

# From the Editor's Desk

## The Long Shadow of Alan Tippett

The *IJFM* welcomes two timely publications as an extensive backdrop to this issue's focus on how we understand movements to Christ. The first is David Garrison's *A Wind in the House of Islam* (see ad p. 181 and Bradford Greer's review pp. 182-83). This book is the culmination of three years of research on sixty-nine such movements that have emerged across the Muslim world since the year 2000—the broadest research effort of its kind to date. Garrison's careful phenomenological approach cuts through the more recent anecdotal hearsay and reflex judgment regarding movements and offers solid evidence that God is drawing Muslims to himself to an unprecedented degree.

The second book, *Fullness of Time*, is the most recent in a series of previously unpublished works by Alan Tippett (see ad p. 170).<sup>1</sup> When it comes to understanding movements to Christ, few were as perceptive as this eminent mission anthropologist. This book is a collection of his essays on ethnohistory, a discipline thought to be Tippett's most innovative contribution to missiology. We've gotten permission to include one of the essays that captures Tippett's perspective on different types of movements in Oceania (see pp. 171-80). And don't miss Glenn Schwartz's review of Tippett's autobiography, *No Continuing City*, a 580-page "inside look" into the life of this rather private Australian (p. 183-85).

It's too easy to forget the missiological rigor of someone like Tippett. Now, just twenty-five years since his passing, the rapid-fire publication of his unpublished works is simply astounding. The conviction of this journal is that any understanding of movements would benefit from comparing his field experience in Oceania with that of a Garrison (or anyone else) in the Islamic world. You would expect the contextual dynamics to be radically different, but when it comes to movements, both are studying "actual dynamic processes at work," and both are alert to how God "can speak to men through social mechanisms."<sup>2</sup> Sure, one setting is the post-WWII colonial resistance of Melanesia and the other the global resurgence of a post-9/11 world, but notice that both represent periods subsequent to historical watersheds. As Tippett notes, most "movements are the result of stress situations which arise when two very different cultures clash or come into acculturative contact."<sup>3</sup> The intersection of Tippett's Oceania and Garrison's Muslim world should be a fertile field for comparisons.

All that said, there is growing attention to the study of movements among Muslims today. The research is growing, and for this we can be glad. The missiological forum on Muslim contextualization known as Bridging the Divide (BtD) has spent the past four years wrestling with different (often controversial) perspectives on

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insider movements in the Muslim world, and it's in that forum that each of the authors in this issue, as well as Garrison's research, has had a considerable impact. It's apparent that two vital developments are pushing the discussion of movements forward.

First, we're willing to discuss our missiological predispositions when it comes to movements. It's quite apparent that our perception of those Jesus movements emerging in other religious terrain is often colored by the unexposed assumptions each of us brings to the table. Len Bartlotti recognized his own presuppositions and broke them down into nine categories, which he then offered to the BtD forum (pp. 137-53). He clarified the different "thought styles" and "group think" that can so easily captivate us. I witnessed the paralysis of misunderstanding at that meeting melt into significant dialogue. His contribution forces each of us beyond a posture of evaluation, beyond that immediate impulse to validate (or invalidate) movements, to a personal examination of those models of church, culture, or theology that drive our judgment.

Secondly, more and more we're studying actual research from the field. Nothing impacts or disturbs presuppositions quite like a case study that holds surprising data. It can bend one's preconceived image of reality and force one beyond caricatures. Admittedly Garrison's research is broad and encompassing, but more focused research on actual movements in particular contexts is finally beginning to be published. A good example is the second installment of Ben Naja's empirical research on two Jesus Movements in Muslim communities in Eastern Africa—offered initially at the BtD and now published here in this issue (pp. 155-60).

The long shadow of Alan Tippett should convince us we have a way to go. It should encourage us to continue our pursuit of thorough field-level research. We can't afford to fall into the oversimplification that Tippett so often decried, what he amusingly called "cartoons," "exaggerating one feature at the expense of the others to the distortion of the general effect."<sup>4</sup> This is no easy mandate to fulfill, for we no longer live in Tippett's post-colonial world, and the role of the field researcher requires

some of the same sensitivity that Travis fleshes out in his description of the "Alongsider" (pp. 161-69). I think the barefoot, island-hopping Alan Tippett would second any motion to instill the cross-cultural habits Travis has outlined. Understanding movements demands it.

This year's ISFM in Atlanta (September 23-25) will offer this generation another look at world evangelization with the theme "Recasting Evangelization: The Significance of Lausanne '74 for Today and Beyond" (see ad on the back cover or on p. 169). Hope to see you there.

In Him,

Brad Gill  
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

### *Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> The Missiology of Alan R. Tippett Series, available at <http://missionbooks.org/search/results/search&keywords=tippett/>

<sup>2</sup> Alan Tippett, *People Movements in Southern Polynesia*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1971, p. 6

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 5

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 226

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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.