

The ISLCFM: Back to the Future

Intergenerational Fusion: An Interview with Brad Gill

by *Kevin B.*

One generation ago, the International Journal of Frontier Missions was born with very unusual roots—namely, the synergistic fusing of two generations. In 1984, Brad Gill, acting as editor of the IJFM’s second release, penned this ongoing thrust:

First, there must be an intergenerational fusion. One of the distinctives of Edinburgh ‘80 was the way in which the younger generation of committed students consulted with each other in the context of the gathering of senior missionary personnel. The complementary nature of this ongoing marriage allows a movement to create as well as conserve, exert as well as mature, initiate as well as maintain. Young and noble spirits are given intellectual and emotional maturity if placed alongside elders of wisdom. Just as students and student leaders were inspired and challenged by the platform messages of missionary veterans at Edinburgh ‘80, so it is intended that this journal will be a means between meetings for the younger generation to hear from their elders of the challenges, complexities and tools needed in frontier missions endeavor. But just as senior leaders at Edinburgh ‘80 were challenged and encouraged by the dynamism and vigor of the concurrent student consultation, so it is intended that this journal will give the older generation of mission leaders access to the insights, concerns, discussion, and zeal of youth. To these ends, we hope that a senior editor and intergenerational editorial board will constantly advise the selection and publication of articles in this journal. (Editorial: A Church for Every People by the Year 2000, IJFM 1/2, 1984)

Brad Gill was the international coordinator for the International Student Consultation on Frontier Mission at Edinburgh in 1980. After interrupting his seminary education to assist in the inaugural years of the USCWM, he served in church planting efforts in a Muslim country for 13 years and is presently designing Muslim training programs in Detroit, Michigan.

Kevin B. is a generation separated from Brad, yet became grafted into this story through an “intergenerational fusion” of relationships at the US Center for World Mission in Pasadena over the course of the past two summers. Kevin currently works in Minneapolis in student mission mobilization through the World Mission Prayer League.

One generation later, on August 10, 2005, two generations of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Mission (ISLCFM) met, as a 23 year-old Kevin B. had the privilege of conducting an interview with Brad Gill.

What began as a 90-minute phone interview came to feel more like inviting Brad Gill into my living room to tell stories to be taken down, ruminated on, and orchestrated into a looser narrative structure for those whom would come after. Welcome to the living room...

KB: Looking back, how did the histories of student power in mission inspire what you were trying to do in the early 1980’s?

BG: “Most of the American and European student leaders at Edinburgh ‘80 would have known the rich history and stories of how students had a role in the genesis of new mission vision and passion. Each would have most likely

had an appreciation, for instance, of the Haystack Prayer Meeting in 1806 when six students came together to pray for missions there on the campus of Williams College, or how those students were the impetus for the first mission sending agency in North America. There was also a very intentional and deliberate focus on the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions of the late 1800's and how we might learn from that structure and how it initiated and maintained a growing movement of volunteers over three or four decades. Student leaders were pretty much equipped to reflect on the application of these movements to their contemporary campus situations."

KB: Looking back, what are the stories of the genesis, fermentation, launching, leading, and landing of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions (ISLCFM)?

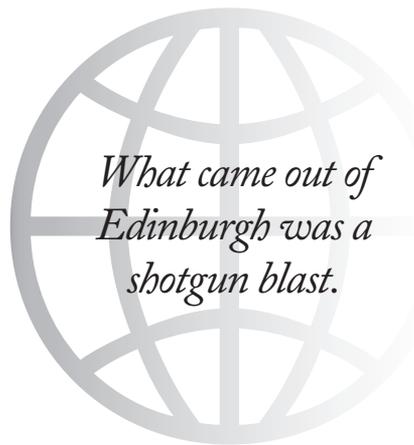
BG: At the Edinburgh '80 Committee meetings, when I and my counterpart Dave Bliss out of South Africa came before that committee, we made a proposal that they consider the formation of a student gathering, which became known as the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions. I well remember that on that committee were some top leadership of key mission organizations. One of which was Clarence Church of Wycliffe Bible Translators, and he looked at the committee and said, "Gentlemen, this might be the most important thing that we do."

It was thrilling to realize that underneath the skin of every one of those committee members was an appreciation that at a certain time in their life, someone gave them an opportunity and place regarding the compass and thrust of their life. So all we were doing was tapping into that deep inner resolve that they formed as students wherever they were as students and they saw that. They appreciated that, and they affirmed the proposal.

At Edinburgh, there was a certain type of germination or marinating going on in the hearts and minds of those who were there. It was not a convention to motivate people into

mission. It was a consultation to draw together those who were already in it, to try to discern how to move forward across the world at that time in history.

What came out of Edinburgh was a shotgun blast. You have a sporadic but tremendous display of influence into different student organizations and bodies across the world (*Editor's note: A few notable examples include Greg Fritz [Caleb Project], Bob Sjogren [Caleb Project/Frontiers/Unveil in GLORY], and Steve Hawthorne [Perspectives/Waymakers]).*



The flow out of Edinburgh was to advocate its concerns {"A Church for Every People by the Year 2000"} and somehow build communication and network between those whom had been there. We failed to come up with some kind of centralized structure that would carry the International Student Consultation concerns beyond three or four years.

One of the challenges we had in the 80's was that we were groping with the historical context which made it so easy for us to look as North Americans, as if we were imposing our Anglo-thing on the world. In a sense, we failed to bring together some kind of centralized body that would march through the next decades. But we did send off an appropriate shotgun blast—pellets going everywhere that gave freedom and a sense to those student bodies across the world that the ball's in their court, the sky's the limit, and form the organization that you need where you are.

KB: Learning from the past, how can we, as an emerging generation of students looking to band together in advancing God's Kingdom of light, learn from your pitfalls and stand on your shoulders?

You can't copy history

BG: Students are on a creative threshold, right on their campuses. They cannot just take history and copy it. I feel like that's one of the pitfalls that we might have been coming up against in 1980 {as} we were looking very boldly at the Student Volunteer Movement. We became aware that more creative networking was needed across the world, rather than imposing some kind of historical model.

Leadership challenges

BG: One of the impediments of a student mission thrust is that most of your leadership tend to leave. They go off to a field. They either grow up or they leave, and so you need to transmit quickly to the hearts and minds of those who are just a year or two your junior.

The leading-serving tension

BG: There's a tension there and I'm not trying to say I know the way out of it. Where you have centralized structure, people automatically feel a sense of control. All you have to do is have centralized institutions and they're immediately interpreted as not serving the international cause but dominating. So how do you serve without being understood as controlling? That's what you need.

We're in a different day

BG: In terms of entering into any international structure, you are in a better position than ever before to go and to lean or to identify where those international initiatives are taking place. There are burgeoning new student initiatives across this world. They are not just operating at a level of consciousness anymore. They are active, organized, moving. We're in a different day; It is very easy to welcome this. It just brings huge new resources of the Church across the world.

The genius of fusion

BG: Going back to this whole idea of the intergenerational fusion of committed students with senior mission

leaders—that was really the genius (I think) behind the world consultation in Edinburgh.

KB: Looking forward, what are your prayers for this generation and those gathering in ISLCFM's Student Mission Forums in September?

The ball's in your court

BG: One of my inherent beliefs is if you give students the idea that the ball is in their court, you are going to get a huge amount of energy. My prayer is that this generation would understand that it is their responsibility. They are responding to a mandate that is 20 centuries, that has Biblical roots, it's the Mission of God, it's for the Kingdom of God, it's moving to the peoples of the world. {I pray} that they would understand it is their responsibility to generate—with discernment—structures that will transmit that commitment to others on their campus wherever they are.

Creativity on the campuses

BG: It involves students creatively facing and you might call them listening to those who are their seniors to talk through what the values, the mandate, the fields of ministry really are. But then it needs to be interpreted down with the purposes of commitment by students, shoulder to shoulder, on the campuses in the right kind of way. A structure or an institution might emerge. But it fits the times. It deals prophetically with the trends that are happening in the thoughts, minds, the ideas that are on the campus. In a sense, anything you create has to do battle with the trends on the campus at this time. It's a prophetic ministry. This missionary thing is not just missionary; on the campus, it ends up being prophetic. It flows with the waves, what's happening, but it also prophetically speaks against it. It challenges it to rise above that and to move in ways that are more for the Kingdom of God.

Tuned to the times

BG: There's a transmittance from one student to the next, and there's a certain kind of structure probably needed to make that longer lasting than just one or two students that really have a passion. They need to

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create a structure that carries that. But it needs to be formed with creativity, discernment, tuned to the times but prophetically able to rise above it. Structure that so students can flow into it, join it, be a part of it, and it will encourage and nurture their commitment and their passion.

No moving back

BG: In a sense, tap into what is already going on. Those hearts and minds are out there. What you have today is global accessed which is unique to your time. The younger generation tends to almost be automatic about use of communication tools, moving around, and fusion of the Western world and non-Western peoples of the world. This has to be appreciated in terms of any kind of structure; we can't move back.

Toward specific purposes

BG: In the information age, we are not going to surrender to just networking and mutual communication and openness across the world. I don't think so. I think wherever you're to be having that horizontal influence happening across the world, you'll also have guys and women who are real leaders form, to shape, and many more cases to join and be a member of something that is moving toward more specific and particular purposes in frontier mission.

Emergence and diversity

BG: We expect that if new bodies of students emerge, whether it be like its emerged in {South} Korea and in Southeast Asia {and} India, there to be a certain impact of that context on how they interpret and shape their missionary endeavor.

In this day and age, there is going to be tremendous diversity of how a certain milieu, a campus, a culture, a country, that the student there will express himself. We have a huge number of organizations across the Protestant world, but can't really change the nature of what's going

on and that's that you have a tremendous variety and diversity of organizational membership across that world. The same will be for any student thrust, there needs to be an appreciation for the diversity that will emerge. The expressions and the forms might be a bit different but the passion, the commitment, the mandate will be totally shared.

My prayer

BG: My prayer for you is that God would grant you wisdom beyond your years to know how to shape and bring together vital institutional steps for others in your generation to follow you. **IJFM**