

ISFM NEWS: ISFM 2005 Shakes the Rockies



by Mack Harling, President, ISFM

Denver, Colorado, September 12-15, experienced the mission-quake, “Synergistic Kingdom Advance among the Least and the Lost,” a joint conference of the ISFM, the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Associations, and several other missions associations. The quake’s epicenter was the ISFM track on Insider Movements, which rocked the foundations of traditional mission paradigms with its seminars on the *Kingdom of God and the Gospel*, *Churchless Christianity*, *the True Nature of the Church*, *the Supremacy of Christ in the Qur’an*, *Jesus Movements in Islam*, and *Parallel Problems between Missions in the Bible and Today*.

John Ridgway, Navigators consultant for frontier missions in Asia, synthesized the book of Ephesians as the foundation for our understanding of the true nature of the church. Ephesians portrays the church not as essentially an organizational or structural entity, but as “the people of God in vital relationships with one another, becoming like Christ, and living among the lost by being insiders in their natural networks.

K. Gustafson of “Common Ground” presented the kingdom of God as a more biblical and effective paradigm of mission than “Christianity.” He offered his “kingdom circles” as a practical and productive tool for presenting the central message of scripture—especially in light of the obstacles presented by traditional paradigms of conversion.

Dave Mack, gave witness to the birth of an Insider movement in Asia—one which came under the scrutiny of a prominent theologian. After lengthy questioning of group after group of its adherents, this evangelical leader concluded that these Muslims who followed Christ were as biblically orthodox as the best evangelicals in

America. Mack advocated incarnational and contextualized ministry. We are to incarnationally become like others (1 Cor 9:19-22) in order that they may remain as they are (in their *oikos* and social network of relationships (1 Cor 7:17-24)—although they must live under the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21). Special attention was given to the context of 1 Cor. 7—marriage in an immoral society. The essence of Apostle Paul’s instructions were:

1. Retain your place in life/calling (marital situation (vv.17-24), religious identity (v.18), and socio-economic standing (vv. 21-22));
2. Don’t try to change it; for it is assigned by God (Acts 17:26);
3. Obedience to Christ is what matters (1 Cor. 7:19)!

Ralph D. Winter asserted that book of Acts gives us the paradigm for the expansion of the church in all times and places. It is not just the history of one era, but a guide of what will happen when the Gospel moves from one culture to another—resulting in conflict among believers, just as was the case with the Jews and Gentiles in the early expansion of the church. Illustrating from church history, Winter showed how different faith communities have consistently had trouble accepting others different from themselves. (The German reformation, he asserts, was not driven by a difference over doctrine as much as it was by a rejection of Latin culture). While there is only one true faith, there may be many religious manifestations of it (such as Hindu followers of Christ) that can be as valid as the varied expressions of the faith within Christianity. Unfortunately, Christians and missionaries often act as modern “Judaizers” as they “Christianize” converts. Instead, we must extract “Christianity” from Christ and present Him alone.

The ISFM also invited Dr. Sung Sam Kang, President of the Korean World Missions Association (KWMA) to tell of “Korea’s Massive Mobilization for Frontier Missions.” This saintly patriarch of KWMA (which represents 120

denominations and mission agencies) stunned us with the Korea mission’s breath-taking vision and meticulously planned mobilization program for frontier missions. Determined to instill a spirit of frontier missions in the Korean churches, they have not only dreamed hugely, but are developing detailed policy, plans, and curriculum to achieve them:

- Adopt 200 unreached people groups every 5 years
- Mobilize 50% of Korean churches to participate in missions by 2030, expanding from the 15% Korean church involvement at present)
- Send out 100,000 missionaries by 2030. (The current North American missionary force is about half that number)
- Equip and send 1 million business and professional “tentmakers” to creative access countries by 2020
- Re-deploy current missionaries to frontier areas
- Establish an accreditation system for Korean mission agencies
- Develop total member care systems
- Establish networks connecting various missions research institutes.

Dr. Kang then asked five representatives of the US Center for World Mission address the KWMA mission leadership, Nov. 16-18, in Seoul, at the inauguration of the Korean Frontier Mission Network and birth of the *Korean Journal of Frontier Missions*. For details of that event see the report by Rory Clark on pp. 153-54.

Participants departed Denver convinced of the need for more biblical and theological study, as well as more case studies, to further develop our thinking on the kingdom of God (vs. Christianity) and Insider movements. Many felt an urgent need to disseminate Insider thinking, and some felt that all mission agencies needed to be at our meetings. Next year’s meetings will provide further opportunity for this to happen. **IJFM**