

Looking Beyond 500 Years of Reformation

On this 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation we offer a rather un-Protestant theme: the household. This summer I sat listening as Mark Noll, the preeminent American religious historian, offered five seminal characteristics of our Protestant era. What I haven't seen or heard among the many insightful reflections on this great tradition is what we are seeing today in the rank and file of movements to Christ: *oikos* (the Greek term for household). As you will hear from our guest editor, John Kim (p. 5), the sensitivities of an Asian perspective on Jesus movements today raises an ecclesiological question: why is the household unit so fundamental to these movements?

Over the past five centuries of Protestantism, the voluntary principle has been fundamental to the way we now frame our biblical ecclesiology. The church is viewed as a company of the committed, whose whole way of belonging seems to reflect the more modern social imagery of individual citizens who voluntarily cohere in a contractual way. This evangelical model of ecclesial belonging has been powerful and has reached to the ends of the earth. Forged in resistance to the deficiencies of a Roman Catholicism, it has successfully integrated itself into the values, interests and institutions of Western society. At the risk of being reductionist, we might ask: is it possible this historic paradigm of a voluntary church has blinded us to other necessary elements of a Christian movement? This issue of the *IJFM* suggests that it has.

We're grateful to the Asia Society for Frontier Mission (ASFM) for focusing our theme on the fundamental place of *oikos* (household) in Jesus movements today. Many of the articles in this issue were originally presented at the October 2017 ASFM meetings in Bangkok, Thailand. Still others were presented at the 2017 ISFM/EMS meetings in Dallas. The whole tone and vision of this theme is represented in John Kim's article (p. 37). His persistent examination of these movements has pushed this important ecclesiological issue to the front burners of our missiological reflection.

I believe each of the perspectives offered in these articles substantiates a new ecclesial priority of the family. One of the participants there in Thailand turned and focused an interrogating gaze on us as Westerners. Suddenly, what had been a theoretical exercise became personal, and I had to do a quick inventory of the

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role I play in my own oikos. It was penetrating. And spiritually exhilarating as it pushed me beyond any reformation I had experienced as an evangelical. I realized that what God was doing in these emerging movements across Asia and Africa was a prophetic voice to modern churches embedded in a Western Christendom.

We must be willing as a Western church to allow a thorough assessment of how our modern ecclesologies have failed to curb the moral and institutional degradation of the family. We see it in our churches—not just in our societies. We are struggling as a Western church to stem the loss of this essential social unit of identity and belonging. By contrast, the importance and vital role of extended families and their networks is very clear in movements among Muslims and Hindus today. It is a welcome corrective, and we trust it will encourage a new ecclesiological sensibility in this new era of World Christianity.

Together, these authors represent more than a hundred years of field experience in and around these Jesus

movements, and their interaction calls for new nomenclature to emerge: “high-identity Muslim people” (p. 7); “family blessing movements” (p. 51); the “Missio (M) Framework” (p. 67); and “spiritual oikos” (p. 37)—just to mention a few. Again, we are so grateful for the fertile interface between the ISFM and the ASFM, and the way it generates insight that then can move laterally and inform other frontier contexts.

We are offering this issue **free** to all of our subscribers. We have fallen behind in recent months, and we need to get back on schedule. Your subscription money will leap over 2017 and be applied to 2018. You will receive the exact number of quarterly issues you have subscribed for—plus the free 2017 combined issue (34:1–4).

Finally, let me do what I usually forget to do: pitch for subscriptions (info on p. 3). We are free online, and get roughly 800 hits a month, half of which are from outside the USA. But it's the \$18 annual subscription for the printed edition that allows us to keep this journal as a tangible “in-your-face”

call to frontier mission. The publisher is ready to respond to that demand for printed copies, so we hope you will invite your friends and colleagues to join us in our discussions on this missiological platform.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The World Consultation on Frontier Missions and the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- ☞ 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.