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## Book Review: Motus dei: The Movement of God to Disciple the Nations Edited by Warrick Farah

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## Book Review

### *Motus Dei: The Movement of God to Disciple the Nations*

Edited by Warrick Farah, Foreword by David Garrison, Afterword by Alan Hirsch  
Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2021

376 pages

USD \$26.99

Reviewed by David H. Campbell. David has a PhD in Missiology from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He has some experience working among Muslims in Indonesia and with Hindus and Buddhists in Nepal. He currently teaches Christian Mission courses at Grand Canyon University and World Religions with Liberty University.

In his groundbreaking book, *Motus Dei: The Movement of God to Disciple the Nations*, Warrick Farah, a missiologist and theological educator from the Middle East, and a team of scholars, practitioners, mission leaders, and movement catalysts from around the world have come together to describe and document the miraculous movement of God among the nations in which thousands of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus in many previously Unreached People Groups (UPGs) are coming to faith in Jesus Christ in the past thirty years. Farah writes in the introduction to his book, “We are talking about movements of the kingdom of God. Church planting movements. Disciple making movements. Movements in which King Jesus is made famous, and lives and communities are being transformed by the gospel. Ultimately, we are talking about the motus Dei: Latin for the ‘movement of God’” (xiii).

But what does Farah mean by the term movement? Movements are not methods, but rather a passion for Jesus Christ in which disciples make

disciples and movements are simply the result. Movements are the “phenomenon of small, rapidly reproducing communities of obedient Christ followers. These communities of Christ followers may look different than the churches with which we are familiar. Yet they are growing remarkably and are currently estimated to constitute about 1 percent of the world’s population” (331).

*Motus Dei* is divided into five main sections and includes twenty-two chapters on movements: Part I-The Big Picture of Movements, Part II-Missional Theology of Movements, Part III-Movement Dynamics, Part IV-Case Studies, and Part V-Movement Leadership and Next Steps. In Part 1, Farah provides a theological, sociological, and practical overview of movements. Farah notes, “While it can be described in several ways, Christianity is by nature a movement” (2). Farah posits that if biblical faith is *motus Dei* by nature, then a careful missiological examination of contemporary movements needs to be made to examine and discern what things could be promoting and hindering movements in both the Global South and potentially in the Global North.

Chapter two provides observations over fifteen years of Disciple Making Movements (DMMs) from a non-western perspective. Samuel Kebreab, the Regional Coordinator for the Horn of Africa with the Movement for African National Initiative (MANI) writes:

I first heard of Disciple Making Movements (DMMs) in 2006, while I was going through a disheartening season. I was serving our denomination as outreach coordinator in a church planting effort we had started among the Yoma [a pseudonym], an unreached people group in Southern Ethiopia. We had aimed to plant one hundred village churches in fifteen years. By 2006, our seventh year of engaging the people, we had planted only seven churches. I felt discouraged... While attending DMM training by David Watson and David Hunt, I felt the material made a lot of sense. (26)

After his training in DMM, Kebreab began to train and coach Yoma men and women using DMM principles. The work grew slowly at first but steadily. After fourteen years, Kebreab joyfully reported, “There are now 5,672 Christ followers in 364 village churches, comprising seven generations of churches” (26). What happened? A DMM was initiated by God working among and through His people.

In chapter three, David Coles answers some of the critiques of movements and movement strategies. Coles deals with the eight most common objections to movements. One such objection he addresses is

the charge that “Church Planting Movements leave open a door for false teaching because of inadequate theological training of leaders” (44). Coles answers the objection by noting the Bible does not call for a diploma or a degree from a seminary. Instead, Coles noted, based on 2 Timothy 2:2, “The apostle Paul described his training model as easily reproducible to multiple generations.”

A theological treatment of movements and a development of movement missiology is presented in chapters six to ten by contributors David Lim, Craig Ott, Trevor Larsen, Michael T. Cooper, and James Lucas. Ott, professor of mission and intercultural studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, identifies seven biblical dynamics of church planting movements: 1) Movements are a work of the triune God; 2) Movements are fueled by the Word of God, the gospel; 3) Movements are the result of evangelism that intentionally plants churches; 4) Movements empower ordinary believers to share their faith; 5) Movements are sustained by developing leaders; 6) Movements can expect to face opposition; and 7) Movements should be linked with the larger body of Christ (104-110).

In the chapters on “Biblical Dynamics of Movements,” Steve Addison considers why movements rise and fall. Addison notes that the degree to which a movement stays anchored to Jesus Christ will determine its growth and sustainability. Pam Arlund and Regina Foard, in their chapter “From Her Perspective: Women and Multiplication Movements,” call for an increased role and voice for women in mission movements and movement leadership.

In chapter thirteen, Paul Kuivinen offers a fascinating treatment of music and missions in his contribution, “How Ethnodoxology Drives Movements.” Kuivinen documents how movement leaders working to reach UPGs are experiencing amazing breakthroughs as the people are learning the Scriptures through songs, melodies, and harmonies using their voices and indigenous musical instruments in creative and exciting ways. Such new approaches are making monumental impacts on how the gospel is spreading in regions that previously were hindered due to Western imports of songs and hymns by missionaries that did not resonate with the peoples in their cultures.

Frank Preston, in chapter fourteen, “Media to Movements: A Church Planting Fusion,” explores how multimedia and online churches are helping to expand movements, especially during a time in which social media has exploded and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic when people have been so socially isolated. Preston discusses how social media is helping to identify religious seekers and POPS (or “persons of peace”) who are open to change and the gospel (214).

Bradley Cocanower and Joao Mordomo discuss movement work among people from the Global South who are in the Global North due to war, migration, or those seeking political asylum in their chapter, “Terra Nova: Opportunities and Challenges of Movement Work in Diaspora Contexts.” Physical needs, financial needs, legal needs, language learning and culture adjustment needs, social connection and friendship needs, and counseling needs for people suffering the ravages of war, can all be daunting and overwhelming to refugees.

In chapters sixteen to eighteen, case studies describe and document tens of thousands of people coming to faith in Jesus Christ among Muslims in East Africa, Hindus in India, and Buddhists in Thailand. In chapter nineteen, Rania Mostofi and Patrick Brittenden ask, “How can we best participate in and work with the work of the Spirit so that his wind continues blowing through to the second generation?” (278).

Emanuel Prinz offers an empirical study using qualitative and quantitative data for a profile of an effective movement leader or catalyst in chapter twenty. In chapter twenty-one, Eric and Laura Adam discuss the paradigm shift of their organization from a church planting group to an organization pursuing movement methods and movement thinking, praying, and planning. In the final chapter, Richard Grady addresses questions using a listening symposium from experienced global movement leaders representing five continents on the next steps to continue and mature the discourse on discipleship movements.

*Motus Dei* is a remarkable achievement as a resource and scholarly work both in its breadth and depth for cutting-edge missiological research. One of the greatest strengths of *Motus Dei* is that it brings together the collaborative insights of thirty-two contributors from African, Middle Eastern, European, Asian, and North American regions. The rich backgrounds and experiences of contributors such as Victor John of India, coauthor of *The Bhojpuri Breakthrough: The Movement that Keeps Multiplying* (2019); David Garrison, author of the groundbreaking books *Church Planting Movements* (2004), *T4T: A Discipleship Revolution* (2011), and *A Wind in the House of Islam* (2014); and Pam Arlund, author of *The Pocket Guide to Church Planting* (2010), *Fruit to Harvest* (2018), and *Conversations on When Everything is Missions* (2020); all bring a wealth of background, experiences, and insights to the conversation on movements.

Another strength of Farah’s *Motus Dei* was the invitation to join the global conversation on movements. Farah invites readers with significant movement experience or interest to join the *Motus Dei* network by connecting with their team through <http://motusdei.network>.

*Motus Dei* raised important issues and questions for further

missiologial reflection and research. Some of the questions were: Are the observations from researchers in reported movements unique to their regions or common across movements? How can movements institutionalize and yet retain their movement DNA or identities? How will movements interact with the broader body of Christ and their societies? What will be the contextualized theologies of movements and their emerging ecclesiologies?

The purpose of this book was not “to satisfy academic curiosity, but rather to provoke inquiry related to how God is at work in our world” (19). Farah and the contributors to the project *Motus Dei* accomplished their collective goal. They described, defined, and documented contemporary mission movements using a multilevel and multidisciplinary approach involving theologians, missiologists, social scientists, and practitioners.

A few areas not explored in the book were movements from populations native to the Global North and Latin America. In addition, although China was mentioned briefly in chapter five, “How Movements Count,” no detailed reports of movements in communist countries were discussed. How could movements be initiated in communist countries such as China, Cuba, and North Korea to reach millions with the gospel? The reviewer agrees with Alan Hirsch in his Afterword to *Motus Dei* when he wrote, “While I recognize that *Motus Dei* has been written by (and mostly for) reflective practitioners and missiologists operating in the Global South, there was little reflection on how their remarkable insights might impact Christian mission in distinctly Western and post-Christian contexts” (339). How might the contributions and conversations from *Motus Dei* be used to revitalize and begin a movement of God in the Global North and Latin America?