

ISFM 2010 Report

Contesting Ethnicity, Religion and Globalization

by Brad Gill

The ISFM 2010 met in Charlotte, N.C., in September 2010 to assess the impact of globalization on “people groups” across the frontiers of mission. Over 100 assembled for two days to examine the contested realities of ethnicity so central in defining the frontier mission mandate.

Todd Johnson and Gary Fujino, whose talks are presented in this issue of the journal, opened the conference by sifting multiple definitions of globalization. Johnson’s macro approach¹ was complimented by Fujino’s “glocal” study of the Japanese of Tokyo.² The take away was clear: we must reexamine our missiological “givens” among unreached populations.

The subject of globalization and religion created some of the most stretching moments of the two days. Kan San Tan filtered this subject through a Buddhist perspective, and challenged us to entertain “multi-religious belonging” as a new global reality.³ His argument for “in-religionization” stretched us to consider how radically incarnational God desires us to be in religious settings.

Due to a cancellation, the conference bypassed the subject of “caste” and instead revisited this theme of religion in the Hindu setting. H. L. Richard challenged historic assumptions concerning religious categories, that religion is an imposed classification which amalgamates huge hunks of humanity in a reductionist fashion. Many found themselves aggravated or uneasy, but all were provoked to reexamine the utility of our religious categorizations.

We also heard of the new religiosities and neo-fundamentalisms emerging in a globalized Muslim world.⁴ Len Bartlotti offered an exacting study of Pashtun identity as it played out between political, ethnic and religious pressure.⁵ From Buddhist to Hindu to Muslim, it was clear that we must address the impact of globalization on religious identity and belonging.

Robert Priest and Steve Hawthorne offered historical depth to the contested concept of ethnicity across mission circles.⁶ Priest focused anthropologically on the manner in which we have traditionally categorized peoples, while Hawthorne unpacked the historic argument for the frontier mandate “A Church for Every People.” The insufficiency of our mission terminology was clear from both sessions, and many critiques of “people group” thinking were endorsed. But rather than retreat the entire conference encouraged participants to refine their missiological toolkit in light of globalization. **IJFM**

Endnotes

- ¹ “Globalization, Christian Identity and Frontier Missions,” p. 165.
- ² “The ‘Glocal’ Dimension: The Case of Japanese Identity,” p. 171.
- ³ “The Religious Dimension: With Special Reference to Christian-Buddhist Encounter” (upcoming article Fall 2011).
- ⁴ “Globalization, Sociology and Islam” (speaker’s name withheld).
- ⁵ “The Case of Pashtun Identity.”
- ⁶ “The Anthropological Dimension” (Priest) and “The Missiological Dimension” (Hawthorne).

The **International Society for Frontier Missiology** presents

“Kingdom” and “Church” in Frontier Mission

The terms “Kingdom” and “Church” are contested among ministries today, but they are catalyzing exceptional and promising models across the religious and cultural frontiers. The ISFM 2011 will explore this dynamic interface from various international perspectives. Come and join us as we engage in this strategic discussion. And as always, students and other young adults are especially welcome.

NOTE: This meeting immediately precedes the North American Mission Leaders Conference.



ISFM National Meeting • September 27–29, 2011
Phoenix, Arizona

Registration: \$50 Students: \$25

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