

Every Step of the Way!

By **TIMOTHY O. OLONADE**

Timothy Olonade, PhD, served on the leadership team CAPRO and was appointed the Pioneer Executive Secretary of Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association before founding El-Rehoboth Global Leadership Foundation and M2414 Initiative for Final Harvest where he serves as President and Int'l Coordinator, respectively. Timothy is a priest in the Anglican Communion where he serves as a Canon. He is the Founding Coordinator of Africa Mentoring Initiative, a network of Christlike leadership development leaders across Africa.

A Generation-Long Series of Encounters

My romance with Perspectives started in 1982. I was undergoing missiological training in preparation for full-time service with an indigenous mission group when someone brought a copy of the Perspectives *Reader* from the USA. I was fascinated by the articles on people-group factors in world evangelism—that was what we cared about in our work in Nigeria.

In 1989, I received cross-cultural communication training in Bulstrode, England, and spent time at Worldwide Evangelization for Christ (WEC International) headquarters. I had a discussion with Patrick Johnstone, then editor of *Operation World*, on the paucity of sound motivational and inspirational missiological materials that can spark mission interest. I had just published my first work, *Motivation for World Missions*, a small book calling for immediate frontier mission involvement from the Emerging African Mission Force. My response to Patrick was this: If Perspectives crossed the Atlantic, it could be one of God's instruments to spur zeal and motivation for world missions for a long time.

In 2000, I was appointed the Pioneer Executive Secretary/CEO of the Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association (NEMA), a networking association committed to mutual encouragement and accountability to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. The Association was birthed in 1982 by five Nigerian indigenous missions groups that wanted to expand the involvement of Nigerians in world missions. After

assuming office at NEMA, I visited the US Center for World Mission in Pasadena, the home of Perspectives and the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*. Greg Parsons arranged for me to meet Ralph Winter.

"If Perspectives on the World Christian Movement is about the world Christian movement, why have you served it as an American menu?" I asked Winter. His answer was quite profound, "We are waiting for people like you to take it further." He went on to show me a couple of abortive moves in India, Ethiopia, Brazil, and Latin America. In each, "We wanted to ensure Perspectives did not come across as an American imposition." To deal with "this American thing," it seemed they killed the fire by removing wood from the fireplace. They were careful that the food didn't smell like charcoal, and they ended up having uncooked food that couldn't be served.

Winter was legitimately interested in seeing Perspectives transcend America, but his position on some of his articles was sacrosanct. Maybe we could drop some articles and get locals to write a piece or two. I saw his dilemma and supported his vision for a culturally adaptable Perspectives in Nigeria. I counseled, "We can't begin to change the content or replace articles until we've interacted with the present content." To that, Winter graciously replied, "Then let's make it happen."

Within weeks, a plan was made for the first-ever PSP (Perspectives Study Program) intensive course on





the continent of Africa in Jos, Nigeria, in 2002. That trip brought Steve Hawthorne and Bruce Koch on their first African visit—to Nigeria! Fifty-six key leaders from over 30 denominations and mission agencies came for the maiden two-week intensive class in May 2002. Their testimonies were electrifying. The content, delivery, and atmosphere refreshed these leaders, some having traveled 500 miles on poor roads to attend the training. After the class, I invited 14 of these leaders to a post-study review session to strategize development for the future program in Nigeria. We looked at the course, hosting costs and logistics, travel challenges, the development of local facilitators, and the affordability of the reading manual. We mapped out our strategy and enlisted help where needed. We scheduled classes across Nigeria and expressed the ambitious desire to step into other African nations ASAP!

Bad news travels fast, but good news travels far. Classes across various regions were held quickly one after another. From that mustard seed planted in 2002, there are now tens of thousands of alumni in Nigeria and other African countries. We introduced PSP as an in-service training and leadership-development course on world evangelization for serving and emerging leaders. And it worked. In the days before Boko Haram invaded and stained the land, even senior government officers, who were bi-vocational pastors and missionaries, fought to get a seat in the class.

So, intentional efforts were made from inception to target participants who could hasten the impact of the program. One such participant was the regional leader of Foursquare Gospel Church, Isaac Komolafe. Following the Perspectives class in 2002, Komolafe trailblazed his denomination's incursion into the unreached people groups of northeast Nigeria. In his words, "Perspectives turned things around—the right way!" He was among the first leading pastors to train as facilitators and traveled with me to facilitate several classes.

Perspectives had an immediate impact on two Anglican Bishops—one in the East, the other in

Central Nigeria. Bishop Sam was an active leader in the Scripture Union Movement in Nigeria before he was elected Bishop. Upon becoming a bishop, he sought the Lord for the best way to bring the deep-rooted mission and evangelism zeal to his area. Hearing of Perspectives, he invited us to run a class for 46 of his senior clergy and fellow bishops. Before the class ended, they resolved to have another larger class. Three months later, 10 bishops, an archbishop, and 89 carefully selected, very senior clergymen from 10 dioceses took the Perspectives intensive class.

The intensive nature of the classes contributed to PSP's growth in Nigeria. For busy leaders, it is much easier to sacrifice a little time over a week than to stretch the course out over a longer period. Such flexibility thrilled Bishop Nyom of Central Nigeria. Rather than send 10 people to Jos for the class, Bishop Nyom pleaded to host a class of their own. Within a year of this discussion, 64 of his close associates and regional leaders took the course. Nyom told me four years later, "The church planting passion and practice that followed the class is remarkable and fruitful."

Various associates were urged to step up their involvement in missions, including two young architects, Sam Olatunbi and Victor Idakwoji. To be on staff in NEMA then, you needed to go through PSP. It was my prescribed baptism into serving and running errands for the Nigeria mission movement. So, Sam and Victor experienced two separate classes that changed the course of their lives permanently. Thereafter, Sam coordinated PSP nationally under my watch for five years before Victor took over and has served in that duty post for over a decade. What started as a mustard seed grew leaps and bounds through the yielded and focused involvement of these two, along with my successors in the NEMA leadership.

I shared with the maiden class in 2002 my vision to see thousands of church leaders take Perspectives. The first five foundational years attracted about 2,000–3,000 people. Another 10 years of moderate growth followed. In a recent analysis of the program, Perspectives has attracted more than 6,400 participants from all the states in Nigeria in the past eight years. Our dream of impacting other African countries has not yielded the desired result. But the program continues to showcase the reality of the world Christian movement that is driven by Nigerians, resourced by Perspectives, and extends the gospel's reach—to the glory of God. 

