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The most common forms of Church Planting and the most common forms of evangelism have a common element – extraction. In extraction evangelism an individual is won to the Lord without serious regard for the family, community or nation. The individual “win” is more important than the possible “win” of the family/community/nation. Extraction evangelism is the result of poor theology and an evangelism strategy that does not understand family/community/ nation structures, or chooses to ignore these structures.

From a theological perspective, one is hard pressed to find examples of personal evangelism as taught and practiced in Western culture.

It is certainly true that each person must make the decision to follow Christ for him or herself (Romans 10:9-13). But, individuals coming to Christ outside the context of family or community are rare in Scripture and usually the result of unique circumstances. Saul, later known as Paul (Acts 9:1-19), and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:27-38) are two examples of individuals who came to Christ outside of family or community structures. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19ff) commanded us to “make disciples of all nations,” not just individuals from all nations. Mark and Luke say we are to preach to all creation and all nations (Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:43-49). Mark does indicate the decision will be made individually. Acts 1:8 strongly suggests we should be witnesses to communities – Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. There seems to be a strong community/national emphasis in the Great Commissions.

A common Biblical statement in regard to commitments to Christ is “so-and-so and his/her whole family/household believed and were baptized.” This pattern emerges in Acts 10 with Cornelius. Peter defends his actions in Acts 11. (See also: Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 16:15) Individual encounters were expanded to the family quickly, and the family became the focus of the evangelism effort. At times this expanded to whole communities coming to Christ. (See the Woman at the Well, John 4:1-26) It was the Philippian Jailer who experienced the miracle, but it was his whole family who believed and were baptized (Acts 16:23-40). It was Lydia and a group of other ladies who first heard the message from Paul, but it was Lydia and her whole household who believed and were baptized (Acts 16:11-15).

Extraction Church Planting is similar. Unrelated people are “won” and brought together to form a new church. They may be encouraged to reach back into their old communities to “win” others, but the focus is on the new hybrid community they have joined – the church. They learn a new culture, an insider language, and are encouraged to bring others into the new community if they are ready to leave their old communities. Redeeming their old communities is not a serious thought, though other individuals will be sought if it is not too much trouble (in other words: little or no persecution). Soon, the new believers are so adapted to their new community and so alienated from their old communities that it is next to impossible for them to reach their families, communities, or nations. Families perceive their loved ones as being stolen or kidnapped from them in much the same way Christians feel about cults and their practices. Communities are suspicious of anyone who would abandon their cultural roots. And nations rarely tolerate traitors.

Extraction churches find it very difficult to reproduce. The pain each member has experienced makes it difficult to inflict the same pain on others. Few members of extraction churches become effective church planters, so the foreign or outsider church planter must continue to start each new church with the same disastrous results – individuals are extracted, families are fractured, communities are torn, and nations legislate against the evils of conversion.

It is my opinion that Satan is at work in these extraction methodologies. Satan encourages the use of extraction evangelism and church planting strategies because these strategies do not take into serious account families/communities/nations, and will result in the “winning” of one at the loss of the rest of the family/community/nation. Good odds for Satan – he will encourage us to win one and lose 10 or more as a result of these methodologies. Most of us play into Satan’s hand thinking we have done something great by “winning” one, when what we have really accomplished is the losing of a family, community, or a whole nation as a result of extraction strategies.

What's the alternative? We must see individuals as doorways to families; families as gateways to communities; and communities as highways to nations. Our strategies must look past the individual to intentionally include their family, community, and nation. When we begin to realize that the minimum unit for evangelism is the household (family), and that the family will win their community, and the community will win the nation; we begin to see the road to obedience found in all the Great Commissions (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20; Acts 1). We will find ourselves at odds with Satan instead of playing into his hand. We will find ourselves developing strategies beyond simplistic personal evangelism models that have failed to keep pace with population growth, much less win the nations.

I challenge you to rethink your evangelism. Each soul is important to God. But, Jesus commanded us to find the lost (Luke 15:1-32). Methods that find one lost person, and may condemn the rest of his or her family/community/nation to remain lost cannot be from God. Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "The Son of Man came to look for the lost and save them." (NIV) In John 20:21 Jesus said, "as Father has sent me, so I am sending you." (NASB)

The job of the evangelist is seeking the lost, all the lost. We must not stop when we have found one, or a dozen or a thousand. We must not participate in strategies that cause lostness or promote lostness through neglect or misunderstanding the task. We must not contribute to strategies that intentionally fracture families or alienate communities from future encounters with Christ. Our job is to find the lost and save the lost, all the lost. We may not be 100 percent successful, but we must not do anything that prevents the lost from receiving those who are looking for them, and being saved by the one who died for them. We are in the business of redeeming communities for Christ and through Christ. We are not in the business of winning a few to a particular Christian culture, denomination, or church. Let's not engage in extraction evangelism. Let's work hard to redeem nations through communities, and redeem communities through families, and to redeem families through their members God allows us to engage with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's see established communities become communities of believers.