM*, we saw that church planting workers tend to choose their mission strategies based on their view of what the church is. Some workers follow an attractional church planting model, in which the church is a new structure existing parallel to other social networks in the community. On the mission field, such workers share the gospel with various unrelated individuals and then gather them together into a “church” to which they gradually invite others from the surrounding community.

Other workers hold to a model of the church as the transformation of existing social networks. On the mission field, such workers share the gospel with a community of people who already know each other and that group gradually grows in knowledge of the Bible and obedience to Christ. In cases when such workers share the gospel with an individual, they carefully choose their practices to facilitate the spreading of the gospel message through the seeker’s existing social networks even before that person becomes a believer. Many other workers are in a transitional state in which they borrow some strategies and concepts from the transformational church planting model without having developed a complete paradigm or philosophy of ministry in relation to the practices they have found fruitful.

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The importance of social networks in characterizing church planting models was discovered inductively during the process of classifying and coding the FP data according to many different dimensions. We take the term “attractional” from contemporary church planting literature (e.g., Frost and Hirsch), while the term “transformational” is reflective of the language used by some church planters following this particular model.

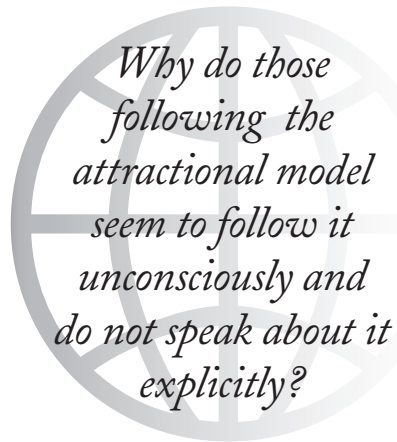
In this article, we will seek to discover why many workers are becoming dissatisfied with the attractional model and are returning to the transformational model that characterized the apostolic and immediate post-apostolic age. In order to answer this question, we will look at the analytical frameworks of social network analysis, paradigm shift and the missional church movement.

Worker Awareness of Church Planting Models

While most of the interviews we examined can be categorized according to church planting models, not all workers express an awareness of the model they are influenced by. Table 1 shows which interviews fall into each category, and indicates which workers interviewed expressed an awareness of their own paradigm. In this table, the cells that are empty are of as much interest as the cells that are full. Why is it, for example, that those who are seeking to establish a church that is parallel to existing social networks do not express their approach in terms of a particular model (box A)? On the other hand, why do we not find any of those who seek to

transform existing social networks in box B (do not express any model)?

A possible explanation is that the attractional model is the current popular model. While it was not the original model used in New Testament times or the apostolic church, the attractional model has been dominant since the time of Constantine,¹ and is a strategy for church planting that has been standard for the last 200 years of missions in the Muslim world. For example, for many denominations in the West, it is completely uncontroversial and normal to construct a church building, hoping



or expecting for people to come. Even when a physical church building is not constructed, it is quite normal and acceptable for the church planters to rent a facility, start a meeting, and invite people to join. On the mission field, this approach might involve setting up a denominational institution similar to that in the sending country and drawing people from many different backgrounds to join the institution. More recently, this approach has involved the cross-cul-

tural worker sharing the gospel message with many (often unrelated) individuals, and then gathering those who believe into a fellowship.

Returning to our question above, why do those following the attractional model seem to follow it unconsciously and do not speak about it explicitly? It may be the case that since the attractional model is the currently accepted practice, workers generally would not feel a need to question their approach or even reflect on it at all. Since they are not departing from contemporary practice, these workers do not encounter disapproval from adherents to the current model and so would not feel a need to explain their approach from Scripture, from books on church history, from missiological literature or from other fields such as social science.

On the other hand, those who are following the transformational model are diverging from current popular practice. In every instance in our sample, these workers have well-thought-out philosophies that guide their practices. Most of these workers clearly articulate their philosophies, showing that they have thought through the issues quite thoroughly and are accustomed to explaining their approach. Unlike those following the attractional model, these workers make substantial reference to Scripture, as well as to other relevant books. Consider, for example, the following excerpt:

One principle we’ve identified—there’s a book called *The First Urban Christians* [by Wayne Meeks], there’s a chapter in there called ‘Paul People’ -- Paul didn’t go after the extremely rich and he

Table 1: Worker Model and Awareness of Model.

	Expresses practices in terms of fully-thought-out paradigm or model	Thinks beyond practices, but has not formulated full model	Does not express practices in terms of any model
Attractional Model	A		18, 22, 23, 37, 89, 90, 103, 73, 92, 97
Transformational Model	3, (7, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44), 76, 79, 82, 106, 108	104	B
Transitional state	77	13, 29, 52, 53	88, 102, 75
Unable to determine from data			31, 107

didn't go after the very poor. Many of them were people of initiative. The same with people that Jesus chose: when you look at Peter and John, Andrew and James and Matthew the tax collector. These were all business men and so I've encouraged (and just more recently I've thought more about this) our Muslim friends to—when they go to a village—think of who are potential leaders there.

So my friend went to a village where one has a relative, and his relative has believed and as they were going, I'm saying "Now who are the people of influencing ability? Who might be a religious leader or a political leader or a financial leader?" (Interview #42)

A few things are worthy of note in the above excerpt. Like other workers that were interviewed, this worker refers to a practice, in this case, the practice of reaching people of influence. However, he goes beyond talking about the practice and relates it to a broader principle. As support for his approach, he refers to a book on the early church and he also refers to the example of Jesus.

Let's look at another example from our interviews in which the worker explicitly mentions the model or paradigm being followed and refers to a book on church planting for additional support:

Another term that's been used is Organic Church...in Neil Cole's book, but for a Western context. And we're seeing that in our context. So in many ways, it's not so much about contextualization that's the issue—how contextualized are you? What's more important for us, at least in our context, is really thinking through "what is the church?" What does it mean to plant the gospel seed, and then for the churches to be formed? And so, that just had put a whole different paradigm on some of these questions we're being asked, or some of the statements that were being made, for fruitful practices. (Interview #82)

Another worker articulates a well-developed social network model in interview #79. The worker begins the interview by explicitly stating what has helped form his philosophy:

Unfortunately, in the set of interviews we analyzed, the C-scale was widely misunderstood by both interviewers and interviewees.

I could say that this whole journey for me has arisen from Scripture. And seeing how God historically has interacted with people... At the same time, I think, anthropology has played a significant role in trying to understand culture. But still the bottom line is: how does culture interact with the Word of God? (#79)

The worker then goes on to explain nine principles that guide his ministry. The first principle is "We need to figure out where we're heading." Later on in the interview, the worker further emphasizes the importance of vision by saying, "You get what you aim for. You get what you settle for."²

It should be noted that, of all the interviews, interview #79 is the one in which it seems that the goal of whole communities transformed by the gospel of Christ has actually been realized. Is it a coincidence that this worker had a clearly thought-out vision, goal and philosophy of ministry that makes explicit reference to the transformation of social networks?

The Role of Contextualization

In issue 26:1 of *IJFM*, Brown *et al.* summarize the results of their quantitative FP research noting that "higher degrees of contextualization appear more conducive to the development of movements" (2009:30). In our article in the same issue, we explained the relationship between contextualization and missiological model or paradigm. We suggested that contextualized practices on the part of the worker did not necessarily have a direct connection to fruitfulness in church planting. We suggested instead that contextualization was indirectly connected to fruitfulness as a supporting factor that helped the gospel spread through social networks. Our data indicated that contextualization of external practices, especially by the cross-cultural worker (e.g., growing a beard) was less clearly connected to the worker's church

planting model than contextualization at the level of worldview (including choice of language, understandable and "normal"—rather than ecclesiastical—terminology, issues of social identity, and the application of the Bible's teachings to felt needs of the community).

Another point of interest related to contextualization is the use of the C-scale by church planting workers. The C-scale is a continuum first developed by John Travis (1998) to describe a range of different Jesus communities that actually existed in Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, in the set of interviews we analyzed, the C-scale was widely misunderstood by both interviewers and interviewees. This confusion was exacerbated by a lack of specification about whether contextualization referred to adaptation to local practices by the cross-cultural worker, retention of local practices by the local believers or communication of the gospel message with a concern for worldview issues.

In many cases, the workers and those interviewing them considered the C-scale to be a description of the workers' philosophy and practices. For example, in interview #90, the interviewer asked, "You mentioned before you dress up and look like the Muslim when you go into a village.... Do some things look like C-5? Do some things look C-3? How would you describe how things look?" The interviewee responded to the question by describing whether the team members wear jeans and t-shirts or long-flowing clothes, whether the women wear bangles, chador or burka. He concluded, "You can call it C-5 or 6."³ And yet the worker described the local believers as having made a clear break from their community: "People said [to the believers], 'Oh you have left, you know, our faith, our community.'" This would indicate more of a C3 situation. In this conversation, both the inter-

viewer and the worker confused outward missionary practices with local believers' social identity issues.

In another interview, #75, the interviewer himself also shows a lack of understanding of the C-scale: "I'm actually exploring the whole issue of C5, C4 and how/if that can be appropriately used, so what does it look like?" When the interviewer talks about how C4 and C5 can be appropriately "used," it seems that he considers the points on the continuum to be a measure of workers' practices rather than a description of a group's identity.

The worker responds, "We were using, when we did evangelism, the way we dressed, my house, it would be a C5." The worker further shows that he thinks of C5 as a set of practices, not a description of social identity, by saying, "this kind of C5, trying to be a Christian within the Muslim context, [local people] don't see that. They see a clear distinction once you start to move and talk more like a Christian."

Given these misunderstandings, we did not find the C-scale to be the best way to describe what was going on in these case studies.⁴ Rather, we found that a description of several variables including socio-religious identity, community dynamics and how the gospel is spreading through social networks gave a fuller picture of the local church planting situation. While the difference between C3 and C4 is a matter of many variables, including language, social identity and contextualization of practices, when we look at the difference that Travis (1998) describes as existing between a C4 community and a C5 community, the most significant difference is that of socio-religious identity. As we will discuss below, identity is inseparably linked to social networks. This may account for our observations regarding the importance of using the local language and contextualized practices: these factors facilitate the spread of the gospel through social networks. Bob Goodmann has articulated the same dynamic: "contextualization is insuff-

icient on its own to lead to movements, because two other factors need to be taken into account—*identity* and *community*." (2006:9, emphasis his)

We have noted how workers connect or fail to connect contextualization to their understanding of social networks. We have found that contextualization at the level of worldview is essential insofar as it upholds rather than seeks to destroy social networks. Sociologist of religion Rodney Stark notes that successful religious movements will of necessity contextualize:



"People are more willing to adopt a new religion to the extent that it retains cultural continuity with conventional religion(s) with which they already are familiar" (1996:55, emphasis his).

Thus contextualization, or what Stark calls "cultural continuity," seems to be an essential bridge to the message flowing through social networks without impediment.

Social Networks: Theoretical Considerations

Fruitfulness and Social Networks

What is the relationship between the church planting approach used by the cross-cultural worker, and the number and characteristics of actual churches planted? We seek to answer this question with our coauthors Bob Fish and Michael Baker with a statistical analysis based on data from questionnaires separately administered to the workers interviewed for this analysis (forthcoming). To complement that statistical

analysis, it is instructive to look at how religious movements in the past have benefited from the message spreading through social networks.

Current sociological research confirms that successful religious movements necessarily take social network dynamics into account, whether intentionally or by accident. Rodney Stark observes:

The basis for successful conversionist movements is growth through social networks, through a *structure of direct and intimate interpersonal attachments*. Most new religious movements fail because they quickly become closed, or semiclosed networks. That is, they fail to keep forming and sustaining attachments to outsiders and thereby lose the capacity to grow. Successful movements discover techniques for remaining open social networks, able to reach out and into adjacent social networks. (Stark 1996:20, emphasis his)

All the successful new religious movements and cults that Stark and his colleagues have studied make use of social network dynamics. Stark notes the difference in growth rates between random evangelizing and outreach targeted on networks, as seen among the Mormons:

Although they often get an isolated recruit on the basis of attachments built by missionaries, the primary source of Mormon converts is along network lines. The average convert was preceded into the church by many friends and relatives. It is network growth that so distinguishes the Mormon rate of growth—meanwhile, other contemporary religious movements will count their growth in thousands, not millions, for lack of a network pattern of growth. (1996:56)

Data based on records kept by a Mormon mission president give powerful support to this proposition. When missionaries make cold calls, knock on the doors of strangers, this eventually leads to a conversion once out of a thousand calls. However, when missionaries make their first contact with a person in the home of a Mormon friend or relative of that person, this results in conversion 50 percent of the time (1996:18).

Lest one think these findings are an anomaly, a Dutch study mentioned by Stark cites no less than twenty-five other empirical studies that supported his contention that conversions tend to spread through networks (Kox, Meeus and 't Hart, 1991). As for the interviews we analyzed, successful church planters made use of a similar transformational approach to social networks.

Tight-Knit Versus Loose-Knit Social Networks

In tight-knit networks there are multiple layers of relationship. Those ties are not easily broken. In societies characterized by tight-knit networks, the attractional model is not likely to work well. On the other hand, societies (such as those in the West) that are made up of loose-knit networks will find the attractional approach successful enough to justify its continued use. However, even in these societies, transformational-type approaches⁵ seem to be playing an important role.

Persecution from within the social network can be more detrimental to the growth of faith communities than persecution from outside the network. Referring to his previous work studying emerging fellowships of believers among animist societies in Mexico and the Philippines, T. Wayne Dye notes that persecution by government or powerful outsiders has less of an effect on the acceptance of the biblical message than persecution by family members and others within the network (Dye, 2009).

We can see an example of the effect of persecution from within the social network by contrasting interview #103 with interview #79. In interview #103, the believers are a group of unrelated men who are afraid to let their families know they are believers. The church planting workers set up a meeting between these believers and some other believers from another area, and the believers agreed to a meeting, but only if it occurred in a third area, away from both groups' social networks. One believer told the worker that he would like to be an evangelist, as long as it was in another

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region, where nobody knew him. As the interviewee notes about the situation: "...in most cases the strongest persecution in our area comes from within the family and not from the community around them." On the other hand, in interview #79 cited above, the worker expresses very clearly his desire that existing social networks be transformed by Christ. Indeed, in his situation the gospel is being shared and embraced in existing networks. The worker reports that the believers are not embarrassed about sharing their faith. In fact, it is very natural for them to do so.

Identity and Social Networks

Social identity is closely related to the strength and vitality of social networks. In cultures that Edward T. Hall dubbed "High Context" cultures, the identity of an individual is defined with reference to their social network (Hall, 1976). In the interviews, we found that the identity of believers could be categorized in four ways:

1. Believers retain identity of the existing social network
 - e.g., "Jesus is my Savior, but I will never stop being a Muslim" (#80)
2. Believers adopt the identity of a parallel social network
 - e.g., "Okay, I told my brother, and he's a Christian." (#75)
 - or a so-called neutral expression, e.g., "Teach me how I can be a believer." (#18)
3. Believers might adopt new identity consistent with existing categories
 - e.g., "Light of Peace" (#106)
 - "Jamaa'a of the followers of Isa" (#52)
4. Believers are still in the process of defining their identity
 - e.g., "If he was asked if he was a Muslim... he would manipulate

it in a way to say, 'Well, what is it to be religious?'" (#75)

- "For a long time, their identity was a very long explanation, such as 'We are people who believe in Isa but we are Muslim and we believe in Isa [as the MBBs would say it]. We get together to study God's word, and we pray together.' Every time they explained who they were it was a very long explanation." (#52)⁶

In our sample, category 4 (in which the believers are in a state of identity crisis) is the most unstable state. Believers do not seem to remain in this state very long. They eventually gravitate to one of the other categories.

While the transformational approach is not the same as what has been called the "insider approach" (these two approaches did not always correlate in our study⁷), the transformation of social networks seems to be an important aspect of insider movements. Rebecca Lewis (2007) notes how insider movements must necessarily have two elements working together. First, social networks are transformed into communities of believers. Secondly, they maintain their socio-religious identity, while being committed followers of Christ. Her conclusion that these two elements are essential for the viability and reproduction of movements seems to be consistent with our analysis.

In a subsequent article, Lewis (2009) contrasts insider movements with two other types of movements that involve whole social networks coming to faith in Christ while adopting a new socio-religious (i.e., culturally Christian) identity. Although we have generally found a connection between social networks that have been transformed by Christ and communities of believers

that maintain their Muslim socio-cultural identity, our data did reveal a few examples of situations in which the gospel traveled through existing family networks even while the church planting workers promoted a change of socio-religious identity among the believers. These interesting cases were discussed in depth in Part I of this article, along with an explanation of the factors that led to their occurrence, often a supernatural event. It would be worthwhile to follow up with these situations in a few years, to determine whether the degree of identity change demanded of believers in these situations had any influence on the sustainability of the movement one way or the other.

Paradigm Shift: Theoretical Framework

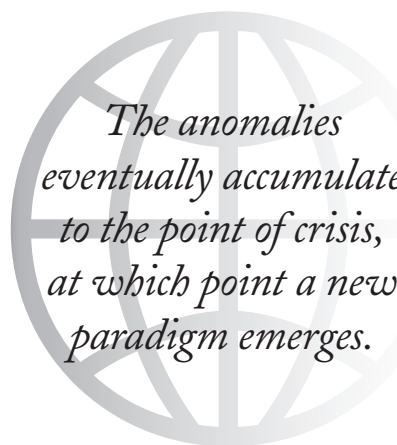
Overview of the Polanyi/Kuhn Model

As we observe many workers making a shift from an attractional model to a transformational model, we need to ask two questions: Why are they making this shift? And how are they making this shift? As we seek to answer these questions, it is helpful to look at how paradigm shifts have occurred throughout history in the field of science. It is important to mention here that while we retain the conventional terminology of “paradigm shift” used in the sciences, it would be more accurate to speak of a return to a previous paradigm (i.e., the paradigm that characterized the apostolic age).

In their deeply influential writings on the nature of science, Michael Polanyi (1958) and Thomas Kuhn (1970) have noted that science does not progress by the incremental accumulation of insights and discoveries, but rather can be characterized as slow linear progress interrupted by “revolutions” or “paradigm shifts.” Normally one paradigm dominates, is usually taken for granted as truth, and tends to drive all the assumptions under which scientists operate. During this period of “normal science,” scientists work at strengthening and extending the predominant paradigm

through problem solving, and when they fail to do so or come up with anomalies, they usually assume that they have failed, rather than thinking that the paradigm itself might be flawed.

However, over time more and more anomalies and loose ends emerge, so that scientists increasingly find it difficult to make sense of the big picture within the bounds of the existing paradigm. The anomalies eventually accumulate to the point of crisis, at which point a new paradigm emerges that better explains the old set of knowledge along with the anomalies.



This can be called a scientific revolution or paradigm shift.

Some examples of paradigm shift in the scientific realm are the move from geocentrism to Copernican heliocentrism and from Newtonian physics to the Einsteinian paradigm. What is of relevance to us as missiologists is that we can apply the Polanyi/Kuhn perspective to systems of knowledge other than the physical sciences. For example, in the social sciences, there has been a shift from positivist science, in which scientists rely on objective data collection and analysis, to a postpositivist or postempiricist position in which it is acknowledged that it is not possible for humans to attain complete objectivity. Nonetheless, it is understood that the interpretation of the data by a human being is still useful, even though it is necessarily subjective.

Paradigm shift can also occur in the worldview of a whole culture, with each paradigm sometimes defining

a whole age or era. The era that we call the Enlightenment is one such example. The medieval European worldview was a comprehensive system that made sense of the individual, the universe and God, but eventually was abandoned for what has come to be called the modern worldview that was ushered in with the Enlightenment. Even while the Enlightenment was a period of great learning and cultural development, it was not without problems, many of which came to light in the aftermath of World War II. Theologian Jurgen Moltmann calls the subsequent era “the reality after Auschwitz” when many people, including Christians, came to acknowledge that their search for enlightenment and progress through rational science and systematic theology had largely failed.

Just as the post-World War II years have presented special challenges to the scientific, theological and cultural communities of the West, these years have presented unique challenges to missions strategists and practitioners who are now asking the question: What does it mean to share the message of Jesus in a pluralistic, globalized and post-colonial world? In this globalized era, the lines are blurred between sending-country and mission field. In this post-colonial era, we see the importance of appreciating and preserving the dignity of other individuals and civilizations. It is not surprising, therefore, that some church planting practitioners and missiologists are wondering, “In order for Muslims to enter the Kingdom of God, do they have to leave their own social identity and culture to become (cultural) Christians?”⁸ The shift from an attractional approach to a transformational approach (or, as we mentioned earlier, the *return* to a transformational approach) is not the only way to describe some of the changes going on in the missions community as we seek to answer the above question. Therefore, we will relate the current discussion to Paul Hiebert’s model of bounded versus centered sets, as well

as to some of the insights from the missional church movement, represented here by the work of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch. We will also consider the process of paradigm shift in general to help us understand some of the dynamics we should expect to see in this missiological shift.

Other Ways of Looking at These Models

Hiebert: Bounded vs. Centered Sets

Paul Hiebert (1994) used the mathematical concept of bounded and centered sets to graphically illustrate the different models for membership in the body of Christ. A bounded set is defined by its boundary, and every point on a plane inside of the boundary line is considered to be part of the set, with no difference in quality or degree acknowledged in “belongingness” to the set. On the other hand, a centered set is made up of all those points on a plane that are related to one particular center point (See Figure 1).

Hiebert notes that Christians who define themselves by means of the bounded-set model define true Christians as those who meet a list of doctrines and practices, a set of “boundary markers” that are usually highly visible. In this model, maintaining the boundary is all-important, and those who push the boundaries are either urged to toe the line, or are rejected as heretics. On the other hand, Christians in the centered-set model consider “belongingness” to the group to be based on how well members are connected to the center point, the person of Christ.

A corollary of defending the boundary in the bounded-set model is the understanding that other religions are in some sense competitors, and so to promote the well-being and growth of the Christian bounded set, one must be in conflict with other sets. In this logic, if a member of another set is forced to see the weakness of his own set, he will most likely be drawn to the stronger Christian set.

In the centered-set model of Christian faith, the key element is trust in Christ,

It is possible for someone who is seemingly far away and firmly within “other” socio-religious boundaries to be a true follower of Christ and a member of Christ’s “set.”

imitation of his example and obedience to his commands. This is possible for anyone, no matter what socio-religious category they belong to. It is possible in this model for someone to appear outwardly to be quite close to Christ, but in reality to have no living relationship with him and thus not to belong to the centered set of Christ. On the other hand, it is possible for someone who is seemingly far away and firmly within “other” socio-religious boundaries to be a true follower of Christ and a member of Christ’s “set.”

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch point out that these two models naturally differ in how they approach evangelism: “Evangelism in the bounded set is focused heavily on getting people into the religious zone.” On the other hand, “[a]s a centered set, the missional-incarnational church sees that its role is not just to “present” Christ in one fell swoop, but to tantalize not-yet-Christians into beginning the search.” (2003: 49-50)

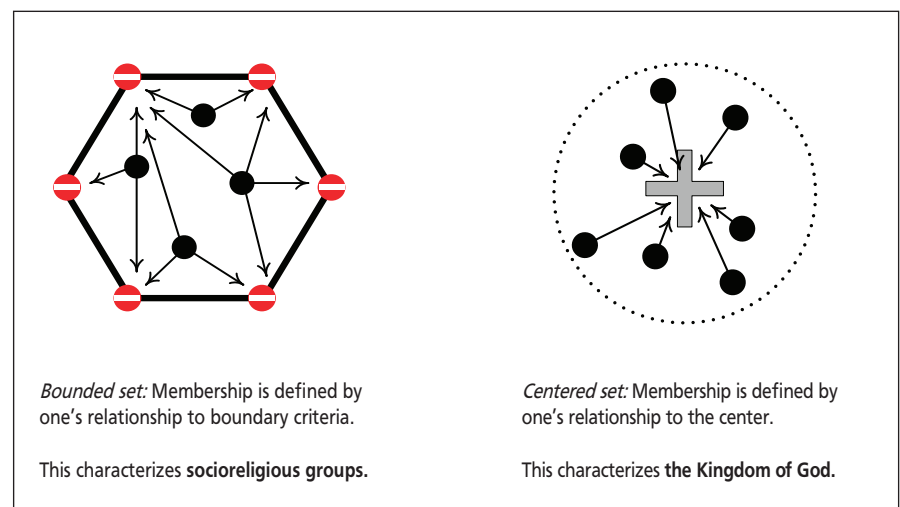
In the next section, we will discuss some further insights from the missional church perspective that help us understand the paradigm shift occurring among cross-cultural church planting workers.

Insights from the Missional Church Movement

While some Western church leaders are mourning the crumbling of Christendom, others—those in the missional church movement—are making the most of this opportunity to investigate and re-implement some of the values and emphases of the pre-Constantinian church. Some of these values include a holistic and conversational style of ministry, a preference for non-institutional leadership and a focus on relationships rather than meetings.⁹ Since some of these values seem to be present in the transformational model, we have found it to be useful to look at what is going on in the missional church movement among Westerners in order to understand some of the dynamics going on with the transformational approach among Muslims.

There are many similarities between the missional approach and the transformational approach; however, it is important to note that we do not claim that the Muslims who are coming to Christ through the transformational approach necessarily share the same characteristics as Westerners who are being reached through the missional approach. The point of comparison is

Figure 1: Bounded Sets and Centered Sets (see Hiebert 1994, figure from Brown 2007)



more in terms of the philosophy and attitudes of those doing the outreach.

For example, in the attractional model of “doing church” in the West, we might say that mission gets people into church, and ministry is what you do for them once they’re there. A missional model, on the other hand, would say that there is no separation between ministry (what we do in the church) and mission (what we do outside the church). Similarly, in an attractional way of doing missions, the accepted approach would be to first evangelize people and then disciple them. However, in a transformational approach, the line between evangelism and discipleship is significantly blurred.

However, each cultural context plays a role in how the transformational model of the missional model is played out. For example, in the tight-knit societies of the East, a transformational model usually means an entire extended family or group of friends or coworkers becomes gradually renewed by the gospel. However, in Western societies that are less tight-knit, the missional model often plays itself out as people join together around a shared activity in the name of Christ, such as feeding the poor. Both the missional and transformational approaches involve going to where people normally gather rather than calling people to come to us.

While Frost and Hirsch use the term “attractional” to refer to the conventional way of engaging in church planting, in a subsequent work Hirsch also points out that

...in missional settings, this *attractional* approach to church actually becomes *extractional*, because it severs the organic ties that the convert has with his or her host culture and creates something of a Christian cloister culturally distanced from its context. (2006:65 footnote, emphasis his)

In describing the ideals of the missional church, Hirsch and Frost borrow the following chart from Carol Davis to help explain the differences between the two missiological para-

digms. Although Davis is referring to a Western church planting situation,¹⁰ it almost seems as if she is describing the very case studies that we analyzed from the Muslim world (see Table 2)!

Various Jesus movements in church history have become institutionalized over time. In such situations it is often the case that the original Jesus movement contains many characteristics of the missional model or the transformational paradigm and that the institution that develops from it has many characteristics of the attractional paradigm. Perhaps it is inevitable that any movement will eventually ossify and lose its transformative power. Missional church practitioners claim that a transformational movement can be successful over long periods of time, but only by avoiding institutional structures and controls and keeping permeable boundaries, where non-believers are continually meeting and joining believers. These successful movements remain inclusive and open (Cole 2005, Hirsch

2006). Note that this is just what Stark observes about successful religious movements in our citation above.

The missional and attractional paradigms also differ in the emphasis they place on doctrines. Referring once again to bounded versus centered sets, Hirsch and Frost say this:

In the bounded set, it is clear who is “in” and who is “out” based on a well-defined ideological-cultural boundary—usually moral and cultural codes as well as creedal definitions—but it doesn’t have much of a core definition besides these boundaries. It is like a fenced farm. It is *hard at the edges, soft at the center*. Most established institutions, including denominations, are, for a host of reasons, bounded sets.

...[A centered set] is like the Outback ranch with the wellspring at its center. It has very strong ideology at the center but no boundaries. It is hard at the center, soft at the edges. We suggest that in the centered set lies a real clue to the structuring of

Table 2: Two Models of Christ Communities

Extraction/Single Convert/“Growth” Model [Attractional Paradigm]	Incarnational/Reproduction Model [Transformational Paradigm]
Church culture	Mission culture
<i>Initial Focus is on ...</i>	<i>Initial Focus is on ...</i>
Individual converts	Group conversions, e.g., households, networks
Believers’ turf, e.g., church services	Unbeliever’s turf
Finding Christians to come to services	Finding persons of peace
Begin in the church	Begin in peoples’ homes
Large group meeting—celebration	Small groups—cell fellowship
Scripture taught as academic information	Scripture taught for application
Build programs and buildings	Build leaders
<i>Leadership...</i>	<i>Leadership...</i>
Pastor or lone-ranger	Apostolic/partnership team
Imported professional clergy	Indigenous new Christians become leaders
Leader of participatory audience at best	Equiper of emerging leaders and reproducers
<i>Finances...</i>	<i>Finances...</i>
Funded church planter	Bi-vocational church planter
Heavy financial investment	Minimal financial investment
Resources are imported	Resources are local
<i>Structure...</i>	<i>Structure...</i>
Needs of the church	Needs of the community
Clergy-centered/driven/dependent	Lay-centered/driven/dependent
For slow growth (leads to stagnation)	For rapid reproduction

[Carol Davis, *DAWN Report* (June 2000), cited in Frost and Hirsch 2003:72.; our headings in square brackets]

missional communities in the emerging global culture and corresponding missional church. (2003: 206-8)

We can see this centered-set dynamic occurring in contexts where the transformational model is being employed. For example, in interview #79, the worker says, with reference to the local believers and pre-believers, “I don’t have to do the theology for them.” He trusts the Holy Spirit and the built-in accountability of the community to guide them in developing theology. He goes on to say that “so far they haven’t developed any weird theology.” For this worker, correct doctrine is not the criterion for entrance into the Kingdom of God. Rather, correct doctrine is a result of experiencing God in community:

Theology is not the domain of the experts, it is not the domain of individuals; it is the domain of the community of the followers of Jesus. (#79)

For missional church leaders and for workers following the transformational model, each community must work out for itself in conversation how it will respond to and express ancient, enduring and unchangeable biblical truths. Every community will find that they occasionally make mistakes in understanding God’s Word and need correction. This process, however, leads to a theology that is both biblical and distinctly local.

The Process of Paradigm Shift

Let us return to our research questions. How do church planters grapple with their contexts and adopt fruitful practices, or fail to do so?

As we saw in our interview data, those in our sample who follow an attractional approach don’t tend to speak explicitly about the paradigm they operate under. On the other hand, most of the workers following a transformational approach were able to speak clearly about the assumptions and perspectives of their model. This makes sense from a perspective of paradigm shift, since those operating under the prevailing attractional

We see this reaction in some of the interviews, in which workers move from practice to practice, trying to find a solution to their problems.

model may do so without being consciously aware of their assumptions.

A key point for our analysis is that during the period of “normal science,” the prevailing paradigm and its assumptions are taken for granted, and assumed by most to be reality itself rather than a model to explain reality. We propose that missiology is no different; there is a prevailing paradigm of missions/church/faith that is currently in crisis, and there is an emerging (or re-emerging) paradigm that more and more believers and practitioners are adopting.

As predicted by Polanyi and Kuhn, what we call the conventional missiological paradigm is struggling under the burden of more and more anomalies. While this approach to missions has produced satisfactory results among many people groups for hundreds of years, there are major clusters of people groups where it does not work. In the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist “megablocs” the methods used by mission practitioners have by and large failed to be fruitful at establishing reproducing fellowships, and many of these practitioners are desperately looking for what is wrong. The very fact that we are conducting this research as part of the Fruitful Practices project is an indicator of this crisis of paradigm. Just as Kuhn uses the term “normal science” to refer to the time when scientists work at reinforcing and extending, but not questioning, the current model, we can use the term “normal missions” to refer to the time when missions practitioners and administrators work to reinforce the current model. During a period of “normal missions,” it is unlikely that missiologists would initiate a research project questioning fundamental assumptions of theory and practice.

According to Kuhn, the first reflex of people facing anomalies in the current system is to tinker with the existing model, to change a few details here or

there, to seek to adopt more effective practices. We see this reaction in some of the interviews, in which workers move from practice to practice, trying to find a solution to their problems. For example, in interview #73, the workers described how they would try different methods:

We tried a lot of different ways of evangelism and evaluated which ones seemed to be effective and which ones didn’t. We were willing to try different and new things and the [local] believers, I believe, caught on to that eagerness and a willingness to try different ways of doing evangelism... and if it didn’t work, just to move on from that and say, ‘we learned a way that isn’t a good way to do it.’

But the Fruitful Practices interviews indicate that a significant number of church planting practitioners and MBBs are moving beyond current assumptions and moving to a new paradigm—one that many practitioners call “the insider paradigm.” These practitioners feel that the current model is broken beyond repair, and they are enthusiastic about the potential of the insider model to transform lives and communities for God.

The amazing spread of the insider model, and not merely insider-oriented practices, is a sign that something big is afoot. C. S. Lewis explained the motives behind such a change:

...the human mind will not long endure such ever-increasing complications [e.g., tinkering with the old model] if once it has seen that some simpler conception can ‘save the appearances’. Neither theological prejudice nor vested interests can permanently keep in favor a Model which is seen to be grossly uneconomical. (Lewis 1964: 219-20)

What causes church planting workers to change practices? We can see from Kuhn’s perspective that work-

ers adhering to an existing paradigm will experiment with adopting new practices in a piecemeal fashion, but are likely to drift away from them when circumstances change. The logic of their paradigm drives their choices and they are seldom aware of it. However, some others will adopt new practices while still operating under the assumptions of the old paradigm. The dissonance between the implications of these new fruitful practices and the assumptions of their existing paradigm will lead to dissatisfaction. They will find themselves in transition.

What leads to workers changing models or paradigms? Those facing the most anomalies are likely to be the first to shift. We also know from Everett Rogers' work on the diffusion of innovations (2003) that at first there will be a relatively small number of people who are very open to change and who will adopt this innovation. As they succeed with the innovation, others will be attracted to change, with the pace of adoption accelerating with time. In the same way, we should expect to see more and more church planters adopting the insider paradigm, and the new and fruitful practices associated with it, at an ever-increasing rate.

Conclusion

A key question for those who wish to see God's kingdom expand among Muslim peoples is, in the words of one worker (#79), "Are we going to settle for church planting or shall we plan for a movement?" We can see from the above discussion that cross-cultural workers who look forward to seeing a movement to Christ among Muslims are able to identify the social networks that exist in a community and consider how these networks can be transformed by Christ. Those workers who have a well-developed model that deals with social networks should expect to see the gospel moving through social networks, a situation that, from a historical perspective, is likely to result in a sustainable and reproducing movement of Christ-followers. **IJFM**

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Endnotes

¹ Frost and Hirsch describe the dominant model in this way: "When Christianity was recognized and accepted in 313 and then gained favored status with the imperial courts, it altered the fundamental *mode* of the church's self-understanding and its conception of its unique task in the world. Because a type of "contract" now existed between the church and the political powers, the church's understanding of itself in relation to that state, culture, and society was profoundly changed. We don't mean to discount the incredible mission movements that occurred sporadically in the fifth to the tenth centuries. But it is fair to say that by the triumph of Christendom in the eleventh century, mission was no longer seen as necessary in Europe. It was delimited to identifiable non-Christian religions both inside and outside of the realm, but no longer to those baptized by the official church. Theology was now used as a powerful political tool. So too were missions. Mission was used as a means of colonization and advancement of various state interests. Christendom set up a certain correlation, a complex of assumptions, about the association between the realms of politics, geography, church, spirituality, and mission. As a result the gospel was politicized, regionalized, as well as racialized. There was no longer any real place for the subversive activity associated with the New Testament gospel." (2003:13-14)

² While interviewee #79 does not mention author Neil Cole as #82 does, the principle he expresses is almost identical to

the vision articulated by Cole, who has been involved in several successful church planting movements: "Starting a single church was not an option for us; we would settle for nothing less than a church multiplication movement, and we would abandon all things, even successful ones that would hold us back from the goal." (Cole 2005:22)

³ In this example, the worker considers C6 to be an extreme form of contextualization, although the original C-scale describes C6 as isolated or secret believers without reference to their level of contextualization.

⁴ It is this kind of confusion on the part of both the interviewer and the workers that makes it difficult to take self-reporting of missiological paradigm and approach at face value. We have to look beyond self-reporting to the details of the story and the terminology the worker uses in telling the story to determine the worker's conceptual model.

⁵ Or what are termed "missional" approaches. These will be discussed later in this paper.

⁶ It should be noted that this group of believers later resolved their identity crisis as they were given a name by fellow worshippers at the mosque they attended.

⁷ For example, in interview #77, discussed in Part I of this paper, the worker describes himself as following an insider approach, but he is following more of an attractional or gathering approach rather than a transformational approach. In other interviews, such as #75, the worker deliberately works through social networks due to government restrictions on gathering, but he does not encourage believers to maintain a Muslim identity as would be characteristics of an insider approach. On the other hand, in many more interviews, there did seem to be a relationship between those who encouraged believers to maintain the socio-religious identity of their community and those who deliberately encouraged the movement of the gospel through social networks.

⁸ See Lewis 2009 for a discussion of this issue in her description of Kingdom Circles.

⁹ A useful chart describing this return to values of the apostolic and early post-apostolic age is found in Frost and Hirsch 2003:9.

¹⁰ Since the Western contexts that Frost and Hirsch and Carol Davis deal with are different from the contexts encountered by workers in this study, we are using the term "missional" to apply to church planting approaches (especially as delineated by Frost and Hirsch) in a Western context and "transformational" to apply to church planting approaches in a Muslim context. These two perspectives overlap, but are not necessarily identical.



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