

## Unit 5: The Fourth Wave of Cell Innovation

### Lecture: Introduction

Consider for a moment what we have seen in the cell church movement. First, the mathematics of an explosion of converts to the faith; how can we bring that home? Second, the incredible conflicts when we attempt to change traditional churches into cell churches. How can we bring these two realities together without an explosive reaction to change?

Third, our evolving model of a church system as a faith community with two wings: on one side the structured, left brain traditional church with its administrative support subsystems. On the other the relational, right brain discipleship system, sometimes with support subsystems of an equipping track and networked management structure. One cycles in familiar, comfortable patterns that repeat the past indefinitely; the other moves people through a process of specific, graduated levels of changes from a new disciple to a better disciple and finally to become a disciple maker. When cells truly mature persons to start new cells, they belong to the discipleship system as they move people through graduated levels of spiritual maturity.

How is it possible to join cells together with the traditional church so that both flourish?

**One is to follow the metachurch approach and create cells which have the goal of membership care but not the goal of evangelism or multiplication.** In this way the cell is made into something that fits into and is almost a miniature of the traditional church pattern; it is an attractive “come” structure, nurtures its members, conducts weekly small group events, and grows numerically by inviting people to these events. This is a process of addition, usually by adding people from those who attend the worship service; the worship service has to be very good to attract seekers. Often these people are at first strangers that soon become friends due to the hospitality of the cell. When one cell is full, another is started; cells do not typically multiply. It operates as a tool of sanctifying grace and produces better Christians. It is a “leader breeder” for the institutional church of small groups.

**Another approach would require us to find an example of a fully functional discipleship system entirely unattached to a “worship wing.”** In order to do this, the discipleship system would have no public worship service, no church bulletins, no church building, no budget, no paid staff, no programs, no committees and no governing structure. It would need to be complete with an equipping track, a management structure that only networked leaders and the demonstrated ability to mature converts into disciple makers. As these disciples make disciples who will make disciples, a generational mathematical multiplication begins to take place as the number of persons doubles again and again. These cells would convert people known to them interpersonally prior to visiting a worship service, as there would be no worship service.

In agricultural genetics in the midwest, seed companies breed pure strains of plants like corn. Generations of inbreeding result in less diversity and more uniformity; while plants with superior characteristics are selected, inbreeding also results in weaker plants and smaller harvests as genetic recessive traits emerge. Astonishingly, when two very inbred, genetically uniform corn plants are cross bred, the resulting hybrid is robust and fruitful. This has led to what is frequently called the “green revolution” as at least 20 percent more corn is produced on 25 percent fewer acres than in 1930, when

hybrid seed corn first became widely available.<sup>1</sup>

We have plenty of inbred, pure examples of worship systems exemplified in thousands of plateaued and shrinking traditional churches throughout the United States who operate with virtually no discipleship system. Is it possible to find a discipleship system with virtually no worship system in order to achieve a bountiful harvest by crossing them and achieve a robust, disciple making hybrid?

The answer is “yes.”

How can discipleship systems with no institutional church succeed in making disciples?

### **How can we have a church without worship at the center of all things?**

Steeped as we are in the traditional church worldview, we cannot imagine church without the public proclamation of the gospel, let alone all of our western concerns for what is essential to have a growing church.

Common church growth wisdom is based on a prioritization of the proclamation system over a discipleship system approach.<sup>2</sup> The priority in proclamation system evangelism is inviting non-Christians to worship. Everything must be subordinated to the comfort and convenience of the seeker so that non-Christians will desire to spend sufficient time in institutional worship services to become converted. This becomes impossible in a church the size of Yoido, where “the average member has to wait at least one hour in a long line just to get a place to sit down in one of our seven services.”<sup>3</sup> It is impossible to accommodate 700,000 Christians in what is considered ideal in the west: a single worship service leaving more than 40% of the seating area unoccupied so that seekers are not crowded or uncomfortable. Growth has overwhelmed the ability of Yoido church to provide a comfortable place for more than a third of the members to worship comfortably, but the church just keeps on growing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Agricultural Research Service, “Improving Corn,” U. S. Department of Agriculture, <http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/timeline/corn.htm>. This link is in your Workshop Materials folder.

<sup>2</sup>Church growth principles for a proclamation system based evangelistic approach are well stated by William Easum, *The Church Growth Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 43-54. These principles remain valid; Easum correctly indicates that improving worship brings immediate, positive results. Contemporary conditions, however, require an effective discipleship system cooperating with God in preventing and sanctifying grace to bring in the people to worship. Both are necessary, but throughout history it is the discipleship system which has been neglected.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Yonggi Cho with R. Whitney Manzano, *More Than Numbers* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 50. The facilities have since been expanded.

<sup>4</sup>In 2001 Cho spoke of Internet broadcasting to Rick Warren: “Korea is very small - not like in America with a lot of space, so we can't enlarge our church buildings. Besides, every year we have 20,000 new converts in our churches, and we can't put them all in our church building or even our branch churches. So now we have an Internet church and many of the young generation participate in the services at home . . . I say to the young people - don't come to church - just stay home and get your teaching through the Internet.” Cho indicates that most of the cells are attending worship via internet broadcasting. Staff, “Breakfast With David Yonggi Cho And Rick Warren,” *Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox*, Issue #17, 7/25/2001, <http://www.pastors.com/RWMT/?ID=17&artid=578&expand=1>

Discipleship Systems continue to be effective at making disciples beyond the capability of a church organization to provide the comfortable worship space or parking that Westerners would expect. ***When an effective discipleship system is in place, most western concerns about worship seem to be irrelevant to disciple making.***

**Discipleship Systems have continued making disciples in Ethiopia and China where persecution has prevented public worship for decades.** Believers of the Ethiopian *Meserete Kristos* movement grew tenfold, from 5000 to 50,000 during nine years of persecution without public worship.<sup>5</sup> Discipleship Systems can continue to effectively make disciples when no public worship is provided at all. ***This continuing growth when persecution prevents public preaching suggests that, with an effective discipleship system in place, the presence of an institutional church is irrelevant to disciple making.***

**The church multiplication movement strategy is rapidly planting indigenous churches under similar conditions in China without flashy public worship considered a requirement for growth in the United States.** Southern Baptist Mission Executive, David Garrison:

*In his initial survey, the strategy coordinator found three local house churches made up of about 85 Han Chinese Christians. The membership was primarily elderly and had been slowly declining for years with no vision or prospects for growth. Over the next four years, by God's grace, the strategy coordinator helped the gospel take fresh root among this people group and sweep rapidly across the Yanyin region.*

*Aware of the enormous cultural and linguistic barriers that separated him from the people of Yanyin, the missionary began by mobilizing Chinese Christian co-laborers from across Asia. Then, partnering these ethnic Chinese church planters with a small team of local believers, the group planted six new churches in 1994. The following year, 17 more were begun. The next year, 50 more were started. By 1997, just three years after starting, the number of churches had risen to 195 and had spread throughout the region, taking root in each of the five people groups.*

*At this point the movement was spreading so rapidly that the strategy coordinator felt he could safely exit the work without diminishing its momentum. The next year, in his absence, the movement nearly tripled as the total number of churches grew to 550 with more than 55,000 believers.<sup>6</sup>*

The discipleship system practiced in homes continued to produce believers in the absence of open, public worship or an institutional church.<sup>7</sup> When public worship resumes, the world is astonished

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(accessed June 13, 2007).

<sup>5</sup>For growth in the Sudan Interior Mission in Ethiopia, 1938-1943, see Bethel University, *Ethiopian Protestantism: the "Pente" Churches in Ethiopia*, www.bethel.edu/~letnie/EthiopiaProtestantism.html (accessed 22 March 2007). Cf. Jeremy Wells, "Ethiopia: 'The Country Blessed of God'," *Christianity Today*, July 1, 2005.

<sup>6</sup>David Garrison, "Chapter 2: CPMs Up Close; A Region in China," in *Church Planting Movements*, <http://www.imb.org/CPM/Chapter2-ChinaRegion.htm> (accessed June 15, 2007). Cf. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 49-64.

<sup>7</sup>Persecution also frees the discipleship system from the negative influence of an institutional church worldview and stranger evangelism, two systemic problems that inhibit disciple making. During persecution, no energy is invested in maintaining an institutional church; it all goes to disciple-making.

at the growth of these churches during a time of persecution and without the pulpit ministry Americans deem necessary. The discipleship system continues to function and make disciples whether or not there is public, Christian worship. ***This continuing growth when persecution prevents public preaching suggests that, with an effective discipleship system in place, the form worship takes is irrelevant to disciple-making.***

**The Willow Creek Association articulates a common refrain: “We are going to give everything we can give to build an Acts 2 church in our time and in our community. We are going to innovate, take risks, try new things, follow the fresh winds of the Spirit wherever they may lead and toward whatever new patterns of church life that may represent.”<sup>8</sup>**

What sort of church was the Acts 2 church? The church of Acts 2 attends Jewish, not Christian, worship in the temple where Jesus Christ is neither named or honored in liturgy. Neither Jesus nor the disciples have any leadership role or control in the worship that takes place in the temple. Temple liturgy was not Christian and did not express Christian belief or theology. The disciple-making work of the Church of Acts occurs without the disciples having the slightest influence on the worship forms of the Temple until Acts 6:7. (Presumably an attempt to influence temple worship results in their immediate ejection via persecution by the balancing process of the Temple system.) Nor does it seem that they sought to influence worship forms at all; they seem perfectly content to attend the temple and worship as they always had prior to the resurrection of Jesus. There is no New Testament correlation to either contemporary or traditional worship in Acts 1-6. The Great Commission does not command us to worship or build churches. Jesus does not conduct worship (as we would define it) in the New Testament, nor do the disciples. The temple is the institutional church in Acts, governed by the Sanhedrin, and they put Jesus on the cross to protect their institution from change. The apostles do not concern themselves with “fixing” or changing the temple in any way, nor in gaining seats in the Sanhedrin. They just go on making disciples who make disciples who make disciples. The church of Acts is a discipleship system functioning symbiotically within an institutional church.<sup>9</sup> ***Who would you rather be in Acts 2, after all: Peter or Caiaphas?***

The Great Commission of Matthew defines evangelism through a discipleship system; in Mark the emphasis is upon proclamation.<sup>10</sup> The number of converts at Pentecost and thousands more in the days that follow are the result of the discipleship system which Jesus modeled and taught for three years. Every community throughout Israel had a few who had experienced miracles, more who had seen them, some who had spent some time following Jesus, and many who had heard him teach. After the day of resurrection, proclamation would be enough to crystallize this proto-network of prechristians into a functioning local church. Discipleship systems work with God in prevenient grace to prepare people for a crystallizing moment of justifying grace. Jesus said, “I will build my church,” and demonstrated the necessary methods over three years of teaching. They were to teach these methods to each new convert.

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<sup>8</sup>Jim Melado, *Willow Creek Association*, <http://www.willownet.org/AboutUs/statement-jim.asp>.

<sup>9</sup>For a visual parable of this concept, see [http://www.disciplewalk.com/parable\\_shell\\_3.html](http://www.disciplewalk.com/parable_shell_3.html).

<sup>10</sup>Other references include Mark 3:14, 16:15, 16:20; Luke 24:47, Acts 5:42, Romans 10:14.

The New Testament church of Acts 1-6 is a discipleship system operating within but not controlled by an institutional church. Rather than waste any energy on recreating the institutional church for the unchurched, why not simply build an effective discipleship system?

**What's happening in our culture that would support this?**

Research from George Barna's book *Revolution*<sup>11</sup> indicates a developing trend of people deepening their spirituality in small groups outside their churches. From the back cover of the book: *World-renowned pollster George Barna has the numbers, and they indicate a revolution is already taking place within the Church—one that will impact every believer in America. Committed, born-again Christians are exiting the established church in massive numbers. Why are they leaving? Where are they going? And what does this mean for the future of the Church? Using years' worth of research data, and adhering to an unwavering biblical perspective, Barna predicts how this revolution will impact the organized church, how Christ's body of believers should react, and how individuals who are considering leaving (or those who have already left) can respond. For leaders working for positive change in the church and for believers struggling to find a spiritual community and worship experience that resonates, Revolution is here. Are you ready?*

When you delve behind the hype, this is a reality. People who believe that the institutional church prevents or hinders their spiritual growth and are seeking spiritual freedom without the confining practices of traditional spirituality. In the terminology of this course, they do not find a discipleship system within their traditional church, so they seek to participate in a discipleship system outside of their church. Some have left the traditional church behind and some participate in both worlds.

What motivates this separation from the limitations of a traditional church. I believe that it is a yearning for the benefits of an effective discipleship system that provides relationships, intimate community both with God and other people, and significant personal and spiritual growth. These hungers, largely unmet in the institutional wing of the two winged church, are driving a trend of exodus of Christians from traditional churches to the smaller intimate fellowships called organic or simple churches. One startling reality is the high percentage of unfulfilled lay leaders and pastors who are dropping out in search of something better than the institutional church.

We certainly are in the midst of a trend of change, and the pendulum may be swinging back to a reexperience of the small groups common in the 1970s during the heyday of what was called the charismatic movement. The Chinese have a curse: *may you live in interesting times*. We certainly live in interesting times, and the traditional church seems besieged. Yet times that are interesting are also times of blessing. It is still God's church, rising like a boat on the waves of change but not sunk by them. While we yearn for a placid time or golden age for the church, I'm not so sure that any such time has truly existed in our history. Whatever this faith is, it is not boring!

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<sup>11</sup>George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005).