

The Shifting Paradigm of World Evangelization

Research can eventually upset our paradigms. We usually welcome the way it sophisticates and refines our theories, but it might gradually erode the ground under our rock-solid assumptions. It was Thomas Kuhn who helped the academy to admit their *faith* in scientific theories, and their general reluctance to accept new theoretical models—read “paradigm shifts.” This same kind of shift was evident in 1974 at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization when Ralph Winter overturned conventional notions of evangelization held by leaders at that Congress.¹ Research demanded a new paradigm, and a remapping of world evangelization.

In an insightful exegesis of Winter’s speech at Lausanne ’74 (p. 5), Greg Parsons ushers us back into the antecedent research which led to Winter’s paradigmatic overhaul. Winter had leaned heavily on the research of Donald McGavran and the socio-religious nature of a caste system in India. McGavran and his colleagues at Fuller Seminary’s School of World Mission had been busy compiling research on “the bridges of God” from all corners of the globe. Parsons detects how Winter synthesized all this research into a new demographic of unreached peoples that then recast evangelization for a new era of mission.

This idea of “recasting evangelization” was the theme of the ISFM meetings on the 40th anniversary of Lausanne ’74. Admittedly, the term evangelization has been shelved in recent missional vernacular—possible evidence that a broad *missio dei* is swinging back to correct any reductionism in evangelical witness. But the ISFM 2014 pulled the terms “world evangelization” out of retirement with a robust reflection on an unreached peoples paradigm which has fueled global outreach over four decades. We’ll offer up articles from those meetings in the next few issues, but in this issue we want to sample some perspectives on the actual criteria that Winter used to map a new global demography of evangelization.

Just as in ’74, there’s a focus on Hindu India and that same complex caste system which shaped research criteria (a subject we’ve been tracking in previous issues).² Particularly in India we can see three new influences which are shaping and refining Winter’s criteria.

The Rise of Local Demographers. At the ISFM 2014 we heard a stunning presentation on the remaining unreached “Other Backward Castes.” I must admit my incredulity at the scope of this huge demographic, but we reprint it here in its

Editorial *continued on p. 4*

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2015 ISFM Executive Committee

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Subscriptions

One year (four issues) \$18.00
Two years (eight issues) \$34.00
Three years (twelve issues) \$48.00
Single copies \$5.00, multiple copies \$4.00
Payment must be enclosed with orders.

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IJFM (ISSN #2161-3354) was established in 1984 by the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions. It is published quarterly under the sponsorship of Frontier Ventures.

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PRINTED in the USA

simplicity (p. 21). It seems to confirm much of McGavran's paradigm from the previous century, but the difference lies in who's saying it. This assessment comes from a local demographer, Yashwant Koli. He represents the fresh streams of qualitative research coming from a constellation of national research initiatives across India. These demographers don't just count, but they walk the villages of India and sense the street level "barriers of acceptance" to the gospel. They feel the ambiguities of modern India, they see the warping impact of globalization, and they perceive how any new church phenomenon might effectively bridge across castes.

New Social Theory. After years of ministry in South Asia, Mark Pickett suspected that the traditional theories of caste hierarchy weren't sufficient for identifying the peoples of Nepal, so he sophisticates those cruder anthropological lenses (p. 23). And don't miss the book review, where Herb Hoefler reviews Darren Duerksen's research on the *Yesu Satsungs* (Jesus Gatherings) of Northwest India. Hoefler weighs in on how Duerksen advances the ecclesiology of his own

(Hoefler's) research from two decades ago, an advance made possible by new social theory. Duerksen utilizes the "analytic dualism" of Archer and other social theorists to unpack how a contextually-sensitive ecclesial identity ("church") is forming behind socio-religious barriers in South Asia (p. 52). The special thing about this kind of social theory is that once applied to one religious world (Hindu), it can travel to another (Muslim, Buddhist) with the potential for reaping new insights.

The Voice of the Oppressed. We would be remiss to ignore Vishal Mangalwadi's perspective on the social repercussions of a growing Dalit revolt against "untouchability" and the Hindu social order.³ While there are no reliable statistics on the "churchless" Christian faith of this mushrooming movement, the revolt is certainly provoking reaction from the Hindu Nationalist BJP Party, especially with the recent election of Prime Minister Modi (see p. 54). His government is encouraging aggressive reconversion of Muslims and Christians to Hinduism, and this politicization of religion is sure to have implications for how peoples identify

themselves. This journal forecasted some of these realities fifteen years ago,⁴ but the fallout from the present tensions between Hindu fundamentalism and the Dalit revolt remains unpredictable. It's unclear what it will mean for traditional barriers to evangelization.

New realities like these in India will certainly influence our missiology, but as Daniels (p. 37) and Howell (p. 43) demonstrate in separate but complementary studies of Muslim Africa, research should result in "fruitful practices." That was the spirit of Lausanne '74, and it should guide any recasting of world evangelization.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ See Harold Fickett on Winter's speech, *IJFM* 31:2, ijfm.org.

² Dyanand Bharati (*IJFM* 24:3), p. 151; N. J. Gnaniah (*IJFM* 28:4), p. 161.

³ Vishal Mangalwadi, "Can Churchless Christianity Transform India?" Unpublished manuscript.

⁴ *IJFM* 18:1 Spring 2001, ijfm.org.

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.