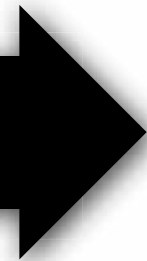


Taking This Conversation Forward:



“Reassessing the Frontiers” at ISFM 2010

BRAD GILL

Global mission gatherings can jump-start new directions for a global Church, and the world-level consultations planned for 2010 have all the potential to do so. As we look back, we can see that the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization sprouted two new directions from two separate critiques of evangelical mission. For more than 30 years these two streams have run parallel, only incidentally fusing their emphases at intermittent global gatherings. Regular readers of *Mission Frontiers* are conversant with the first stream that has emphasized people groups and especially “unreached peoples,” as revisited in this issue of *MF*. That stream grew from Ralph Winter’s introduction of the idea of cultural distance into the challenge of evangelizing the world.

The second stream grew from a plethora of prophetic voices among churches in the non-Western world. It called for a more comprehensive gospel, the yeast of the Kingdom, one that can transform

societies, bless the poor and the destitute, and liberate the oppressed



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of the world. This “transformational” mission has generated its own mission organizations, educational institutions and missiological societies over three decades. Its emphasis was front-and-center at the recent Urbana student mission conference, an indication that it is capturing the minds and hearts of a new student generation.

A third reality, globalization, quite outside the control of mission agendas, has run parallel to both these streams of mission. Global mission gatherings in 2010 are scrambling to reassess the impact of global systems on their mission endeavors. Their periscopes will struggle to break the surface of this ocean of change. Appreciating 100 years of mission since Edinburgh 1910 is one thing, but assessing the phenomenal changes since 1974 will be breathtaking.

These three topics are the backdrop for the (admittedly immodest) agenda for this year’s gathering of the North American chapter of

the International Society for Frontier Missiology (ISFM). Under the theme “Reassessing the Frontiers: Ethnicity, Globalization and the Kingdom of God,” the ISFM will examine the intersection and potential integration

of these three topics: unreached peoples (ethnicity), transformation (the Kingdom), and globalization. ISFM 2010 will take place in Charlotte, North Carolina September 21-23, preceding the North American Mission Leaders Conference September 23-25 in the same city.

Keynote sessions at ISFM 2010 will examine how globalization has caused religious resurgence across the world. In the past decade, the ISFM and its journal (the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*) have focused much on the borderlands of these religious civilizations, shining the spotlight on movements to Christ behind increasingly radioactive frontiers, in what are now popularly known as “insider” movements. At ISFM 2010 Todd Johnson (co-editor of the *Atlas of Global Christianity* and director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity) will bring a sweeping analysis of how globalization impacts these religious frontiers, often creating either firewalls or new thresholds between world religions. Other mission voices will respond from the Buddhist world (Kang-San Tan, formerly OMF research desk, now Redcliffe College) as well as from other religious traditions.

As this issue of *Mission Frontiers* intimates, the most pressing question at ISFM 2010 may be the impact of globalization on “people groups.” Robert Priest (professor at Trinity School of Intercultural Studies) will survey the development of our anthropological lenses on “people groups,” refining our grasp of the contextual complexity of peoples amidst global change. Other sessions will respond and expand on both the increasing “hybridities” and the ethnic explosiveness which impact the boundaries of caste, tribe and people.

Amidst the global pressure of multiculturalism there are renewed calls in the global Church for culturally-hybrid congregations and the melting down of differences. Hence ISFM 2010 will offer sessions to re-examine the biblical foundations of ethnicity and cultural difference, addressing whether a “higher” biblical view of the local church requires a blending of cultures. Indigenous mission voices from the “First Nations,” ranging from Oceania to Africa, will respond on the role of ethnic revitalization in their Christian identity.

Finally, a rising generation is calling for a more comprehensive “Kingdom mission” that transforms the evil injustices and inequities of global society. Bruce Graham (Frontier Mission Fellowship) will address the subject of the “Gospel of the Kingdom” from his two decades of biblical training among the indigenous mission efforts of India. Can we reconcile the beauty of ethnic identity with the Kingdom transformation of identity? Can a “Kingdom Mission” open up new and creative breakthroughs for service across difficult frontiers? And what is the Kingdom story from which we draw our sense of mission? Responses to this Kingdom dynamic will come from younger leaders and campus ministries in touch with this emerging generation.

Look for more details on ISFM 2010 in the next two issues of *Mission Frontiers*, but for now I encourage many MF readers to put September 21-23 (Charlotte, NC) on your calendars. In coming weeks further details and registration guidelines will be posted to the Website of the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (www.ijfm.org). f

