

Refining Our Religious Sensibility

You may have noticed that this journal is trying to raise our religious consciousness. We live in a secular age, one in which religious phenomena are considered marginal, epiphenomenal, not at the core of what moves people. But religious affinities and dispositions can lie silent and deep, hidden under a cosmopolitan sameness, creating barriers for the gospel.

Our last two *IJFM* installments have addressed this interreligious challenge. *IJFM* 38:3–4 was a compendium of the 2021 RDW Lectureship, with historical reflections on the innovative Christian-Buddhist ministry of Karl Reichelt among Chinese Buddhist monks. Then came issue 39:1 which focused on the “hermeneutical space” created in these interreligious encounters, especially those turning to Christ in a Buddhist religious world. That issue introduced Dr. Kang-San Tan’s concept of “inreligionization,” which served as his plenary address at EMS/ISFM 2021.

This current issue, 39:2–4, continues the same focus. It offers formal responses to Tan’s interreligious proposals delivered at the 2023 Winter Lectureship, “Beyond Contextualization: Crossing Religious and Cultural Boundaries.” This very recent event certainly widened our religious sensibilities, pressing us beyond mere theoretical engagement to a more grounded appreciation of the way people encounter Christ across religious and cultural divides. The reader will find these mature assessments of how and why movements to Christ may or may not emerge amidst Asia’s pluralistic world of Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu.

No one, not even Dr. Tan, seems beholden to the actual neologism in inreligionization, but further probing of the concept itself seemed a fruitful course. Tan’s presentations bookended the symposium, with the introduction of his concept of “inreligionization” in the opening lecture (p. 69) and then a closing perspective on dual religious belonging (p. 117). All presentations by the formal respondents in this symposium—Harold Netland, Brainerd Prince, Anna Travis, and Darren Duerksen—are published here. But this issue falls short of a full compendium, with only a sample of the short responses to the different presentations. Neither were the panel interactions transcribed, where the adept moderator, Kevin Higgins, linked insights from across a wide field of Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu religious worlds.

We have added three other articles which illustrate a religious sensibility to the Hindu world. H. L. Richard provides a vivid historical example of interreligious engagement from the life of R. C. Das (p. 127). Elizabeth Walker offers a practical

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orientation to the ceremonial life of Hindu friends (p. 135), and Herb Hoeffler points to the significance of poetry and song in the spiritual devotion (*bhakti*) of Swami Bharati, a Hindu follower of Jesus (p. 143).

Let me suggest how this religious sensibility fits into all that's happening in frontier mission today.

I attended a recent conference where I listened to some of the most astute leaders involved in the growth of disciple making movements today. I was struck by their description of the social dynamics of these movements. Their analysis was beyond mere quantification, for they seemed ready and willing to use social network analysis and diffusion theory. But I noted hardly a reference to cultural or religious distinctives across this analysis. A religious sensibility played a minor role, if any. That's a precipitous judgment, I confess, but the grid seemed to favor social data.

No doubt these movements are rippling through an unreached social landscape in wonderful ways. But one wonders if a shallow religious sensibility may allow certain affinities—like the more

“high-identity” religious populations—to remain hidden at the edges of these same movements. One wonders whether further innovation would emerge where there is an astute religious sensibility.

Thinking biblically for a final moment, I'm impressed that the apostle Paul always appeared to have a religious sensibility. He was constantly interacting with the cosmopolitan religious perspectives of his Greco-Roman world. It wasn't just a social landscape, nor simply a cross-cultural challenge. In particular, he was keenly aware of the significance of religious affinities, rituals, and institutions. This point seems clear without a full biblical review of Jew/Greek/barbarian, the “strong” and the “weak,” the cultic participation in eating meat, the keeping of sacred days, or the “elemental principles of the world.” Paul knew that religious realities tended to divide, and he was sensitive to the boundaries of different religious identities at the edges of that first-century Christward movement.

So, the *IJFM* is grateful for this recent lectureship's venture “beyond contextualization,” and for the further examination of Kang-San Tan's concept of

inreligionization. It's been a privilege to edit and publish these contributions. May they sharpen our interreligious aptitude, especially as we endeavor to see the power of the gospel emerge in the religious complexities of Asia.

The ISFM/EMS 2023 is happening this October 13–14, 2023 (see ad on page 65). Our plenary speaker, Paul Cornelius (Pres., William Carey Int'l University), and the ten breakout sessions will address vital aspects of education and formation in frontier mission. The meeting is a hybrid event, both virtual and on-site at our new venue, Dallas Theological Seminary. Hope to see you there.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

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.