

The Undeniable Place of Disruption in Biblical Missiology

Our publication schedule has been disrupted and we apologize. While the consequences of a global pandemic are still rolling out, the disorder comes at a time when church and mission organizations were already scrambling to survive the tectonic shifts of the 21st century. We're all feeling the tremors. Disruption forces us all to look below the institutional cracks to the deeper fissures in organizational design. What was good yesterday may not be sufficient for tomorrow.

But the torture of disruption can open us to new perspective. A couple of years ago, Fuller Seminary asked their biblical scholars to reflect on the disruption caused by their plan for relocation¹—themes like “disruption and resurrection,” “shaken to remain,” “exile or exodus,” “divine disruption,” and “Jesus the disruptor” emerged from their biblical search for resilience. Disorder molds an experience that then launches new biblical excursions.

That biblical reflex is what you see in our four articles and four of the book reviews in this issue. They are biblical perspectives in response to the predicaments we face on cultural and religious frontiers. Barriers of resistance, miscommunication, and prejudice create their own kind of disturbance. The surprises, the anomalies, and tensions destroy any missiological homeostasis, but they fuel a fresh biblical awareness that you read in these articles and reviews.

According to Bosch's historical analysis, each era of mission history tends to herald a particular biblical theme. He recognized the modern emphasis on the Great Commission (Matt. 28) and surmised that a new mission paradigm was emerging.² All this global disruption could speed that up. While we don't jettison these fundamental biblical texts, they can appear insufficient for our modern conditions. Other portions of scripture beckon us as we minister on the frontiers.

Colin Yuckman's exegetical study of the mission commission in Luke-Acts would have us consider the narrative of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 (p. 5). Luke's pivotal treatment of this encounter provides a model for the way God reveals himself to both the church and the world. Could it be paradigmatic for the frontiers today? Can God's work in Cornelius, or we might say in today's “religious other,” help the church-in-mission recognize the way it places boundaries on God that then limits its witness on these frontiers?

I think Pascal Bazzell nailed the reason Acts 10 appears so relevant: it speaks to the way a go-between God will reveal himself in today's sensitive inter-religious frontiers.

Editorial *continued on p. 4*

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The problem of our increasingly pluralist world, as he sees it, is that the gospel has been tainted.

Where initially the missionary was challenged to not bring a double-sided gospel—the gospel of Jesus Christ and his own culture—today's challenge includes not affirming the negative historical and contextual connotation of the gospel in a particular locale.³

Something has gone before us and created “negative connotations” to the gospel—it has tainted the gospel. Less frequent are contexts like Paul on Mars Hill among those Greeks who had never witnessed any “Christian” reality. The world more often seems aware of an enculturated caricature of the gospel—that rival religious culture known as Christianity, a reality warped by local rumor and social media. Millions of people in the world have already decided, “We don't want that.” This reality—this tainting of the gospel—is just one of the many missiological barriers that motivates a fresh biblical search for relevant models.

Each of our articles addresses the biblical presuppositions of our present models. Paul Pennington examines the

tainting of our biblical terminology—words like “gospel” and “kingdom”—and promotes the “cultural non-specificity of the gospel” we find in scripture (p. 15). Dave Shive transcends a gospel that merely offers the remedy for sin and presents a biblical basis for mission rooted fundamentally in God's nature and being (p. 25). Bob Sluka is searching for that strategic intersection of creation care and frontier missiology, and he delivers an insightful critique of our modern dualism (p. 33).

Our book reviews reflect new, emerging biblical interpretation. The continuing rise of movements to Jesus today (1300 at last count⁴) can also foster fresh biblical eyes. Michael Cooper's broad exposure to these movements helped him discover the dynamic “Ephesiology” of a New Testament movement (p. 45, and see ad p. 1). The systematic theologian Amos Yong rides a global Pentecostal wave with his study of the *missio spiritus* from Genesis to Revelation (p. 48). Jackson Wu brings an Eastern sensibility to the study of Romans which represents new biblical interpretation that resonates with Asian religious worlds (p. 46).

Finally, this year's EMS/ISFM gathering (October 9–10) is also disrupted and will be entirely an online event. This virtual platform increases the global range of our presentations and respondents, so we hope you'll join for this two-day event. Registration and the program are available at emsweb.org.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

- ¹ “Disruption,” *Fuller Seminary Magazine* 12, 2018.
- ² David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 1991).
- ³ Pascal Bazzell, “Who is Our Cornelius? Learning from Fruitful Encounters at the Boundaries of Mission” in *The State of Missiology Today*, ed. Charles E. Van Engen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 107–124.
- ⁴ *Mission Frontiers*, 42, no. 4 (July–August), 2020, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/>.

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- ☞ 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.