

Best Practices in Frontier Mission: Hype or Hope?

“Best Practices” sounds a bit presumptuous, don’t you think? It sounds like the latest slick technique, or an idealistic “how to.” I mean, can we really pin down the way God works across frontier fields? Hold that question a moment and glance over your shoulder, back a few decades to the seventies, when we were hearing new questions and theories about contextualized Muslim ministry. It seemed all we had was theory, for the tumultuous sixties had erased any hope for sending personnel. But a whole new generation of mission personnel arose in the eighties, and many of them carried these new ideas with them. Of course, it did seem like God’s kairos moment in certain Muslim contexts, and we’ve seen harvest among Muslims like never before in history. But notice, we’ve journeyed through a research cycle over the past decades, and there now exists new and crucial data from across the Muslim world, data that can inform practice. Our last few issues of IJFM have, like a gourmet meal, tried to serve up some of these findings, these “fruitful practices,” which, through the Holy Spirit, seem to be living up to the name (see 26:1-3).

At the recent ISFM meetings in Orlando, we let the Fruitful Practice Research team present the discipline of “knowledge stewardship” behind their perceptive research (pp. 159-63). Could this cluster of simple disciplines prove crucial to the missiological maturation of frontier ministries? Could it speed the learning curve of ministries within other major religious spheres? Could it potentially strengthen any outflow from the global mission gatherings in 2010? Time and loving practice will tell.

Ministries in other major religious spheres may have yet to see the emergence of such fruitfulness for their study, but they do have data-filled history, and Parimal Roy offered the ISFM participants his reflective probe into the pilgrimage of a key Hindu follower of Christ (pp. 165-70). This kind of historical study is theory tested in retrospect, a candid and painful reminder of the myriad complexities of that world. And whatever you do, don’t miss H. L. Richard’s impassioned response (pp. 171-74).

This issue has brought to print two ISFM discussions on “Unpacking the Insider Paradigm” (pp. 175-80), and, in much abbreviated form, the ensuing panel discussion with the plenary speakers (pp. 183-87). You can’t miss the dynamism of these discussions as they wrestle with syncretism, contextualization and the formation of identity in Christ on the frontiers. This interaction is the signature purpose of the ISFM and of this journal.

Now for something a little different. Rick Love, in a short background piece (p. 188), introduces us to “Grace and Truth,” a new collaborative document that reexamines our attitudes and practices vis-à-vis our Muslim neighbors (pp. 189-98). A condensed derivative *Affirmation* has garnered the support of a number of signatories, a partial list of which appears in this IJFM (p. 199). We think it embodies some of the practices we’ve been discussing recently; see if you don’t agree.

Enjoy,

Brad Gill (sitting in for Rory Clark)

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2010 President, ISFM

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