

Continents in Conversation

On a recent trip to Africa I was third party to a bilateral African-Chinese exchange. It began on a hotel shuttle when I found myself sitting next to a Chinese gentleman who was ministering in a major Muslim city. It was fascinating to hear how his family—without any hint of Western Christendom—was strategically placed. One could see that he was thriving. Earlier that same day my cab driver had pointed out the Chinese cars, the Chinese buses, the Chinese highways, and the impressive buildings which had all been built by the Chinese. China had arrived and was investing in Africa, and I was suddenly alert to the missiological conversations I might overhear between African and Chinese colleagues at the conference we were attending.

Of course, over the past half century, a global, multilateral missiology has already been flourishing. Associations like the Lausanne movement (LMWE), the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (IFEMT) have brokered global conversations on the various dimensions of the *Missio Dei*. This cross-pollination brings depth and new insights that can shift our mission priorities. But how might this global interaction impact frontier missiology with its singular focus? Should we expect such international conversations to help us overcome the seemingly insurmountable barriers to reaching the unreached?

The articles in this issue provide some African and Asian observations on three very critical issues in frontier missiology: the orthodoxy of new insider movements, the role of ancestor veneration, and the “prophetic” role of Muhammad. Daniels and Nussbaum (165) lead off by comparing the historic analysis and categorization of Africa’s indigenous movements with Muslim insider movements across Africa and Asia today. Richards insists that these types of movements require that we “cultivate reticence” if any fresh mission activism is to effectively engage in discipling an unreached Hindu world (173).

On the subject of ancestor veneration, we include the final installment of David Lim’s treatment of this difficult barrier for the peoples of East Asia (183), but we’ve placed it in tandem with Kwame Bediako’s treatment of similar phenomena in the African experience (195). Orbis Books has graciously given us permission to republish a chapter from Bediako’s *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, and you won’t want to miss the way he weaves the ancestors into a biblical interpretation of Hebrews (198–200). We look forward to hearing how our Asian colleagues respond.

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The views expressed in **IJFM** are those of the various authors and not necessarily those of the journal’s editors, the International Society for Frontier Missiology or the society’s executive committee.

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Finally, we continue to roll out responses to Harley Talman's recent treatment of the "prophethood" of Muhammad (see *IJFM* 31:4). In that issue we heard from Lebanese missiologist, Martin Accad. Now we welcome Egyptian scholar and professor, Ayman Ibrahim. Professor Ibrahim's response and Talman's interaction with it were originally presented at the 2015 EMS/ISFM meetings. In the next issue, we continue with a second set of interactions between Talman and Ibrahim, but we will also add a response from John Azumah, the Ghanaian missiologist who teaches at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA. There is no doubt that Talman has assaulted traditional notions of Muhammad, and let the reader be forewarned that the resulting dialogues are heavy and technical. These provocative (American–Arab–African) conversations are nevertheless crucial for reimagining our missiology for modern encounters with Islam.

I say "reimagining" intentionally, because these kinds of civil multilateral conversations—with very divergent points of view—will eventually reshape our missiological imaginations. They

force us to explore our well-established paradigms of mission, and allow a maturation of frontier missiology. The African–Chinese encounter I witnessed at the conference indicates something significant about the place of Africa in our global conversation. But beyond the development of these Global South relationships and the emergence of invigorating new pulses of mission, might we ask just how this partnership across the two very different religious landscapes of Africa and Asia will profit our missiological imagination?

Missiologists like Bediako (195) and Turner (166–167) remind us of the vital role of the primal religious imagination in African mission history. They recognize that Africa retains a traditional religious consciousness even amidst rampant globalization. Years ago, one missiologist suggested that this primal imagination

may survive the loss of its overt religious system and continue to provide at least part of its terms of reference in a new and more complex situation...¹

That African complexity has certainly demanded new terms of reference that have then spawned a new political

imagination in African missiology.² This issue of the *IJFM* posits that it's the lessons from Africa's history of mission to a primal religious world that must be heard laterally across frontier missiology. If indeed a primal religiosity also lies at the grassroots of Asian religious worlds,³ then it seems that an intentional African–Asian linking of missiology should benefit greatly the ministries on those religious frontiers. The pairing of articles in this issue was designed towards that end.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ John B. Taylor quoted in Bediako, Kwame, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa* (Orbis: Maryknoll, 2004), 86.

² William Dyrness & Oscar Garcia-Johnson, *Theology Without Borders* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2015), 60–66.

³ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology* (IV Press: Downers Grove, 2014), 63.

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- ☞ 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.