

The Discipline of a Lateral Gaze

I was walking with Todd Johnson through his Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) when he handed me their new regional study of North Africa and Western Asia.¹ As I leafed through its pages, I found myself back in the Arab streets and towns where I had served so long ago. But this volume provided a perspective that I had struggled to obtain during those years in North Africa—an aerial sweep of that predominantly Muslim geo-political world.

One particular memory stands out. I had been feeling a dull marathoner's ache from some long months of ministry in my Muslim mountain community when I got hold of a piece of fiction. Needing a little mental escape, I plunged into the tale of a renegade intelligence officer skulking around the streets of Southeast Asia. I don't remember the plot, but I'll never forget a principle vividly illustrated in the story's denouement. Ultimately, it was a tale of two kinds of knowledge: the first embodied by the street-level, cultural savvy of a covert operative; the second, by an older woman down in the basement of the home office, combing diligently through mountains of data from that region of the world. The resolution of the case required both kinds of knowledge. That story left an indelible impression on how I view the missiological task.

The 12,000 volumes at the CSGC represent a librarian's organization of global mission. Subjects are shelved categorically and predictably in an overall kaleidoscope of World Christianity. More than once I wanted to park and pull a title. The files were buried in the back offices, where the vital data for the World Christian Encyclopedia is compiled. I couldn't help but recall the elderly lady pouring over intelligence data in that spy thriller. The lesson was transferable: a more comprehensive knowledge is a vital complement to the skill and savvy of a field worker.

The articles in this issue of *IJFM* may fit those same categories. But they also demonstrate a discipline of mind we might label "peripheral vision." Strategic phenomena for our study and reflection might be close at hand, but run parallel to our mission, thus failing to intersect with it. As a result, they remain unrelated, unincorporated, and unused. Our peripheral vision fails us.

It was Edward de Bono who introduced the idea of *lateral thinking* a few decades ago, a kind of logic that disrupts the more traditional *vertical thought* process.

Lateral thinking moves across subject matter, like my roaming of those volumes at the CSGC. But that kind of thinking requires a more deliberate exercise, a kind of

Editorial *continued on p. 104*

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Subscriptions

One year (four issues) \$18.00
Two years (eight issues) \$34.00
Three years (twelve issues) \$48.00
Single copies \$5.00, multiple copies \$4.00
Payment must be enclosed with orders.

Please supply us with current address and change of address when necessary.

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IJFM (ISSN #2161-3354) was established in 1984 by the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, an outgrowth of the student-level meeting of Edinburgh '80.

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PRINTED in the USA

discipline that challenges the logic of a library. It tests our categories by pressing toward the margins, examining what tends to be ignored on the periphery. It will search beyond any denominational status quo and welcome the ambiguity of apparent incompatibilities. When it comes to missiology, lateral thinking promises to loosen up the matter-of-factness of locked down paradigms. It creates new vantage points and a broader canvas for missiological reflection.

These articles do just that. H. L. Richard looked afield and discovered a recent Roman Catholic movement among the peoples of India. His interaction with Fr. Jose Panadan offers valuable lessons on the dynamics of the gospel in a Hindu religious world (p. 105). Christian Anderson looks sideways and compares two movements in the distinct socio-religious contexts of Iran and Bangladesh, insisting that religious structures like the Muslim *ummah* (global community) shape the conditions of discipleship (p. 117).

George Bristow continues this journal's intrepid excursion into the subject of Muhammad and biblical prophethood (p. 127). David Dunaetz introduces the

insights of cognitive science to help us face the impact of technology on learning and theological education in the Majority World (p. 135).

Some have recently suggested that frontier missiology suffers from tunnel vision. Lee and Park in the recent *Missiology*² claim that the unreached people's emphasis (UPG) over the past four decades is myopic and naïve given 21st century global conditions (p. 148). Globalization, they say, calls for a more progressive anthropology, one that sees beyond the antiquated notion of people groups. We will be addressing some of these concerns this fall at ISFM 2018.

As an initial response we invite you to troll our archives (ijfm.org) and benefit from our journal's lateral thinking across various disciplines, perspectives, and global realities. We believe you'll find promoted there a "peripheral" vision that qualifies static understandings of those conditions we now face among the frontier peoples of the world.

ISFM 2018 offers a rare opportunity to tackle how we communicate the frontier mission task to the wider body of Christ. For the past two years, mission

demographers have been wrestling with definitions of unreached peoples. In October, key leaders of mission mobilization agencies will hold a summit around the theme "Clarifying the Frontier Mission Task." Presentations, case studies, and formal responses will also seek to involve feedback and participation from all participants. To register for the October 12–14 gathering, which will be held at the Graduate Institute of Linguistics/GIAL, Dallas, Texas, go to emsweb.org (see back cover).

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros, and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity (Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

² Peter T. Lee and James Sung-Hwan Park, "Beyond people group thinking: A critical reevaluation of unreached people groups," *Missiology* 46, no. 3 (2018): 212–225, doi: 10.1177/0091829618774332.

The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The World Consultation on Frontier Missions and the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go, yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.