

African Missiology En Route

In 2011, this editorial page highlighted the “African Precedent in Frontier Missiology.”¹ The astute missiological reflections of Bediako, Kalu, and Sanneh from an historic African frontier still seem so applicable to the frontiers we now face across the 10/40 window. They’ve challenged our settled Western notions and created a “missiology en route.”

The upcoming Ghana 2013 Global Mission Consultation is a clear indication that the Africans have arrived in force. African delegates to the Tokyo 2010 Global Mission Consultation conference decided to bring that same spirit and vision to Africa this coming September.² One could catch this African energy and commitment at MANI (Movement for African National Initiatives) 2011.³ After three decades of strategic research and continent-wide initiatives into unreached peoples, we can expect our African brothers and sisters to offer some new perspectives under the theme “Disciplining the Nations.”

The arc of African missiology is captured in the new autobiography of Lamin Sanneh, the D. Willis James Professor of World Christianity at Yale University, reviewed in this *IJFM* (pp. 148–50). His story makes vividly clear that an indigenous African experience, filtered through the hallowed halls of Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Harvard and Yale can both broaden and sharpen our Western missiological perspective. While not denying a strong critique of colonial mission history, Sanneh places greater value on the emergence of indigenous genius in response to the West. I think we can expect Ghana 2013 to display some of that genius. Rather than just adding new force to already solidified Western mission efforts, this consultation may showcase an African missiology in process. The synergy of African mission leaders and other non-Western participants, most of them schooled in familiar Western mission theory and terminology, might expose the flabby assumptions we still carry in the 21st century.

The ferment created by an African “theology en route” back in the 1960s and 1970s⁴ has proved a valuable infrastructure for their emerging “missiology en route.” The vitality and variety of approaches to their African-Christian identity in recent decades is impressive,⁵ leading to what Sanneh coins as “frontier Christianities.”⁶ You catch a sample of that cultural self-actualization in Part II of Larry Caldwell’s article on ethnohermeneutics (pp. 113–21), where he cites the creative “chicken theology” of the Builsa people of Ghana. It’s an indigenous

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interpretation so representative of Africa, and one of the reasons we should anticipate fresh missiological feedback from our African brothers and sisters.

African and other non-Western voices forced Western missions into a half-century of self-assessment. David Taylor, research director of the Global Network of Mission Structures, offers a balanced, honest and vulnerable review of our Protestant mission legacy (pp. 123-28). His posture invites our non-Westerner partners to add their missiological voice to Ghana 2013.

Two other articles reflect two missiological dimensions that can often surface in African missiology. Alan Howell has suggested the need for a "theology of suffering" that takes into account an African cosmology (pp. 129-37). Indigenous African theology has insisted it be free to begin from within its own "world." This is the persuasion of Isaiah M. Dau, whose article in the recent WEA publication, "Sorrow and Blood," is the only indigenous theology of suffering in an anthology of 62 authors on the

subject of persecution and martyrdom.⁷ It should be no surprise that it's a new African voice who compares both Western and African perspectives through a biblical lens. The crisis and turmoil of Uganda, Rwanda, Congo and Zimbabwe force any African missiology to address the full scope of evil and suffering.

The African setting of Ghana 2013 might also force us to confront the geopolitical factor in missiology. The mix of the Western nation state and African tribalism is a troubled history. John White feels it's time we compare how the church responds in different national contexts to communism, and he gives an initial analysis of the church in Russia and China (pp. 139-47). Africa has confronted communism, but in the future it's more likely Africans will address the threat of Islam's geopolitical reach out of the north. I suspect a missiology emerging at Ghana 2013 might prioritize how the gospel can survive and flourish amidst brutal and totalitarian anti-Christian regimes.

These articles combine dimensions which create a "missiology en route": Western assessment, cultural sensitivity, hermeneutics, theology, persecution and suffering. We should expect the same at Ghana 2013.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ *IJFM* 27:1, Winter 2011.

² September 25-28, 2013. <http://www.gnms.net/ghana2013>.

³ See <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/mani-2011-abuja-nigeria>.

⁴ Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, *African Theology En Route* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).

⁵ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).

⁶ Lamin Sanneh, "The Significance of the Translation Principle," in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 35.

⁷ Isaiah M. Dau, "The Problem of Evil and Suffering," in *Sorrow and Blood* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), 113.

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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.