

From the Editor's Desk

Echoes from a Bygone Era: The African Precedent in Frontier Missiology

I could hear the voices of African missiologists as I reviewed the articles for this issue. They were echoes from an older African frontier. These voices began to be heard amidst the post-colonial turbulence of the 1960's, from pan-African theological consultations to prestigious posts within Western academia. It's a remarkable change from the African absenteeism at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh a hundred years ago. Their perspectives will echo through these articles, like the musical genre my 16 year old son listens to called "mash-up" (where one tune transposes on another tune). It's our modest way to salute the African precedent in frontier missiology.

Many are conscious of the recent loss of two of these prominent African voices. The deaths of Kwame Bediako (Director, Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre, Ghana) and Ogbu Kalu (Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity and Mission, McCormick Theological Seminary) seem to have come too early. Fortunately their writings have helped ignite a generation of new reflection from the African context. Bediako was unique in his ability to synthesize the various African theological perspectives on the African-ness of their Christian identity.¹ He very perceptively identified this 20th century African concern with the early church's struggle on the Greco-Roman frontier.² Bediako recognized in both a singular concern for continuity and authenticity in their Christian identity. Is this not the very same concern reflected in the continuing debate over Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists coming to faith? Bediako's masterful framing of the question is echoed in Brogden and Lewis's debate on insider movements (pp. 33-48).

It was at the 1977 Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians that we began to hear that perceptive voice of Ogbu Kalu.³ This historian of African Christianity addressed Western missionary assumptions by training his indigenous eye on the empirical study of African spirituality, poverty and pluralism.⁴ His writing disclosed the force and pervasiveness of an African Pentecostalism that challenged Western presuppositions.⁵ His "groundedness," his attention to the "what really is" rather than "what ought ideally to be," must be applied to newer frontiers. Kalu's concern for empirical research is reflected in both Gene Daniels' new installment from the Fruitful Practices team (p. 21) and James Bultema's study of receptivity in Turkey (p. 27).

But the African voice of Lamin Sanneh (Professor of History and World Christianity, Yale University) also shadows these pages. His insights are found all across mission studies today. Maybe it's because he was shaped so uniquely, being born a Muslim from a royal household and educated in colonial Africa, subsequently matriculating through prestigious Western universities in both Islamic and Christian studies. Or maybe it's because he was shaped by that older "theatre of Christian-Muslim engagement" in West Africa.⁶ But it goes without saying that Sanneh has an instinctive grasp of religious frontiers that can help reframe our questions especially in Muslim contexts today.⁷

A hint of Sanneh's and Bediako's influence is found in the article by Gilles Gravelle (p. 11), a published address from the ISFM last September. It's Sanneh who asserts throughout his writings that the singular missionary method of vernacular Bible translation built indigenous confidence among African peoples burdened under colonial "overlordship." That confidence rose up and ultimately sabotaged the entire

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Related Perspectives Lesson and Section

Whether you're a Perspectives instructor, student, or coordinator, you can continue to explore issues raised in the course reader and study guide in greater depth in **IJFM**. For ease of reference, each **IJFM** article in the table below is tied thematically to one or more of the 15 Perspectives lessons, divided into four sections: Biblical (B), Historical (H), Cultural (C) and Strategic (S). *Disclaimer: The table below shows where the content of a given article might fit; it does not imply endorsement of a particular article by the editors of the Perspectives materials.* For sake of space, the table only includes lessons related to the articles in a given **IJFM** issue. To learn more about the Perspectives course, visit www.perspectives.org.

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Bible Translation in Historical Context Gilles Gravelle (pp. 11–20)		X					
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Inside Out: Probing Presuppositions among Insider Movements Dick Brogden (pp. 33–40)						X	X
The Integrity of the Gospel and Insider Movements Rebecca Lewis (pp. 41–48)	X						X

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.