

Set Theory and Conversion

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Introduction:

- the church has debated extensively what constitutes "conversion".
- we need to understand how our own worldview assumptions influence the way we answer this question.

1. Bounded Sets (well-formed, intrinsic sets. $X = x(f)1,0$).

1.1 Their nature:

- 1.11 A set is defined by the intrinsic nature of its members.
 - things either belong to a set or they don't.
- 1.12 It is important to maintain the boundary to define the set.
- 1.13 All members of a set are essentially the same.
- 1.14 The only change is from in to out, or out to in.

1.2 "Christian" as bounded set:

- 1.21 A Christian is defined by what he or she **is**:
 - defined in terms of orthodoxy
 - defined in terms of orthopraxy
- 1.22 The focus is on maintaining the boundary - in or out.
- 1.23 One sees all Christians as essentially the same.
 - growth is not an intrinsic part of the set.
- 1.24 Stress chiefly conversion and evangelism.
- 1.25 Unity is expressed by uniformity.
- 1.26 Danger: worshipping the group, lack of a center.

1.3 Mission as bounded set:

- 1.31 Christians in other cultures must adopt our doctrines and practices.
- 1.32 We must be their teachers.

2. Centered Sets

2.1 Their nature: (Extrinsic - well formed sets).

- 2.11 A set is defined by the relationship of its members to a center or 'other'. Membership is not by what a thing **is but to whom is it related**
- 2.12 There is a clear boundary, but the primary emphasis is placed on the relationship and the center.
- 2.13 Two types of change are possible:
 - in to out, and out to in.
 - movement towards the center = growth in the relationship.

- 2.14 There may be considerable variation in the intrinsic nature of the member of the set.
- 2.2 "Christian" as centered set.
 - 2.21 A Christian is defined first and foremost in terms of a relationship to Christ.
 - 2.22 There is a clear boundary between those who are Christian and those who are not.
 - 2.23 Stress is placed on the relationship to the person of Christ - on worship, obedience, etc.
 - 2.24 Stress both conversion (= turning around) and growth - both justification and sanctification.
 - 2.25 Stress unity in one family because we have one Father.
 - 2.26 Danger: Idolatry = wrong center.
- 2.3 Mission as centered set:
 - 2.31 Christians in other cultures should read the Bible for themselves.
 - 2.32 They and we must study it together.

3. Fuzzy Sets. (Intrinsic, fuzzy sets)

- 3.1 Their nature:
 - 3.11 Sets are defined intrinsically - by what the members of the set **are**.
 - 3.12 The boundaries between sets are fuzzy.
 - 3.13 Things may belong to two sets, and there are degrees of inclusion in a set.
 - 3.14 Change is from in to out or out to in, but this is not a point but a process.
 - 3.15 A thing can belong to two sets at the same time.
- 3.2 "Christian" as fuzzy set:
 - 3.21 A Christian is defined by what he or she is.
 - orthodoxy and/or orthopraxy.
 - 3.22 The boundary is fuzzy. One can be part or fully Christian.
 - 3.23 One can belong to more than one religion at the same time - eg. be 1/2 Hindu and 1/2 Christian.
 - 3.24 Conversion is a process, not a point.
 - 3.25 This view leads to relativism.
- 3.3 Mission as fuzzy set.
 - 3.31 Christians in other cultures must find Christ in their own religions and cultures.
 - 3.32 We and they must dialogue to find a common ground.

Note: Much of western Christianity thinks in terms of Bounded sets. I believe Centered sets are more biblical. I reject fuzzy sets when applied to Christian conversion and faith. It leads us to a position of religious relativism.

Bibliographic References

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FIGURE 2

A Typology of Sets

