

ASFM 2015 Report

—by B. J. Jeoung

In October 2015 the Asia Society of Frontier Mission (ASFM) convened its annual meeting in Indonesia under the theme “Understanding Insider Movements,” and focused presentations on research and topics related to insider movements. John Jay Travis and Harley Talman, the editors of *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus in Diverse Religious Communities* (reviewed on pp. 152–156), presented an overview of the key themes and principles in this comprehensive treatment of insider movements in Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Jewish contexts. A key principle is that as insiders grow in their relationship with God and their biblical knowledge, they will modify and reinterpret the religious teachings and practices of their birth community, and marginalize or reject others they find incompatible with Scripture.

There were presentations on three separate “in-context” movements that are currently developing on three different continents, each which is scripturally-based and functions within challenging Muslim environments. The main principles and process of discipleship were identified from the personal spiritual testimonies of their respective leaders and believers, and these principles are clearly at the heart of these movements as they spread within their communities.

Several leaders of Muslim followers of Jesus from an island in the Indonesian archipelago demonstrated the validity of their worship of Jesus Christ through their *salat* (ritual prayer), their socio-religious musical styles, and the chanting of the Gospel in both Arabic and in their mother tongue.

Kevin Higgins presented a paper offering a sympathetic but dissenting opinion concerning the recent World Evangelical Alliance Review Panel recommendations for translation of the terms “Son” and “Father” in the New Testament. The paper began with five points of agreement, which included a shared passion for the Gospel and a commitment to biblical principles for translation. Higgins then offered six areas of dissent, the most egregious being the failure to include any translators involved in the types of projects under scrutiny, nor any Muslim background believers who had elected to remain Muslim (and who represent the audience which finds non-literal renderings helpful).

Al Harrison illustrated how the wording of verses from the sacred literature of other religious contexts can be a useful vehicle for communicating biblical truth (or pointing people to the truth). One example of specific verses from a particular non-Christian sacred text illustrated its usefulness in drawing attention to the uniqueness of Jesus and what God does for those who follow him.

David Lim presented nine best practices for insider movements. Evangelizing must be relational and culturally

sensitive—friends inviting others to join Christ followers in a spiritual journey. This approach requires a study of the local worldviews, the highlighting of commonalities, and the avoidance of conflicts and differences. Any theological contextualization of Christology requires an appreciative approach in “truth encounter” that emphasizes continuity rather than discontinuity with a people’s cultural and religious background. And for ecclesiology, these believers should be empowered to develop their own transformational spirituality from the bottom up and from the inside out. It should focus on biblical spirituality, develop missional spirituality, and retain simple church structures.

In his presentation “Let the Prince Kiss the Bride: Functioning as a Best Man” (see p. 139), Japanese scholar and practitioner Mitsuo Fukuda used a wedding allegory to introduce the role of the evangelist as that of a “best man.” Just as the goal of a wedding is to unite a bridegroom with his bride, so also the goal of evangelism is to unite Christ with the new believer. Yet with a disregard for worldview and an over-emphasis on cognition, many evangelists (best men) cut in and mistakenly place themselves in the role of bridegroom. The result is that direct communication between Jesus and the new believer is usurped. Presented in the context of Japan, Fukuda gave concrete examples of how understanding and respecting Japanese worldview can pave the way for the bride to meet her groom.

Chris Bauer explored what Buddhists actually reject when they reject “God” and all that is misinterpreted. New terminology is needed in order to properly convey the core message of Christ, but the hindrances in finding such terminology are rooted in certain theological and missiological assumptions. Uncovering those assumptions will enable field practitioners to see how God has uniquely prepared Buddhists to receive the Good News.

A Burmese mission leader explained how Christian communication remains alien to the Burmese Buddhists after 200 years of ministry. Christianity among these Buddhists is still regarded as a “potted plant” transplanted onto the Burmese soil, and it fails to fulfill their spiritual quest. He discussed how to communicate true liberation in Christ through a contextualizing of the gospel among Burmese folk Buddhists on pilgrimage to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon city.

John Kim concluded the ASFM gathering with two thoughts. First, there should be more focus on field issues and practices (with a Kingdom perspective supported by the UIM book, concrete research results and the witness of insider movements). Second, the ASFM must rediscover the meaning of *oikos* (household) from a Kingdom perspective—how it can encompass a future generation of insiders/outsid-ers/alongsiders, and how it can create a fellowship of followers of Jesus from various socio-religious backgrounds. **IJFM**

The 2016 ASFM annual meeting will be held in Korea from October 31 to November 4. Please contact John Kim at john_yoon@psmail.net for more information.