

## Unit 3: The First Wave Interpreted Worldwide Lecture: *Introduction to Unit 3*

At Yoido, Dr. Cho had transitioned his traditional congregation to the cell model in a time of crisis. In the transition the church learned from success and failure, systematized those lessons and refined the cell model into a system with very clear, specific operating procedures. They were no longer a church in transition; after two decades, cells now were “the way we’ve always done it here” for the vast majority of Yoido members.

While cell groups at Yoido differentiated, just as cells differentiate in the human body, at their core they all had the same, identical DNA of instructions that guide every action. Newly born cells were no longer an innovation; rather than being a creative artistic expression or entrepreneurial reinvention, they functioned more like replications of a franchise guided by a detailed manual of operations. As the innovation moves through the adopter framework, it gains a stable, functional structure which is now the primary cause of generative growth. The goal is not to revise the plan but work the plan, cycling the current reality over and over again to make disciples. The Wesleyan discipleship system was likewise rule based; as John Wesley would have said, “Don’t mend our rules, but keep them . . .”

Brilliant, innovative minds took from the Yoido cell system what seemed to be needed back home and began adapting “what worked in Seoul” into something new based on something old.<sup>1</sup> Innovators are able to understand and apply complex technical knowledge, improvise with that knowledge, cope with a high degree of uncertainty and often have resources which offset the risk and inevitable losses that come from experimentation. They are continually debugging, improving and reworking their projects; a project is never done while a new feature or improvement can be added. Innovators love to improvise solutions to problems. They resist structure and systems, preferring to reinvent everything; early adopters then refine these new adaptations for local optima. Innovators are drawn to anything new, unusual and productive; they are by nature incapable of carrying out a plan developed by someone else. Some aspects of the Yoido system were considered unnecessary and dropped, while various aspects of western Christianity were blended in to improve upon the original and make the flavor more palatable to consumers.

Two basic trends developed. Ralph Neighbour’s brilliant adaptation of Yoido’s discipleship system focused on the contrast between the “pure cell church” and the traditional church, leading to what I call the second wave of innovation in South American churches which is the topic of Unit 4. Carl George’s innovation, the “metachurch model,” focused on similarities between Yoido and the traditional church, leading to what I call the third wave of innovation in “cellish” American megachurches which is the topic of Unit 5.

The problem with new innovations is that they attract innovators who likewise modify the original innovator’s adaptation of the innovation. And these new, “improved” innovations lead to more innovators and more modifications and concessions to tradition. The cycle repeats as ideas are handed onward from innovator to innovator until whatever it was that worked at Yoido has been removed or

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<sup>1</sup>For more information on the innovator mind set, see *Seminar Two: Dialogue* at [www.disciplewalk.com/resources](http://www.disciplewalk.com/resources).

neutered. Result: the “new idea” fails to achieve its goals in the Western setting. Systems take advantage of this weakness of innovators as a means of resisting change, often resulting in church conflicts and the painful rejection of the innovation.

After reviewing Beckham, Neighbour and George’s early contribution to these trends, we’ll take a brief look at insights from the *diffusion of innovations* on this process. The inability of innovators to follow instructions without “mending” them underlies many of the negative experiences of attempting to bring innovation to traditional settings, according to *diffusion of innovations* theory. The second half of the great commission in Matthew 28:20a is essential to the fulfillment of the Great Commission: “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” The essential quality of this Great Commission teaching is that new disciples become able follow instructions. To simply obey Christ is still a challenge for many and still a challenge for me. The inability to follow directions and to teach new disciples to follow directions underlies many significant problems in the church today. It is the major challenge to developing a healthy discipleship system.

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