

Minding the Gap

Frontier missiology stands on the shoulders of spontaneous forums. Two consultations which resulted from these conversations recently published their compendiums, both significant for frontier missiology. This issue spotlights one convened by the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS) in 2018, because we like the way it explored the intersection—a missiological gap—between Jesus movements, relief and development, and the least-reached peoples. Ten principles are addressed in their subsequent publication, *Undivided Witness* (ad, p. 92; book review, p. 106), and the publisher has generously given us permission to offer you an excerpt (p. 93).¹

The second publication is from the “Rethinking People Groups Forum,” which was sparked by discussions at ISFM 2018. Any attempt to clarify the global demographics of the remaining frontiers must address the emerging debate over the concept of “peoples.” After a year and a half of many virtual and face-to-face deliberations, Marv Newell, editor of the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly (EMQ)*, agreed to publish an extensive compendium of those perspectives (now available online from MissioNexus).²

Both these forums highlight the complexity of culture, context, and community, where conditions of place (community) weave themselves in and through any sense of peoplehood. The rethinking of people groups analyzes the way identity and ethnicity are stretched, contested, re-created, or affirmed in an urban and globalized world. But, conceptually, this rethinking of people groups evaluates only two of the three domains addressed in the OCMS forum, i.e., the emerging fellowships of Jesus followers among the least-reached peoples.

This OCMS forum saw a gap that divided our witness, and they pursued a more integral mission. For half a century we in evangelical missions have sought a greater reconciliation between proclamation and social action. We’ve addressed a missiological tension—a conceptual and institutional binary—that endures between word and deed. This recent forum in Oxford reframed this historic effort for frontier missiology. It explored the space—that place of convergence—between (1) these least-reached peoples, (2) the emergence of vibrant fellowships of Jesus followers, and (3) community development (see diagram 1, p. 58). In that interface of three domains, this forum discovered a set of strategic principles. They’re minding the gap.

Editorial *continued on p. 58*

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Editor

Brad Gill

Consulting Editors

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

Copy Editing and Layout

Elizabeth Gill, Marjorie Clark

Subscriptions

Lois Carey, Laurie Rosema

Publisher

Frontier Mission Fellowship

2020 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 (Pay by check or online)

USA & Canada (first class)

1 year (4 issues) \$25
2 years (8 issues) \$48
3 years (12 issues) \$69

All other countries (airmail)

1 year: \$50; 2 years: \$96; 3 years: \$138

Single copies: US & Canada \$7, All others \$14

Payment must be included with orders.

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Pasadena, CA 91104

Tel: (626) 398-2249

Fax: (626) 398-2263

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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.

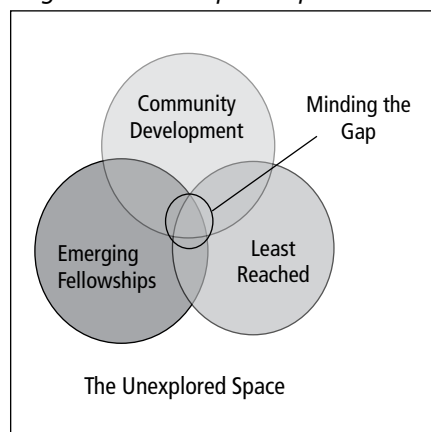
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PRINTED in the USA

The third leg of this stool, the matter of *development*, forces us to use a wider lens on all the contextual realities. It forces us beyond any singular focus on culture and community (peoplehood) to a broader assessment. Lacing across the inclusive categories of family, ethnicity and socio-religious identity are the intersecting realities of the human condition: physical, economic, religious, environmental, political, urban, and technological. Any witness to the whole person must appreciate the warp and woof of a community.

The articles in this issue of the journal (and Bob Sluka's article from our previous issue) suggest some of the

Diagram 1: The Unexplored Space



Adapted from *Undivided Witness*, p. 3

disciplines and specializations that cut across any frontier situation. Sluka, a marine biologist who has worked in the Muslim world, actually got us started with his study of creation care and its convergence with frontier missiology.³ His environmental perspective from the coastlands of the world challenged us to reimagine our theological and biblical assumptions. In this issue, Todd Pokrifka also reflects on this divided witness as a systematic theologian (p. 67), and he favors the kingdom of God as the ground on which we integrate our spiritual and material well-being in greater fullness and transformation.

But it's in our mission praxis that we can feel this divide, and it's those same practitioners whose expertise can help us integrate our witness. Andrea Waldorf's article from *Undivided Witness* (p. 93) combines her street-level savvy and global experience to distill the common principles she sees both in community development and in our efforts to foster vibrant fellowships of Jesus followers. Margaret Pennington, a licensed counselor, was surprised that her training gave her an eye for family systems and the healthy way Hindus must come

to faith in India (p. 59). Steven Spicer fuses the science of innovation with spiritual discernment to suggest a way to catalyze more genuine transformation in frontier settings (p. 81). And Dwight Baker reviews two books that force us to admit that the reality of war and state totalitarianism can complicate and divide our witness (p. 100).

In Him,

Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ David Greenlee, Mark Galpin, and Paul Bendor-Samuel, *Undivided Witness: Jesus followers, community development and least-reached communities* (Regnum Books International: Oxford, 2020).

² Go to www.MissioNexus.org/emq for details.

³ Robert Sluka, "Creation Care and Frontier Missiology," *IJFM* 37:1 (Fall 2020), http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/37_1_PDFs/IJFM_37_1-Sluka.pdf.

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.