

Negotiating the Edges of the Kingdom

The Apostle Paul looms large in any attempt to clarify the frontier mission task; he's our biblical exemplar. We're drawn to his vision statement in Romans 15 where he claims, "I have fulfilled the gospel of Christ" (v. 19). Paul had ministered the name of Jesus from Jerusalem to Illyricum, in synagogues and temples, to Greek and barbarian, in urban hubs and hinterlands. He had established a foundation (v. 20) and communicated this achievement when he says, "there is no more place for me in this region" (v. 23). It was time to move on.

Paul chose the Greek term *pleroo* (to fill, supply, accomplish, finish) to indicate a sense of measurement. The choice of term fascinates me. After reviewing the significant factors in that particular Christian movement, he determined it was "full." He had finished, there was a certain sufficiency, and he could head for Spain. *Pleroo* is a meaningful term for speaking of closure, but perhaps not precise enough for those of us who might study movements to Christ on the frontier. Something unspoken lies behind Paul's determination to move on. What were his criteria for this *pleroo*?

Over the past four decades certain terms have emerged that attempt to measure the frontier task. "Reached" and "unreached" represent a strategic assessment of where the frontier mission task either is—or has yet to be—completed among a people. Likewise, the terms "engaged" or "unengaged" attempt to gauge when a significant enough ministry has begun among these unreached/frontier peoples.

We need to realize that these concepts are negotiable and bear on realities that will constantly be contested. Just when we think they have been resolved, they pop up again. A recent example is Peter Lee and James Park's critique in *Missiology* of the unreached peoples concept.¹ In one sense, this debate is rooted in the rather open and unclear assessment Paul gave regarding the fulfillment of his ministry there in Romans 15. What did Paul imagine as he surveyed the foundations he had laid? It wasn't quantified in any metrics, but he must have had a sense of scale, of movement, and momentum. Whatever those qualitative indicators were, in his heart and mind they clearly indicated *pleroo*—a fulfillment of his task.

Years ago, when I was working in North Africa, I was introduced to a new label for such concepts; the philosopher W. B. Gallie called them "essentially contested concepts." He identified five characteristics that make terms (like "democracy"

Editorial *continued on p. 152*

The views expressed in **IJFM** are those of the various authors and not necessarily those of the journal's editors, the International Society for Frontier Missiology, or the society's executive committee.

Editor

Brad Gill

Consulting Editors

Rick Brown, Rory Clark, Darrell Dorr;
Gavriel Gefen, Herbert Hoefler;
R. W. Lewis, H. L. Richard

Copy Editing and Layout

Elizabeth Gill, Marjorie Clark

Secretary

Lois Carey

Publisher

Frontier Mission Fellowship

2018 ISFM Executive Committee

Len Barlotti, Larry Caldwell, Dave Datema,
Darrell Dorr, Brad Gill, Steve Hawthorne,
David Lewis, R. W. Lewis, Greg Parsons

Web Site

www.ijfm.org

Editorial Correspondence

1605 E Elizabeth Street
Pasadena, CA 91104
(734) 765-0368, editors@ijfm.org

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 ea.
Payment must be enclosed with orders.

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

Send all subscription correspondence to:

IJFM

1605 E Elizabeth St #1032
Pasadena, CA 91104
Tel: (626) 398-2249
Fax: (626) 398-2263
Email: subscriptions@ijfm.org

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.

**COPYRIGHT ©2018 International Student
Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions.**

PRINTED in the USA

and “good Christian”) continually negotiable. Paul’s use of *pleroo*, as it relates to his sense of fulfillment of the frontier task, is surely an essentially contested concept. This fact is reflected in our own modern struggle to clarify this same frontier mission task. Here is how Gallie explains an essentially contested concept:

1. The concept must appraise some kind of valued achievement.
Paul appraised this Christian movement and its mature foundation.
2. This achievement has an internally complex character.
Paul’s epistles reveal an internal complexity to that foundation.
3. The accredited achievement is variously describable.
Today, Paul’s achievement is described and valued differently.
4. The achievement is “open” to considerable modification in changing contexts.
Radically different frontier contexts require an openness to modification.
5. The negotiators are aware of the criteria used by others.²
Missiologial association increases our awareness of others’ criteria.

Can we agree on our essential need for negotiation—for gaining a comprehensive sense of Paul and the frontier mission task? Will we welcome contestation as a healthy contribution to frontier missiology? This is the opportunity we have at this year’s ISFM 2018. We’ll be bringing together mission demographers, mission mobilizers, and missiologists to discuss the theme, “Clarifying the Frontier Mission Task.” The new full-color demographic charts, tables, and maps presented in R. W. Lewis’ article (p. 154) will be at the center of our discussions. And there’s a startling focus on South Asia.

In this issue, two other articles encourage us to move beyond reductionist views of the remaining frontier people groups. Warrick Farah’s article is taken from the new book he has edited with Gene Daniels: *Margins of Islam: Ministry in Diverse Muslim Contexts*. Farah calls us to a more “adaptive missiology” (p. 171). My own article, “Beyond Groupism,” responds to Peter Lee and James Park’s recent critique of the anthropology of the unreached peoples concept (p. 179). Our fourth

article comes from a great mission anthropologist, Wayne Dye. Dye fuses fifty years of experience with that of a younger colleague, Danielle Zacharia, to offer us the essential questions required of any “cultural apologetic” on the frontier (p. 185). H. L. Richard has written an insightful book review on the role of caste among the peoples of India (p. 197). Finally, another mission anthropologist, Dwight Baker, helpfully reviews Brian Stanley’s comprehensive synthesis of Christianity in the 20th century (p. 194).

Enjoy this cutting-edge missiology.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ Peter Lee and James Park, “Beyond People Group Thinking: A critical reevaluation of unreached people groups,” *Missiology* 46, no 3 (July 2018): 212–225.

² W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 157–191.

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.