

## *Unreached: A Term, a Concept, and a Reality*

It has been said, "A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew." We could also add that oblique mission concepts will fail to guide the church effectively. The terms we utilize must tie our missiological concepts to the actual realities we face in mission today, so it's no surprise if we are constantly debating both our terms and concepts. "If the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?" (I Cor. 14:8).

We've given the greater portion of this issue of the *IJFM* to Dave Datema's historical review of the term "unreached" (pp. 45-71). Mission demographers today are still faithfully mapping unreached populations with a conceptual grid that has developed over decades. Our hope is that a newer generation in mission will find Datema's overview a beneficial synopsis of how this term has been negotiated.

Over the past four decades "unreached" has been a term, a concept and a reality. Other terms have been explored (pp. 72-76), but unreached (or "unreached peoples") has held its ground.

To be historically accurate, the concept actually came first. Most of the relevant ideas were nurtured in the Church Growth school of thought, where "people groups" or "people movements" were studied and modeled for the purpose of expanding or extending the church. The reality came second. As Ralph Winter was given the task of outlining the state of world evangelization at the Lausanne Congress in 1974, a certain reality was dawning on him. When he took those same concepts, he began to see that a tremendous population of un-evangelized individuals resided in peoples who had no access to an indigenous church. As much as we have gone back and forth over our conceptual tools these past decades, we must still admit to a huge demographic reality that faces us on the frontiers of the global church. That reality—those unevangelized peoples with no access to the Gospel—needed a term, and the one that stuck was "unreached."

For forty years the concepts behind the term have been discussed, debated, and tested—and most of that evaluation has come from new developments in socio-cultural analysis. An "anthropology of globalization" promotes new realities and new paradigms, and mission anthropologists are continually pushing for a more postmodern perspective on "people group" thinking (p. 86). We've chosen to dip into the archives of Paul Hiebert for a much earlier analysis, and we find his assessment of Church Growth thinking to be cogent and profound (pp. 77-81).

*Editorial continued on p. 44*

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As early as the 1980s, those of us who had been students of Hiebert were arriving on the field with his syllabi under our arms, ready to test and explore our typical cultural categories. Hiebert, the anthropologist, had a way of inviting us into the inductive task of understanding the ever-changing contexts of mission; he was brilliant on the epistemological shifts taking place in modern social science.

But note that this critique did not force him to automatically discount the reality of the unreached challenge that had dawned on Winter and the others at Fuller's School of World Mission. He may have wanted our conceptual grid to correspond better to mission realities, but he did not minimize this particular unevangelized reality itself. May his irenic approach be a model to us all. (I should say that at the time of publication, we had yet to determine just when and where Hiebert presented this short evaluation to his Mennonite Brethren denomination, but maybe by virtue of its publication here, a reader might help us situate it historically.)

At the upcoming ISFM 2016 (October 14–16, in Dallas) we look forward to addressing the challenge of mapping the demographics of unreached peoples today. Mapping the unreached tests the application of our terms and concepts, forces ambiguities to surface, and exposes “the fog in the pew.” Mission demographers and statisticians will be in attendance and some will present papers; we invite you not only to attend but to participate in their discussions.

Other sessions at this ISFM will bend towards the EMS theme of “Missions in the Local Church.” These sessions will examine key missiological concepts that need to be understood if local churches are to engage the frontiers (i.e., culture, sodality, pluralism, urban sociality). We will have a special focus on the challenges facing the Korean church in understanding the religious challenge at its doorstep.

Concerning mobilizing the local church today, we commend Darren Duerksen's review (pp. 83–84) of Bryan Bishop's new book, *Boundless*, and the attempt—in clear layman's

terms—to cut through the mist surrounding insider movements. Again, in his book as in this issue, terms and concepts are woven in and around an actual reality—in his case, movements to Christ within other religious worlds. And, finally, we have Jonathan Bornman's review (pp. 82–83) of Peter Sensenig's *Peace Clan*, a sixty-year history of work among the Somalis by Mennonite missionaries and workers of the Mennonite Central Committee. It examines the symbiosis of gospel transformation with on-the-ground development, all from the peacemaking worldview of the Mennonites.

Hope to see you at ISFM 2016!

In Him,



Brad Gill  
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

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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.