

## AJPS AND GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

The publication of each issue of a journal is a reason for celebration. There are at least two good reasons to do so. First, the mortality rate of academic journals is extremely high, especially in the first few years. Everyone begins with a clear vision and mission, often aligned with those of the institution that sponsors the journal. The Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies (AJPS) was not an exception: it once had a period where its death, even in its “teen” years, was rather apparent. To a founding editor, it was hard to watch. Its “resurrection,” therefore, came with much rejoicing. Second, each issue is different from all others. The character of the journal remains constant, but its content is always different. (For this issue, I will speak more below). The institution’s decision to make the journal content available online is an expression of missional generosity.

AJPS is an Asian journal on Pentecostal studies, not a journal of Asian Pentecostalism. The name of the journal points to a distinct Asian perspective for a wide range of Pentecostal subjects, while it aims to serve broader constituencies. Its global awareness is therefore to be celebrated. At the same time, the journal has been a source of rare studies on Asian Pentecostalism for almost two decades. In many academic books on Pentecostal topics, “AJPS” is a regular entry in the list of abbreviations. The world turns to this journal when researchers look for Pentecostal thoughts and voices in Asia. For example, when a ground breaking book was recently published on Pentecostal creation care, the most important voice among Asian Pentecostals was found from the journal. Agustinus Dermawan began his Indonesian reflection among Indonesian Pentecostals on creation care (or the lack thereof) as a class paper at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary. After a considerable revision, the study was published in the journal.<sup>1</sup> His study received extensive attention as a crucial Asian Pentecostal voice.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Agustinus Dermawan, “The Spirit in Creation and Environmental Stewardship: A Preliminary Pentecostal Response toward Ecological Theology,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 6:2 (2003): 199-217.

<sup>2</sup>A. J. Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees: Toward a Pentecostal Ecological Theology* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2013), 187-88.

Today, there is another important reason why the watchers of global Christianity focus on Asian Pentecostal Christianity. There are credible data proving that Christianity throughout its two-millennium history has not yet grown beyond the one-third wall of the world population. One exception, according to the *Atlas of Global Christianity*, was the record rate of 34.8% in the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> The historic Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910) was perhaps a brilliant moment to mark this unprecedented point of Christian history. The participants of this first-ever gathering of world mission leaders (although it was really “Western”) firmly believed that “Evangelisation of the world in our [their] generation” was a possible reality. At the height of western colonialism, a vast part of the world was under “Christian” domination. But within that generation, two world wars brought devastations and destruction that human history had never experienced. This time, destruction of lives numbered millions, not thousands. We just marked the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, which occurred with a blazing fire of atomic bombs in Asia. When the centenary of the Edinburgh conference was held with a smaller number than was at the original gathering, the mood was obviously different. Since the early 1980s, more Christians have lived in the three southern continents. Today, almost two-thirds of the world’s Christians live and witness in what is now called the “Global South.”<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the world Church had learned hard lessons. At that point, world Christianity was under 33.3% of the world’s population, in spite of historic gains in Africa (that is, almost a 42-fold growth of Christianity in one hundred years!).

Asia has been the prime suspect for this “under 1/3 saga” of global Christianity with its massive population (close to 60% of today’s world population). Christianity is about 1/3 of the world average, that is, about 15.5% of the Asian population. When Asia grows, this will definitely impact the world scene. When Christianity in the two “billion club” nations (that is, China and India) begins to grow, we know Asian Christianity will increase. Furthermore, that is happening in our time. There is one last important key: about one half of Asian Christians are of a Pentecostal/Charismatic type, open to the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit. That means the most logical answer to the quest is Asian Pentecostals, who can cause this “1/3 wall” to finally be broken and

---

<sup>3</sup>Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 59.

<sup>4</sup>Johnson and Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity*, 51.

keep global Christianity on the other side of the wall in a sustained manner. This was not a role which the journal perceived when it began at the end of the last century.

Four main studies of this particular issue well exemplify what Asian Pentecostals offer to the world. Again, the range and contextual engagement of each study provides a good possibility that Asian Christianity can be a mile wide and a mile deep. First, Dionson's exegetical study is significant in two ways. The first is the ministry of encouragement that is crucial for any ministry, and the study is addressed to both mentors and mentorees. Its second importance is the very fact that Pentecostal faith and life is firmly grounded in the Word and this study demonstrates just that. Indeed, Pentecostals have been known as "people of the book" and only when a biblical principle is confidently laid can a robust contextual engagement can take place. Thang now brings his own Myanmar Christianity into discussion, which is divided between the "work" and "faith" lines or evangelical and mainline churches. He brings this contemporary challenge in a serious engagement with two key passages of the New Testament, which each camp may base their emphasis on. It is not only a careful exegetical study, but also a self-critical and constructive proposal for both to see each other as members of the same body of Christ, and commonly called to reach the vast nation still not touched by the transforming power of the gospel. Phanon's study on Thai spiritual tattoo is another splendid example of a Pentecostal engagement with the socio-religious realities of societies in Asia. Amidst the widespread spirit-related practices, Asian Pentecostals are called to bring a clear gift of God's salvation and freedom from bondage, while countering spiritual forces, beliefs and practices that have permeated deeply the social psyche and life. Liu takes up his own Chinese cultural festival, Zhong Yuan, and contends that there is a strong animistic and religious aspect to it. His exploration of a Pentecostal response to the animistic aspect of the festival is particularly impressive. It is important to remember the pervasiveness of animism, especially in Asia. Anthropological analysis of the festival concludes that it has strong animistic and religious components and Liu provides a practical guide for ministering to people who are involved in the festival.

In my editorial experience of this particular journal, I have noticed that many contributors had their first published studies appear in the pages of *AJPS*. This proves its unique service to new thinker-practitioners. At the same time, it is expected some studies may lack scholarly nuances and refined choice of terms, especially those by non-

English-speaking authors. This is exactly where the journal provides a rare space for such “first-time” thinkers to share their thoughts and experiences with the world. It is clear that all these and other studies in this journal exemplify originality, engagement with cultural and contemporary social issues and deep commitment to the Word and the Spirit. This is the unique call of this journal and I am proud to have been part of this unique ministry in the beginning years.

*Wonsuk Ma*

Executive Director and David Yonggi Cho Research Tutor of Global Christianity, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

Founding co-editor (1998-2006) of the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*