

## Guest Editorial

### Keep the Embers Alive

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Published in *Global Missiology*, [www.globalmissiology.org](http://www.globalmissiology.org), July 2021

I grew up in the rural countryside in the Muranga district of central Kenya. In the mud and wattle homes that dot the hillsides, people still cook with woodfires built around three stones. Firewood comes plenty, but fire needs to be tended so it does not go out. After all the cooking is done for the night, one gathers hot ashes around remnant embers at the center of the hearth. In the morning one pokes the ashes to expose glowing embers, and with fresh kindling builds a fire to prepare a pot of hot black tea. Upon leaving to work the land during the day, one preserves the embers under ashes again. Late in the afternoon, woody chunks are used to create a large fire for big pot of *githeri* (a meal of maize and beans that requires a long period of boiling) for the family meal. Repeat at bedtime to keep the fire alive for the next day. You never quite tire of covering embers or blowing in the ashes to awaken the heat. If one ran out of smoldering embers, one would need to have a matchbox handy, which is quite improbable in an impoverished countryside area, so the more likely scenario is to walk up the hill to the neighbors to scoop live embers from their hearth.

This recollection comes to mind as I reflect on the articles we have in this issue of GM. The work of tending, spreading, and making the gospel useful to the world that needs it is a bit like the fire in that rural setting. It sparks, grows, glows, smolders, even fizzes out as it is attentively tended, or not. Sandro Oliveira explores the subject of “reverse missions” as one of the ways the fire of the gospel is being rekindled and sparked in secularizing western nations. Defining reverse mission is actually not as strenuous as imagined. It feels strenuous if one thinks of and measures cross-cultural mission work done by non-western missionaries in the West, using the same yardstick that western missionaries used to measure their work across the Global South in an earlier era. Times, cultures, geographies are different. It goes without saying that the methods of mission are different, particularly as socioeconomic circumstances impose an unequal power differential between the would-be missionaries and would-be evangelized society. What is without a doubt is that those who move to western countries from southern and eastern countries are presently more attuned to the gospel, and their presence influences the religious environment of the West. While we appreciate Oliveira’s affirmation that reverse mission is a reality, we need to resist the temptation to think of mission in the same terms in which it was carried and conducted across the Global South. What is crucial to grasp about mission, reverse or otherwise, is that it is a vital way continually to cultivate the awareness that each generation must do its part to find its place in God’s mission in the world in its time. Those who have moved from the non-western world to the western world are called upon to seek God’s guidance in how they may bear witness in their adoptive homelands. Specific case studies of how immigrants are witnessing—of how they are kindling many little fires all over their new homes, how they are scooping embers from their host neighbors—may also help move the debate on reverse mission from generalities and often repeated tropes, to demonstrate the principle of the gospel at work.

In Paul Hertig’s piece, “Trouble with Kindness,” explored through the Book of Acts, we see kindness as a fire that never goes out, indeed, a perpetual fire kindled in the bosom of God’s eternally redemptive hearth. Indeed, kindness is good trouble. The Acts Community, already ablaze with the Fire of Pentecost, unleashed wave upon wave of kindness in what was an unkind

and troubled world, and the Lord added to their numbers daily. They were persecuted and fled, they traveled to trade, they followed God's nudging to witness, and in each place they went acts of kindness created a hearth, a new blaze, a new community of faith, till the gospel has reached our times in all faithfulness. To our deeply troubled world, may kindness spark the fire of the gospel like a good old bonfire, warming the cold exterior of troubled humanity to the love that God offers in Christ Jesus.

The specialists' article by Nelson Jennings concludes a lengthy three-part exploration of the complex models of mission developed by Ralph Winter. For the well-schooled mission specialist, this issue's suggestive piece is worth engaging in depth, not only here in the article itself but also in digging afresh into the models as Winter presented them. In the working metaphor of this editorial, what Jennings writes is like deeply sustained, late night chat around a full bonfire, one that explores weighty matters of models of mission with deep introspection and care. We are at a point where the future of Christian mission invites serious thinkers to do the deep work of reflection about the current state of our world, the status of the unfinished task of sharing the gospel, and what we as mission agents must do in our time. We do well to revisit—appreciatively and critically—what those who have gone before us have said and done, so that we may catch a spark from their fire to light our own.

This issue's two book reviews also spread their own embers on already hotly discussed matters of contemporary missiology, namely so-called Insider Movements and the nature of the missiological task itself. The books reviewed, as well as the penetrating analyses of them here by John Cheong and Samuel Law, contribute significantly to this entire issue's attempt to "Keep the Embers Alive."