

Stewarding Legacies in Mission

# Global Cooperation and the Dynamic of Frontier Missiology

by Brad Gill

*Editor's note: This article was first presented as a plenary address at the Asian Society for Frontier Mission (ASFM) meeting in Seoul, Korea, in October 2013, on the theme of Global Cooperation.*

Over the past year or so, certain missiological associations and mission movements have been recognizing their 40th anniversaries.<sup>1</sup> Each has taken the opportunity to reflect on the discipline of missiology, to crystallize the vision and purpose of our profession, and to publish insightful summaries of their four decades of cooperation.<sup>2</sup> It's clear from these commemorations that missiology distinguishes itself from the rest of the academy, for it is not just a scholarly exercise that recedes into theoretical abstraction. It is an "interested" discipline which prioritizes the practice of mission towards God's purposes for this world.<sup>3</sup> It's in this context that I want to offer some reflections for our frontier mission associations.

While the roots of both the Asian (ASFM) and American (ISFM) frontier mission associations do not run very deep into the past, I believe any reflection on our short history reveals a certain dynamic in our missiological cooperation. I'd like to capture some of the essential features of this dynamic through an historical excursion, with the hope of nurturing and extending an apostolic missiology.

## **Frontier Mission**

From the genesis of our societies they have carried the designation "frontier mission." It's the original flag of our association. It was chosen to signal a certain re-focusing in mission that emerged during the latter decades of the twentieth century. It was a time in mission history when a common ecumenical perspective had arisen that believed vital national churches were capable of finishing the task of world evangelization in their respective countries. In 1974 this singular identification of a church with its political boundaries was found wanting. Ralph Winter's plenary address at the Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelism in '74 reconfigured that lost world into a mosaic of thousands of people groups who remained without an effective church in their midst. Reaching that lost world would require us to recognize a myriad of cultural,

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linguistic and religious barriers to the gospel.<sup>4</sup> The term “frontier” was lifted from general missionary discourse and applied to this particular challenge of reaching into the “unreached peoples” of the world. While we can always suggest other mission frontiers, “frontier mission” took on a singular meaning: it identified with Paul’s apostolic mission to see the gospel enter and transform the remaining unreached peoples.<sup>5</sup> After four decades it remains the flag under which we cooperate as societies for frontier mission.

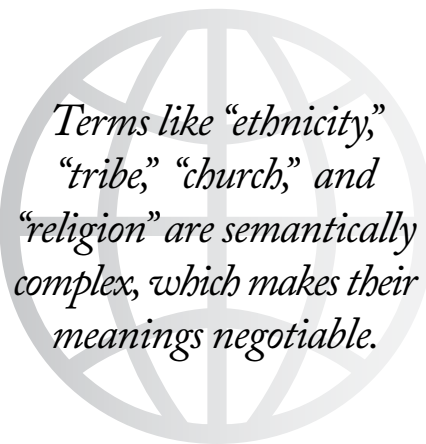
But it’s more than a new rallying flag. These frontiers provide the essential backdrop of the biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation. The call of Abraham (Gen. 12) to be a blessing among that Table of Nations (Gen. 11) assumes a plurality of peoples who each represents a socio-cultural frontier. Jesus references this Old Testament perspective when he commissions the apostles to disciple *panta ta ethne* (all the peoples) in Matt. 28:19-20. And then, that magnificent Revelation of John reveals the great plurality of tribes, tongues, nations and peoples which will worship at the throne of Christ (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). From the primeval origins of man to the great consummation of history, God’s heart is to penetrate the darkness of every human frontier so that all can worship Him in the light, and the glory, and the majesty of His Kingdom. “Frontier mission” is embedded in the biblical mandate.

### ***A Negotiable Frontier***

Every generation begs for a clear call into mission. It certainly was the case with my generation. I do recall sitting with two eminent missiologists, Donald McGavran and Ralph Winter, and their wives, and a cadre of younger 20-and-30 somethings when we birthed the watchword “A Church for Every People.” Both these leaders in world mission had helped light a fuse just five years earlier at Lausanne ’74, where evangelization was recast into a

new mandate which would undergird “frontier mission.” It gave tremendous clarity to a younger mobilization movement in mission.

But the assumptions and concepts which buttress this mandate did not diffuse into the mainstream of mission without critique.<sup>6</sup> “Frontier Mission” did not go uncontested, and from the outset, the very definition of “reaching unreached peoples” was disputed.<sup>7</sup> Over the years we’ve had to reassess our assumptions as we’ve listened to the feedback and research of those who have been sent across these frontiers. And conditions have changed with the increasing complexity of globalization, urbanization and modernity. Then there’s the critique



from the church’s wider ecumenical mission agenda (*missio dei*) and the newer voices of a burgeoning southern Christianity. All these have combined to force a reassessment of this concept of a cultural frontier.

We’ve had to recognize that concepts which bear on human relations like those which bolster “frontier mission” don’t carry absolute meanings. Terms like “ethnicity,” “tribe,” “church,” and “religion” are semantically complex, which makes their meanings negotiable. These terms remain conceptually open to the application of new criteria from a rapidly changing world.<sup>8</sup> But I believe the process of reassessment has brought greater precision and matured

our frontier missiology. After all is said and done, here we are meeting together because this particular frontier still commands our attention.

Take the currently debated concept of “ethnicity.” It is fundamental to our original understanding of the biblical mandate “to make disciples of *panta ta ethne*” (Mt. 28:19). For the past 40 years we have used an “ethno-linguistic” categorization to map a lost world of peoples who each need a relevant church. But the term ethnicity is complex, open and debatable, having only recently been defined in English dictionaries. And the increasing impact of globalization forces us to reexamine what’s happening to ethnic identity in the crucible of migration and teaming urban contexts.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, eminent mission anthropologists are reexamining the modern loss of “groupness” in ethnic identity, some even concluding “that we really cannot speak of distinct people groups.”<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, a younger generation is emerging (in the USA) that views ethnicity quite differently, causing us to rearticulate what we mean by this frontier.

Secondly, the definition of frontier mission also involves the interface of not just one, but two contested concepts: “ethnicity” and “church.” The watchword “A Church for Every People” that emerged in the early 1980s,<sup>11</sup> involved the pairing of culture and church as a simple derivative of the “homogenous unit” principle (i.e., a church primarily comprised of one ethnic group). At Lausanne ’74 and its subsequent meetings, that rather bounded concept<sup>12</sup> met resistance from those whose criteria for categorizing humanity had more to do with the social injustices and the economic disparities that divide mankind.<sup>13</sup> From their vantage point, a church’s social and ethnic homogeneity held negative connotations, for it seemed to justify the segregation of mankind into racial and cultural inequalities. Based on this criteria, it was difficult to see frontier mission as

asserting the freedom for individuals and cultures to identify with their particular background in any movement to Christ. These differing perspectives on ethnicity and church illustrate their complexity for frontier mission.

Thirdly, the different dimensions of ethnicity (language, culture, religion, etc.) have an elastic quality under modern conditions: it bends, sharpens, fades and blends according to context. In the last couple of decades, the missiological community has paid growing attention to the *religious* dimension of ethnic identity. While we originally categorized unreached peoples as discrete cultural challenges, they were also viewed through those large religious blocks of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Animist. More recently, we have been reexamining the complex relationship between “culture” and “religion,” both of which are embedded in any ethnic frontier. One cannot interpret religion monolithically or unilaterally, for the “religious” barrier to any gospel witness can often include a cultural (ethnic) resistance to the perceived threat of an alien Westernization and its form of Christianity. Note that the elasticity of ethnicity grants us the latitude to examine which factor or combination of factors (culture, religion, etc) create the greater barrier on that particular ethnic frontier.

This swirl of discussion over ethnicity was not simply a theoretical exercise. It was pushed by data emerging across these frontiers. In particular, we were confronted with research that profiled the decisions of tens of thousands of new Hindu Jesus followers (*bakhti*) who did not wish to join what they perceived as a foreign Christendom.<sup>14</sup> We realized that people handle their religion culturally, and their culture religiously, and that across a vast Hindu bloc, different peoples would handle the fusion of religion and culture differently. The term “socio-religious” emerged as a way to convey the reality

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of this fusion of culture and religion, and it too has been controversial.<sup>15</sup> Our rejection of a monolithic religious frontier has led us into a decade of sorting the threatening subject of religious identity.<sup>16</sup> The entire controversy over “insider movements” emerged from new interpretations of how God was working on the frontier, and the contested concepts of religion and culture are front-and-center in this debate. While we continue to understand this frontier as ethno-linguistic, this debate has pushed us to examine particularly the religious side of ethnicity. But this shift proves the semantic range of ethnicity as a flexible concept for any hindrance we face.

I believe this negotiability is essential to the dynamic of frontier missiology. The truth of the gospel confronts frontiers that are inherently complex, and reexamining the terminology and concepts we use is crucial to the maturation of our missiology. It’s interesting to me that John’s vision of that multitude in Revelation 3 uses multiple terms of “tribe, tongue, nation and people” to convey different aspects that define and bind together humans into community. By doing so, the Bible seems to confirm a breadth to the ways we understand the human borders of our identities within the people of God. Any global cooperation in frontier missiology will thrive on that same ability to negotiate our terms and concepts.

This negotiation is only one aspect of our cooperation in frontier mission. Further reflection can identify other “habits of cooperation” which can be the building blocks for any global cooperation.

### *A Collective Awareness*

There has been a growing and cumulative understanding of this frontier

through surges of new awareness. The Spirit of God, the “Go-Between God” who operates between the Church and a lost world without Christ, has progressively been helping his Church discover important aspects of our mission on this frontier.<sup>17</sup> The Spirit has catalyzed new perspectives that expand our missiological comprehension, and we’ve witnessed how these new concepts can then assimilate into mainstream missiology. This surfaces in the creation and diffusion of concrete tools like the “C-Scale,” the “Kingdom Circles” or the church planting method we now call “Discovery Bible Study.”

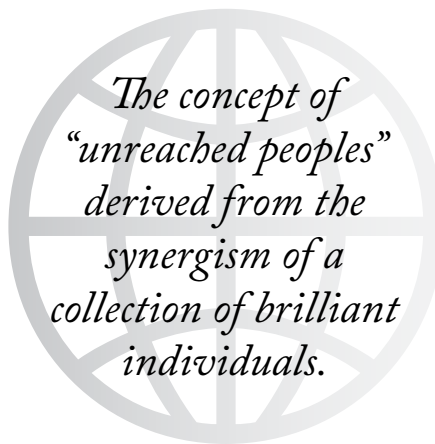
But, most important, let’s note that we become aware together. It’s a collective development. An insight that emerges is not necessarily the origination of any new truth, but something that “dawns on us.” The Spirit alerts us individually and collectively to something that was already there, a perspective or idea or reality that has somehow gone unnoticed by the mission community. Our attention will fasten on a biblical, theological or cultural aspect lying somewhat outside of our general awareness. It could have originated with a particular person, but the insight quickly grows beyond that person. It is here, at these times, that we witness the vital role of cooperation. Global cooperation does not just serve to spread our ideas, but it is in our global cooperation that new ideas are born, refined and developed for the frontier. This collective awakening to new concepts refines our understanding of the unreached “Other” who live across barriers of darkness, mystery, culture, religion and evil.

My wife, Beth, is the oldest daughter of Ralph Winter, and it has been left to her to transcribe and edit over 50

personal journals her father left when he passed away in 2009. From time to time she alerts me to what she is discovering. The first five years or so they were written in Spanish, which was the language he used among the highland Mayan peoples of Guatemala. But when he joined the faculty of the School of World Mission at Fuller Seminary, he entered a missiological “school of thought” that was thinking on a much more macro level than he had been wont to do. What has become clear to my wife is that the development of the concept of “unreached peoples,” and the impulse to count them, and the passion to mobilize a generation of Christians to reach them, all derived from the synergism of a collection of brilliant individuals. No one person alone would have stumbled over this arresting fact (that 2.7 billion people lived in cultures without a Bible translation or a community of churches in their language who could reach them for Christ). Together, the MARC researchers (at World Vision) and the professors at the School of World Mission (many of whom worshipped at the same churches) began to unearth and then discern the enormity of the apostolic challenge still facing the church. We need to remind ourselves of the obvious: missiological awareness flourishes in a collegial atmosphere. It’s what creates the dynamism.

Throughout the entire book of Acts we sense this progressive awareness in the mission of the church. Amidst all the powerful acts of the Holy Spirit, one of the signs and wonders is an ethnocentric church being reluctantly led by the Spirit across an ethnic frontier. The illuminating experience of Peter in Acts 10 is an exemplary case for frontier missiology. His walk up that dangerous road and across a socio-religious boundary into the home of that Roman centurion Cornelius is a study of this vital reality. Peter and his companions are stunned by God’s baptism with the Holy Spirit,

his confirmation and spiritual acceptance, of this small household of pagan God-fearing Romans. Note that this new awareness had an impact in two directions, one towards the lost and the other towards the church. It clarified to Peter something that had heretofore remained out of focus: God is not one who shows partiality and favor to any one people. Certain “absolute absolutes” which operated silently in the underlying presuppositions of this leading Apostle were suddenly shifted and became mere “relative absolutes.”<sup>18</sup> His obedience to the Father’s voice (beyond his own understanding) began what would become increasingly a broader and more corporate awareness of God’s intention on that Gentile frontier.



It’s essential that we appreciate the way a “thought collective” grows across these few chapters of Acts.<sup>19</sup> It not only represented the experience of a single apostle, Peter, but also included the reports of Barnabas and Paul from the frontier in Asia Minor. Awareness is not normally born all at once in one person’s thinking but grows progressively in a “fraternity of thought.” One singular event in Cornelius’s household is interpreted and developed more systematically as it connects with Paul’s call, gifting and ministry. And Luke’s narrative shows how this event unfolded from Peter’s testimony in Acts 11 through to the climax in the decisions of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. This corporate climax is a biblical

endorsement of how the Spirit works collectively in missiological maturation.

Of course, we as a fraternity have been assisted by the editing and publishing through journals and publications. Greater economy and facilitation is now at our disposal with the internet and new forms of social media. But we still face the challenge of language, and I suspect that the singular use of English greatly impedes the quality and comprehensiveness of thought. We do expect that national initiatives will facilitate a more natural collegial interaction, and we have attempted through meetings like the ASFM to provide global cross-pollination. But even greater synergism is needed if we are to see breakthroughs in historically-resistant domains.

### *The Intersection of Ideas*

I want to look a little closer at another way in which our frontier missiology has developed. Somewhere around the year 2000, when mobilization for unreached peoples climaxed with the global AD 2000 movement, there was a gradual shift of focus to how we interpret the larger macro-religious worlds of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. As I mentioned earlier, it seems to me that before this past decade, these religious blocs of unreached peoples had been an essential category in our thinking, but we focused more on the cultural and ethnic differences. Now we began to focus on the Muslim and Hindu religious blocs, and it was our frontier missiological discussions that allowed for a cross-pollination of these very distinct religious worlds. This fulfilled the original aspiration to be an association that gains from the intersection of different disciplines and domains.

One of the contributing factors that prompted this shift to religious phenomena was Herb Hoefler’s research on the *Jesu Bakhti*, that huge demographic of Hindus who had turned towards Christ but who had remained within their ‘other’ religious world.<sup>20</sup>



It was originally called “churchless Christianity,” but some people alternatively called it “Christianity-less churches.” This massive *Jesu bakhti* anomaly was somewhat like Peter finding himself on the doorstep of Cornelius’ home. There was surprise and wonder. These devotees to Christ did not “convert” to the church; they remained devoted to Christ “inside” their socio-religious world and “outside” mainstream Christian church life.

What’s interesting for my purposes here is the way this Hindu phenomenon then *intersected* with what had developed in one part of the Muslim world. John Travis had developed the C-Scale as a way to understand the range and types of contextualization among churches in his particular Muslim context. Suddenly, from deep within the Hindu world, the *Jesu Bakhti* emerged as a vivid example of the type Travis had called C5<sup>21</sup>, but in an entirely different religious world. This combination of a well-researched phenomenon in one religious world with the church typology of another religious domain catalyzed a spontaneous combustion in frontier missiology. It’s part of the dynamic we need to continue to promote.

What also becomes apparent in retrospect is that we were focused on the binary tension of “other religions” and “the church.” There were perceived contradictions in this consideration of C5 which disturbed, and continue to disturb, those within our historic “Christendom” structures of the church. Admittedly, the majority of us had to adjust to the re-categorization of this surprising reality, and the subsequent polarity of perspectives (usually directed towards different understandings of “insider movements”) has felt a lot like the heat generated in the first-century Jerusalem Council.<sup>22</sup> The conflict seemed to concentrate around presuppositions of church and other alien religious worlds.<sup>23</sup> As long as we looked at this development through the lens of the church the tension remained.

**T***he intersection of Kingdom and this religious frontier allowed us to cross a threshold which was strange and alien.*

Simultaneously, another independent theological concept showed up in our collective missiological awareness: the Kingdom of God. It was taken from biblical and theological studies and brought into the discussion on this C5 phenomenon we were witnessing on the religious frontier.<sup>24</sup> I should step back and mention that “Kingdom” is a broad and comprehensive theological term which integrates a wide semantic range of meaning; but what’s important is that it can transcend our ideas of church, ecclesiology and the gravitational pull of Christendom. When we allowed the perspective of Kingdom to frame our considerations of a C5 movement beyond Christianity, it helped us begin to think with a new hermeneutic. The prism of Kingdom theology freed us from much of the cultural and institutional overhang we carried from our own Western “church” experience. While there may have been aspects of Kingdom theology we ignored, what we gained in the intersection of Kingdom and this religious frontier was deeply illuminating and freeing. It allowed us to follow the steps of Peter and cross a threshold which was strange and alien, and it helped open us to how God was manifesting His glory on the frontier.

I’m trying to point out here a certain characteristic: when two ideas are fused in new and helpful fashion, we can benefit from what sociologists have called “complimentarity.”<sup>25</sup> It’s a combination of ideas that generates new and fruitful insight. It’s a mixture that’s catalyzed our “thought collective” with the combination of the Kingdom of God and the religious frontier. We witness it as well in the intersection of data from the two religious domains of the Hindu religious world and that of the Muslim religious world. The fruitfulness of these complimentary discoveries is like striking

gold. There’s a surge of new missiological effort to dig deeper, to find bigger nuggets of gold, and then the realization that underneath this complementarity is a whole field of gold with seams going in many directions.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, what we today call the model of “Kingdom Circles” is one clear example of this very productive pairing of the concept of the Kingdom of God with that of a religious frontier.<sup>27</sup> And these types of tools then enrich a cooperative fraternity of thought which amends, refines and applies these tools for Kingdom service.

### *A Common Orientation*

I believe our collective awareness (or fraternity of thought), with all its negotiation and conceptual intersection, has progressively developed a common orientation at the core of our two associations. Some might call it a “paradigm” for frontier mission, but I want to communicate a little less structure and a little bit more of a “thought style,” so I would prefer to call it a common orientation. We lean toward certain values. If you’re reluctant to admit that our associations together operate with a singular orientation, I can introduce you to opponents who would treat our connection as a hardened, closed and formidable paradigm. The more recent battery of criticism against “insider” perspectives and against particular Bible translation practices is part of a process of self-awareness that alerts us to certain identifiable convictions (or practices) we hold in common. As abbreviated as it is, we do have a tradition, and we’re being forced by detractors to examine our terms, our assumptions, and to embrace (or reform) our orientation.

I want to quickly summarize three core convictions I recognize in our

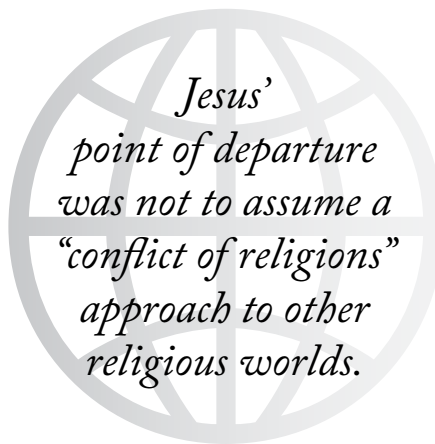
history. Common convictions express what we are and what we believe our association is good for. While our convictions have developed progressively over time, they are representative ideas that constitute a central core to our way of seeing the world and our mission in it. They should make us a “we” that is able to act from a common identity,<sup>28</sup> while not detracting from the unique and distinct strengths arising from our different national heritages or local theologies. So this is a quick work of synthesis, with all the risk of being a reductionist. I should say as a disclaimer that not all those in our association would frame our orientation in frontier mission as I do. But this is my humble attempt to identify a basis for our global cooperation.<sup>29</sup>

*On the frontier we preach a gospel of the Kingdom that offers unencumbered access to Christ*

In 1974 when Dr. Ralph Winter formulated the challenge of unreached peoples to that great evangelical assembly in Lausanne, Switzerland, there was an immediate resistance to the identification of churches with a homogenous principle.<sup>30</sup> Winter had to amend his original address to answer the resistance to his initial paper, and I believe that amendment (which comprised one third of his speech) remains one of the fundamental perspectives underlying our cooperation.<sup>31</sup> The respondents to that address felt that Winter’s cultural grid over the world’s unreached would splinter the global unity of the church. Winter’s response was to show that “freedom in Christ” was essential for any true unity in the church. In essence, Winter asserted that “where there is no freedom, there can be no genuine unity.” Every people needs the freedom to congregate so that a genuine unity might exist across the church. This theological treatment of freedom in Christ remains one of our core convictions in frontier mission. We believe every person and every people must have direct access to God, and that there must be

no cultural imposition that impedes man’s ability to respond to the gospel.

This principle of freedom in coming to Christ gained further attention (and controversy) as it was applied to the *religious* identity of those who turned to Christ. The emergence of the Kingdom Circles<sup>32</sup> was an effort to diagram how those from other non-Christian religious worlds might freely turn to Christ without having to pass through Western/Christian socio-religious expectations. Over the past few years, new studies of identity, both biblical and sociological, have added greater perception to these observations.<sup>33</sup> While there remains debate over just how much of a non-Christian religious background one can retain, our associations generally



adhere to the perspective that religion is embedded in culture, and that this enmeshment creates a certain ambiguity and opportunity for anyone and everyone to maintain aspects of their original religious world. It is more often a matter of context. The cultural and religious plurality within the global religious worlds of Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist make us reluctant to dictate any unilateral determination of one’s collective religious identity. But I believe we would also affirm the freedom to throw off any custom or religious practice that impedes, spoils, or constrains a person’s ability to follow Christ.

Again, this is where the idea of the Kingdom has offered us new ability to

articulate this freedom in Christ. We have shifted our gaze to the religious world of Jesus in the gospels, and to his articulation of the Kingdom of God. While he made religious distinctions, he did not allow religious identity to implicate anyone’s freedom to turn to him and potentially remain within one’s original tradition (Jn. 4:1-42). His point of departure was not to assume a “conflict of religions” approach between our Christian faith and other religious worlds.<sup>34</sup>

*On the frontier we actively contextualize ecclesial movements*

I have intentionally used the term “ecclesial movement” in describing our progression from earlier terminology such as church planting. While the two terminologies may carry the same spirit and intention, our orientation is to be free of a prescribed ecclesiology and to allow those who come to Christ within a new cultural and religious context to actively contextualize the church for themselves. *Ecclesia* carries all the Pauline intention of church, and “movement,” the expectation of growth and extension,<sup>35</sup> but it also opens us to new contextual forms of corporate life as new believers join the body of Christ.

In 1972 the term “contextualization” was coined to grant freedom for younger church movements to formulate their own understanding of how the gospel must impact their cultural context. Heretofore, there was research focused on church growth, on the emergence of people movements to Christ, on the nature of indigenous churches, on factors of receptivity, and on methods which allowed the broad harvesting of new believers *where the church already was*. The transition was towards new study and outreach to the seemingly unreceptive populations, and our hope was that more perceptive contextualization of the gospel and church could make these very populations more receptive.

Again, the Kingdom theme assisted us. The Protestant tendency is to close

down our understanding of ecclesiology and how we expect the church to institutionalize. We prefer “our” ecclesiological custom to be applied universally (and inappropriately) in all contexts. To view “church” from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, allows us to transcend any particular culture’s presuppositions regarding church custom, practice and organization.<sup>36</sup>

It was in this vein that Jesus in the Gospels was discovered as a new guide on this matter of contextualization. The more common missionary tendency had been to concentrate on Pauline portions of scripture as the template for ecclesial movements, and thereby to marginalize the actual Jesus movement in the Gospels. But Jesus also was responsible for an “ecclesial movement” that called men and women into the Kingdom of God, and that ecclesial movement rippled through the religious environment of his day. He did not plant a synagogue, or reproduce synagogues, but he led an ecclesial movement, a Jesus Movement, that we take as evidence of his *active contextualization*. He respected the socio-religious organization of his particular Judean context, which was quite distinct from the predominantly Graeco-Roman world of Paul, who would alternatively choose to plant and multiply synagogue-like structures. Both Jesus and Paul actively contextualized in their respective environments, and ecclesial movements emerged.

We respect that the ecclesia (the body of Christ) in any particular cultural or religious context will need to determine how Christ encounters their particular culture.<sup>37</sup> They will need an *active* contextualization that sorts and sifts what to accept, what to adapt and what to reject from their own culture. It is a *contextualization by the insiders*.<sup>38</sup> There is more and more evidence emerging of how these ecclesial movements are identifying and contextualizing their faith.<sup>39</sup> These studies indicate the need for restraint

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by leaders outside the cultural context, but they also encourage a greater partnership between the apostle, the “alongsider,” and the local leaders of an emerging ecclesia.

### *On the Frontier we mediate between different forms of Christianity*

The introduction of the C-Scale (C-Spectrum)<sup>40</sup> was an important moment across our networks. Its original intent was to simply describe the different contextual forms of church in one particular region of unreached peoples. While it has been popularized as a way to legitimize Christward movements that remain inside non-Christian religious worlds (i.e., insider movements),<sup>41</sup> it was also originally intended as a general affirmation of Christian freedom to congregate. It was Kingdom-minded and ecumenical in the best sense of the word. It transcended the denominational character of Protestant Christianity by affirming the different forms of church. It answered the call for new “meta-narratives” that would mediate between the different cultures, theologies and churches across our world.<sup>42</sup> Our associations seek to be affirmative of the plurality of church expression found across the frontiers; but, we are intentional towards new, emerging forms of Christ-centered community, especially on those frontiers where the Gospel is breaking into new cultural and religious contexts.

We tend to respect a certain global reality in and around this C-Scale: the obvious and ever-increasing impact of the Western world on frontier contexts. We recognize that the historic forces of Westernization have been pervasive and powerful, and too often have preceded and/or even partially negated any influence of the gospel. Now a multi-regional global influence

imposes itself more immediately, both locally and worldwide. It pulls and pushes some persons to assimilate in more modern directions, but it also provokes others to react against any modern imposition of new ideas on their traditional identities.<sup>43</sup>

I’d simply like to suggest that this push and pull, this variety of forces introduced by globalization, must be factored into the contextual decisions of ecclesial movements that are appearing across the frontier. It forces decisions on Christ-centered communities, and this demands a new sensitivity on our part. Non-Western societies, especially urban contexts, can easily condition their populations towards more Western forms of association and organization, and ecclesial movements may choose to adopt a more Western template of church rather than more traditional forms of religious association.<sup>44</sup> The freedom of the gospel demands that we listen sympathetically to these new forms of Christianity, that we expect and affirm diversity, and that we encourage people to discern wisely between these expressions of Christianity. From a biblical perspective, the entire book of Romans was Paul’s apostolic effort to preserve biblical truth and yet allow freedom in expression and practice between Jewish and Greek forms of Christianity.<sup>45</sup> A gospel of freedom requires that we both mediate and contend for that freedom.

This mediation has been very necessary in our American context, where representatives among us have been called on to attend consultations where new forms of ecclesial movements (i.e., insider movements) have been questioned, examined and judged.<sup>46</sup> While we do affirm the importance of mediation, we also recognize that voices of church tradition will predominate in

these consultations; newer voices or those voices that remain on the margin of the church, who form and identify themselves differently, need to find some way to be heard. The gravitational pull of mediation tends toward the conservative voice, and an active contextualization cannot settle for this. The ability of the gospel to penetrate all remaining frontiers must not settle back into established forms, no matter how powerful or effective their particular form of ecclesia has been in history. Therefore, we not only mediate, but we *advocate* for those younger forms of ecclesial life, so that a new movement of redeemed life is free to express itself through traditional customs and identity. These new models of ecclesial life are not required for all new believers, but it is the path least supported and understood, and may allow the gospel to bridge effectively into some of the resistant domains of major religious worlds.

### *A Collaborative Agency*

While we share a common orientation, our associations are not deliberative bodies that make decisions for strategic ministry. We're more a reflective body and expect those mission agencies represented in our associations to think and act out of a common fraternity of thought. Our original charter in the USA affirms the strategic role of the mission agency,<sup>47</sup> and most of our participants are members of agencies that decide and act in ministry somewhere across the frontiers.<sup>48</sup> It is in those agencies that we expect deliberation and decisions to accomplish strategic ministry. But, in our fraternity, we provide a space to transcend these strategic agendas with a broader sense of collaboration that brings together different roles and "agents" under the canopy of frontier mission. I see four roles in our associations, each contributing to the dynamic of frontier missiology.

*The Apostle.* Our conviction that the Gospel of the Kingdom must offer free and direct access to Christ is modeled

for us in the apostolic ministry of Paul. A great percentage of our association either serves or has served in contexts requiring the apostolic function, and we grant special value and place to those who represent this frontier role.

*The Alongsider.* But our commitment to active contextualization among ecclesial movements is also modeled for us in the ministry of Barnabas, who was sent across a frontier to get "alongside" an already existing Jesus movement. He nurtured these new believers, developed new leadership, and brokered them into the greater church movement. A spirit of humility, service, and encouragement constrains this form of leadership, and we have those among us who demonstrate this role among movements today.



*The Advocate.* There are also some of us who are more like the Apostle Peter, not serving directly in a frontier setting, but our position allows us to mediate between forms of Christianity. We give voice to how God is moving in new ways among the unreached populations. Again, it was Peter's awareness and advocacy that released the church to embrace new forms of ecclesia across cultural and religious frontiers, and there are those in our associations who themselves are functioning in this way.

*The Insider.* Increasingly by the grace of God we may find among us representatives from within new ecclesial movements. Visa and other economic and political constraints might restrict

their participation, but we desire to enlarge our tent to include these brethren. By God's grace we would expect them to gain the majority, for the gravitational pull of our association is in their direction. We listen for their voice, a voice from the edge of the Kingdom.

### *Concluding Recommendations for our Global Cooperation*

I have attempted to describe the dynamic of apostolic collaboration throughout this paper. I have used history to identify a combination of features that can contribute to our future cooperation. It involves:

- A Negotiable Frontier
- A Collective Awareness
- The Intersection of Ideas
- A Common Orientation
- A Collaborative Agency

I would like, therefore, to suggest some modest contours for our future global cooperation as an International Society for Frontier Missiology (ISFM):

- That we continue to promote the *collective awareness* of new currents in frontier missiology.
- That we remain primarily *reflective* associations, not deliberative bodies, that can support mission agencies in strategic initiatives.
- That we encourage the creative *intersection* of different disciplines, contexts, paradigms and initiatives in our international and intergenerational forum.
- That we continue to *advocate* an active contextualization that is specially attuned to those voices emerging from within highly resistant socio-religious contexts.

### *A Kingdom Perspective on Global Cooperation*

Friends and associates, the Kingdom is here, it is at hand and it is coming. Like John the Baptist, we should be impressed with the fullness of this



promise. When John's movement was compared to a superior movement following Jesus upriver, his identity was secure in the coming glory of the Kingdom, for "a man can receive nothing unless it is given him from heaven" (Jn. 3:27). He was simply "a friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, and rejoices greatly because he hears the bridegroom's voice" (v. 29). When the Kingdom comes, when the King is present and doing his work among us, we should be marked by this profound joy. It's a joy that delights in the entire range of the bridegroom's redemptive and transforming agenda. Let his redemption come. Let his transformation come.

Let the dynamic of our cooperation be expectant. Like John we must release and bless new movements displaying God's surpassing glory. We can expect new initiatives to arise, new strategic networks to be born, and new frontier missiology to emerge. We can expect our brothers to specialize, to spin off in new endeavors, to concentrate on new frontiers. We expect that a younger generation will see new visions. And the graybeards will dream new dreams. The Kingdom of God moves across a wide horizon and it's our joy to cooperate in this dynamic expectation of our coming King. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> There were 40th year commemorations of The Asian Mission Association (in 2013), the American Society of Missiology (2013) and The Lausanne Movement (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Note especially the historical retrospect on the 40th anniversary of the ASM by Dana L. Robert, "Forty Years of North American Missiology: A Brief Review," in the *IBMR*, 38:1 January 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Dwight Baker, "Missiology as an Interested Discipline – and Where is it Happening?" in *IBMR*, 38:1, January 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph D. Winter "The Highest Priority: Cross Cultural Evangelism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland*. (World Wide Publications: Minneapolis, MN) 1975.

# New models of ecclesial life are not required for all new believers, but it's the path least understood and supported.

<sup>5</sup> Dana Robert, "Mission Frontiers from 1910 to 2010," in *Missiology: An International Review*. Vol XXXIX, no. 2, April 2011, Electronic issue. Robert documents disputes over the definition of frontiers and argues that the concept of unreached peoples represented both a shift and a narrowing of discourse about mission frontiers and raises questions about the nature of frontier discourse in the twenty-first century.

<sup>6</sup> Bradley Gill, "A Church for Every People" and Donald McGavran, "A Church for Every People: Plain Talk About a Difficult Subject." in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (1st Edition), eds. Steven Hawthorne and Ralph D. Winter (William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA) 1981 pp. 597f. and 622f.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Dayton of Mission Advanced Research and Communications (MARC) was part of the early debate and gives a review of the different perspectives in "To Reach the Unreached" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (1st Edition), Ed., Steven Hawthorne and Ralph D. Winter (William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA) 1981, pp. 586-87.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality*, p. 185f.

<sup>9</sup> Brian Howell and Edwin Zehner, eds., *Power and Identity in the Global Church* (William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA) 2009, pp. 1-25.

<sup>10</sup> See Paul Hiebert's claim of disappearing people groups in *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI) 2009, pp. 90, 92. Our North American meetings of the ISFM felt it necessary to address the impact of globalization on ethnicity in the 2010 meeting (See *IJFM 27:4 The Globalization of the Frontiers* at [ijfm.org](http://ijfm.org)). In the fall of 2013, the ISFM met to examine the diaspora of global peoples and how the stretching and segmentation of global 'ethnoscapes' is impacting our concept of frontier (See *IJFM 30:3 ISFM 2013: Dancing with Diaspora* at [ijfm.org](http://ijfm.org)).

<sup>11</sup> World Consultation on Frontier Mission, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1980.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Priest calls it a "crude anthropology" in Howell and Zehner, *ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> Rene Padilla, "The Unity of the Church and the Homogenous Unit Principle,"

in *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids) 1985, pp. 142-169; also, Tite Tienou's recent piece in Lausanne 40th online: [www.lausanne.org/en/documents/40th-anniversary/2285-titetienou.html](http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/40th-anniversary/2285-titetienou.html)

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Hofer, *Churchless Christianity* (William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA) 2001.

<sup>15</sup> See the debate by Daniels and Waterman on the term "socio-religious" in *IJFM* 30:2, Summer 2013, p. 59f.

<sup>16</sup> On the subject of Religion and Identity, *IJFM* 28:4, Winter 2011 and on the subject of Interpreting Religion see *IJFM* 29:2, January 2012, both online at [ijfm.org](http://ijfm.org).

<sup>17</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia) 1973.

<sup>18</sup> The declension of "absolute absolutes" and "relative absolutes" in expositing this passage is taken from the ministry of Dr. Sam Kamaleson, who served pastors throughout the world with World Vision International for many years.

<sup>19</sup> I am using the sociology of Mary Douglas and her development of Fleck's concept of thought worlds in *How Institutions Think* (Routledge: London) 1986, pp. 16-17.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert Hofer, *Churchless Christianity* (William Carey Library: Pasadena) 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Travis' category here was for those followers of Christ whose identity remained within the understood borders of their non-Christian religious world and did not join the normative "Christian" church.

<sup>22</sup> See [ijfm.org](http://ijfm.org) for *IJFM* 24:1 Spring 2007, *The Jerusalem Council: Descriptive or Prediction?*

<sup>23</sup> Len Bartlotti, "Seeing Inside Insider Missiology: Exploring our Theological Lenses and Presuppositions." In *IJFM* 30:4 Winter 2013, p. 137f.

<sup>24</sup> Recognition needs to be given to many who have developed this concept of the Kingdom in collegial interaction over the last two decades, but due to security concerns we do not publish their specific titles and ministries.

<sup>25</sup> I am using the conceptual work of Margaret Archer in her *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory* (Cambridge University Press) 1992, p. 143f.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>27</sup> “Kingdom Circles” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA) 2009, p. 675.

<sup>28</sup> For the basis of these statements regarding a common orientation, see Oliver O’Donovan’s philosophical treatment of community in the 2001 Stob Lectures at Calvin College. *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids) 2002.

<sup>29</sup> I am indebted to Oliver O’Donovan’s philosophical treatment of community in the 2001 Stob Lectures at Calvin College. *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids) 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Ralph D. Winter, “The New Macedonia: A Revolutionary New Era in Mission Begins.” In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (4th Edition) Eds. Steven Hawthorne and Ralph D. Winter (William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA.) 2009, pp. 356–360.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 357f.

<sup>32</sup> See note 26.

<sup>33</sup> See Kathryn Kraft’s excellent treatment of identity and conversion in, *Searching for Heaven in a Real World: A Sociological Discussion of Conversion in the Arab World*, (Regnum Studies of Mission, Regnum Books International: Oxford, 2012) and David Greenlee’s *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between* (William Carey Library: Pasadena) 2013. For biblical material see William S. Campbell’s *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (T&T Clark: London) 2008, and his more recent “Differentiation and Discrimination in Paul’s Ethnic Discourse,” in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, Vol 30 No 3, July 2013. Also Philip A. Harland’s *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians* (Continuum Int’l Publishing: New York) 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Rick Brown develops a Kingdom approach distinct from a “conflict of religions” approach in, “The Kingdom of God and the Mission of God: Part Two,” in *IJFM* 28:2 Summer 2011, pp. 54–58 at [ijfm.org](http://ijfm.org).

<sup>35</sup> We have built upon McGavran’s expectation of “people movements” yet we recognize that an urban movement may grow in a sociologically different way than rural people movements.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Brown on Sectarian Mission versus Kingdom Mission, p. 55.

<sup>37</sup> The African mission theologian Kwame Bediako has done a thorough study of the different positions that are taken

on how the church handles culture in his book *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa* (Regnum Books: Oxford) 1992.

<sup>38</sup> This is the main point of Hwa Yung’s study *Mangoes or Bananas: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Regnum Books: Oxford) 1997.

<sup>39</sup> See Darren Deurksen’s ISFM 2012 talk on Hindu movements, “Must Insiders Be Churchless? Exploring Insiders’ Models of ‘Church’” *IJFM* 29:4 Winter 2012, pp. 161–167 at [ijfm.org](http://ijfm.org); also see the recent research of Ben Naja, “A Jesus Movement Among Muslims: Research from Eastern Africa” *IJFM* 30:1 Spring 2013, p. 27f. at [ijfm.org](http://ijfm.org).

<sup>40</sup> John Travis, “The C-Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of ‘Christ-Centered Communities’ Found in Muslim Contexts” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 4th Ed. (William Carey Library: Pasadena) 2009, pp. 664–665.

<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Lewis, “Insider Movements: Retaining Identity and Preserving Community” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 4th Ed. (William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA) 2009, pp. 673–676.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Hiebert calls us to be “In-betweeners” who mediate the different expressions of the global church through new meta-narratives of transcultural sensitivity. *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Baker Academic) 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Brad Gill, “Lifting, Pushing, Squeezing and Blending: The Dynamics of Ethnicity and Globalization” in *Mission Frontiers* May–June 2010, pp. 8–10 (online at [missionfrontiers.org](http://missionfrontiers.org)).

<sup>44</sup> The thesis of Mark Noll’s study of World Christianity is that the conditions of non-Western societies today mimic the conditions of 19th Century America where the American voluntaristic church template arose, and thus we can expect more American type churches across the world. *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (IVP Academic) 2009.

<sup>45</sup> William Campbell, “Differentiation and Discrimination in Paul’s Ethnic Discourse” in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* Vol 30 No 3 July 2013 pp. 157–168.

<sup>46</sup> At the Bridging the Divide Consultation over the past four years “insider believers” have needed an advocate to stand and interpret how to participate in a Western context of Christianity.

<sup>47</sup> The original ISFM charter states that we “highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions.”

<sup>48</sup> At the recent ISFM 2013 there were 35 agencies represented among 65 participants.