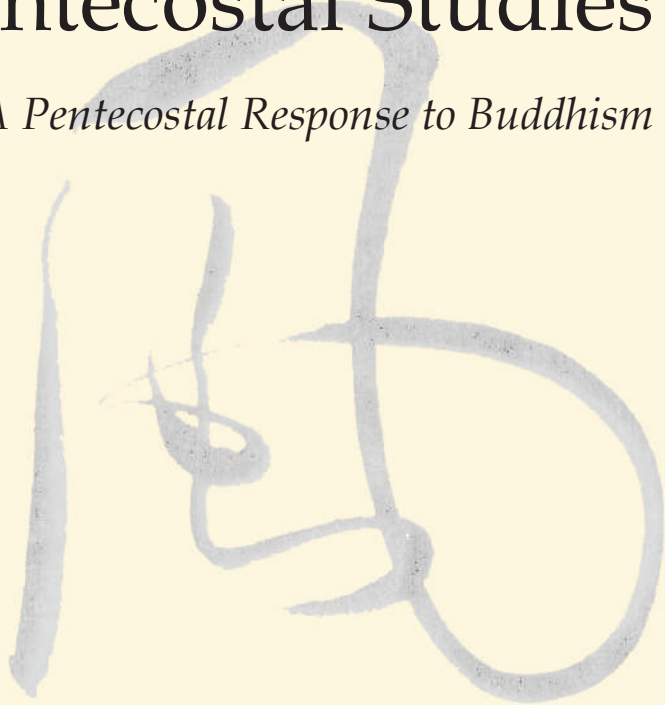


Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies

A Pentecostal Response to Buddhism



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Fax: +63 74 442 6378

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P.O. Box 377, 2600 Baguio City, Philippines

IMPACTING THE FUTURE OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC CHURCH

A Pentecostal Response to Buddhism

by Dave Johnson

This is a dream come true. Ever since becoming the managing editor of the AJPS in 2012, I have wanted to dedicate an edition to this important subject. My thanks to my friend, fellow missiologist, and missionary colleague, Alan Johnson (no relation) for helping me put this edition together. Any mistakes or other weaknesses are entirely my responsibility.

In the opening essay, Johnson notes that there are around 1.29 billion Buddhists in the world, making them one of the largest unreached blocs of people anywhere on the globe.¹ With the notable exceptions of Korea, Cambodia and, more recently, Bhutan, 2,000 years of church history and a century of Pentecostal missions have failed to significantly change the situation and progress remains slow. Nevertheless, there are many missionaries, pastors and church members, past and present, who believe that we can change the map. This is our modest contribution toward that end.

Alan Johnson leads off with an essay explaining what we mean by a “Pentecostal” response to Buddhism. In doing, he asks and seeks to answer three critical questions, “*Why is a response by Pentecostals needed by the Buddhist world,*” “*why is a uniquely Pentecostal response needed*” and “*whose Pentecostal response are we looking at?*” He concludes his essay by posing a fourth question, “Where do we go from here in shaping a Pentecostal response to the Buddhist world?”

Second, global worker Jason Morris discusses Pentecostal engagement with Buddhism in Vietnam. He briefly sketches the history of Buddhism there which came directly from India, not through China as many assume. As it did elsewhere, Buddhism in Vietnam, which is a blend of the Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions, became mixed in with the animism that predated it, as it spread throughout the country. For Morris, Pentecostal missions in Vietnam calls understanding the Vietnamese worldview and Buddhism as it is actually practiced in Vietnam. Furthermore, he calls for Pentecostals to share the gospel

¹Mark Durene, *Change The Map: Impacting the Buddhist World Through Prayer and Action*. (Bangkok: by the author, 2021), 19.

through a paradigm of truth, grace—an unknown concept in Buddhism, and power.

In the third article, *Signs and Wonders: Necessary But Not Sufficient*, which is reprinted by permission (Johnson, Alan R. "Signs and Wonders: Necessary but Not Sufficient." In *Seeking the Unseen: Spiritual Realities in the Buddhist World*, edited by Paul DeNeui, Seaneet Series, ed. Paul DeNeui. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2016, 239-254), Alan Johnson, drawing on thirty-five years of missionary experience among folk Buddhists in Thailand, contends that signs and wonders are necessary among the Thai, but are not sufficient in and of themselves to bring people to Christ. He begins by defining what he means by the concept of power encounter and concludes by theorizing why more than a power encounter is needed in the Thai religious milieu. Our thanks to William Carey Library for their permission to reprint this article.

Fourth, Mark Rodli correctly notes that church growth in Thailand has been quite small. He contends that at least part of the answer may lie in Pentecostal theology and praxis. He then goes on to explain in what way an implemented Pentecostal theology may be the efficacy of efforts in mobilizing laity for witness by looking at the Protestant theological idea, with which Pentecostals agree, of the priesthood of all believers according to I Peter 2:4-10. Furthermore, he explains how this can be lived out in the honor/shame culture of Thailand where patron/client relationships are the norm.

Finally, Darin Clements concludes this edition with an article, drawn from his PhD dissertation at APTS, on non-formal Christian education among Assemblies of God churches in Cambodia (AGC). Most of the members of AGC are first-generation Christians in a majority-Buddhist nation. The approach of the AGC is to proclaim the Good News on its own terms without using Buddhist forms or directly referring to the surrounding Buddhist worldview. The main content of the article presents the findings of the research and discusses implications from those findings that could prove helpful to nonformal CE in similar contexts. The article also includes a four-level model for thinking about nonformal CE and a detailed descriptive model of nonformal CE among AGC churches.

While this edition is a dream come true, it did not come together as well as I hoped. Despite our best efforts to do so, we were not able to include any Asian authors here and did not achieve our goal of maintaining a balance between Asians and Westerners in this regard, although all of the western authors here have had significant experience in working among Buddhists, two of them for twenty years or more. I apologize for this unintended omission.

Before closing, let me mention the Change the Map prayer movement that is focused on the Buddhist world. Pioneered by Assemblies of God missionaries Mark and Janie Durene, this is a movement focused on intercessory prayer for Buddhists. You can visit their website at www.prayforbuddhists.com. I signed up to join this prayer movement. I hope you will too.

As always, I welcome your feedback. You can reach me through our website, www.aptspress.org.

Warmly in Christ,

Dave Johnson, DMiss
Managing Editor

Some Introductory Thoughts on a Pentecostal Response to Buddhism
by Alan Johnson

When I heard Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies (AJPS) was doing a theme issue on Pentecostal responses to Buddhism, a number of questions immediately came to mind. It seemed to me that the phrase “a Pentecostal response to Buddhism” begged for three clarifications:

1. Why is a response by Pentecostals needed for the Buddhist world?
2. Why is a uniquely Pentecostal response needed?
3. Whose Pentecostal response are we looking at?

I begin with the following caveat: I am not a trained theologian, preferring rather to call myself an armchair theologian, meaning that (a) I love the Bible, having read it repeatedly and deeply; (b) I love exegetical commentaries and biblical theology work; and (c) I have been thinking about these things for nearly 40 years now. Being a Pentecostal missionary and practitioner for over three decades in the Buddhist world, my thoughts here grow out of my experiences of working in Thailand plus my interactions with others working in the Buddhist world. In this essay I will address the above three questions and conclude with some personal reflections regarding Pentecostal missiology in the future.

Why is a Response by Pentecostals Needed for the Buddhist World?

The answer to this question is rather straightforward. Buddhism, in all three of its major streams—Theravada in South and Southeast Asia, Mahayana in China and North East Asia, and Vajrayana (better known as Tibetan Buddhism)—have all been notoriously difficult arenas regarding a response to the Gospel message and development of robust church movements.

Counting Buddhist religionists is a challenge because, as Brian Morris says, while it is clearly “appropriate to concede that Buddhism is

a religion...it fits uneasily into a theistic definition.”¹ Its indifference towards a creator-god and the aid of spirits to achieve nirvana cause some to see it as more of a philosophy or ethical religion. Another challenge comes from the reality of configurations of religious and philosophical influences that are combined into a total reality for the practitioner on the ground. It is tempting to separate, for analytical purposes, the different influences, such as traditional religions, Brahmanism, Taoism, Confucianism, Bon, Tantrism, and Shinto, in the various streams of Buddhism and somehow conclude that this admixture means they are not real Buddhists or at least not good Buddhists. This makes for radically different numerical estimates, depending on whether peoples that are influenced by the Buddhist worldview at some level are counted, or if such estimates are limited to core Buddhist countries where Buddhism is more public, or is legally considered the national religion. In an attempt to capture this diversity, the *Atlas of Global Christianity* uses three different categories—the core, the “wider” as in Chinese folk religionists, and the non-religious who follow Buddhist practices—and arrive at a total of 1.29 billion people² (Figure 1).

1.29 billion Buddhists in the world

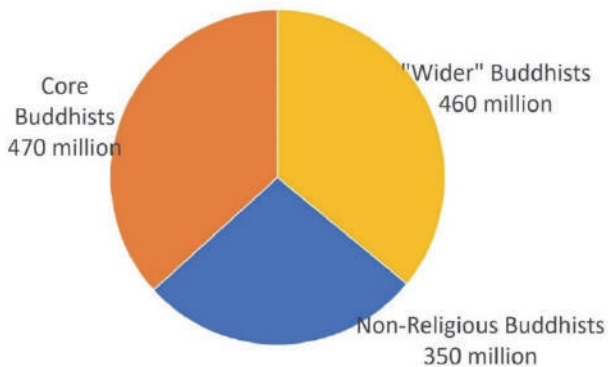


Figure 1. Total Buddhists from the Atlas of Global Christianity, 2010

It is much easier to count the presence of Christianity among Buddhists simply because there are not nearly as many of them. In most

¹Brian Morris, *Religion and Anthropology: A Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 45.

²Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, Center for the Study of Global Christianity, 2009), 14-16.

countries with Buddhist peoples, Protestant Christianity as a whole is 1% or less, often times after some 200 years of missionary effort. What makes this low and slow response even more remarkable is the fact that much of the Buddhist world has been fairly accessible and open to Christian mission. With the exception of the Tibetan homeland, Christian mission has had a presence among Buddhist peoples, and there are Buddhist-background believer churches in most of these countries. Yet, the overall response numbers in terms of adherents and churches remain disappointingly low. With the two exceptions of Korea and Cambodia, which now have significant numbers of Christians, one does not have to look too far to see that the massive social disruption of war and genocide created windows for openness to change.³

It is clear that some kind of response is needed to the challenge of seeing Buddhist societies having access to culturally relevant Gospel communication and churches that flourish in the local cultural environment. Having an identity as a missionary people, we Pentecostals, who are a major bloc in World Christianity and in the global force of cross-cultural workers and who have a record of success in much of the global South, need to respond to the spiritual need of the Buddhist world.

Why is a Uniquely Pentecostal Response Needed?

In mulling this over, I came up with three reasons: two that are internal to Pentecostals themselves and a third that grows out of the history and context of Pentecostal work among Buddhists.

Concerning the first reason, from the perspective of Pentecostals, our identity is forged in the vision of taking the Good News of Jesus Christ to the whole world. Biblically, we see our experience of the Holy Spirit as giving us power to bear witness to “the ends of the earth.” Historically, the pneumatological interest of those who were immersed in the turn-of-the-century revival was to speed up world evangelization.

³Korea’s Protestant growth happened in the twentieth century and peaked in the mid-1990s at 8.7 million members which was about 20% of the population; see Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 40-41,46. The massive growth among the Han in China both in the Three-Self and house church movements, which includes religionists influenced by Buddhism at some level, is well known, although the numbers are estimates. In contrast to conversions numbering in the millions is the case of Cambodia. Although the country is only 2.05% Evangelical and 3.4% Christian (Joshua Project) all Christian growth has occurred when the country was reestablished following the Khmer Rouge genocide and the Vietnamese occupation since 1989. Over the past thirty years, starting from approximately 200 believers, there are now hundreds of thousands of Protestant Christians. This growth is particularly significant because it is located in the heart of the Theravada Buddhist world.

Thus, when a religious bloc, like Buddhism, elicits a relatively small response to the Gospel, it is natural for Pentecostals to be moved to pray and hear the call of the Spirit to go.

The second reason, which may not be as clearly articulated in our own reflections on mission, is that Pentecostals feel they have something to offer in situations where the Gospel's progress is slow. It is a well-known fact that the Christian faith, in general, has done much better among the primal religions than among the major world religions, with Pentecostal and Charismatic missions being the most successful. This numerical success of charismatically inclined Christianity has created the idea (in some quarters, at least) that Pentecostal ministry is *the* answer to fruitful missionary effort in any setting. That assumption has given rise to a discourse that says that if we just had more of the Spirit and power, things would come aright and the difficult group under consideration would respond similarly to what we have seen in the large revivals and Pentecostal movements in Latin America, Africa, and Pacific Oceania.

As to the third reason, I am tossing myself into the ring, since, by and large, the expectations of Pentecostals working among Buddhist peoples have not been realized. I am wondering if the relative lack of success for Pentecostal mission in the Buddhist world can serve as an *invitation* for us to learn about ourselves, and deepen our understanding, plus gain new experiences of how the Spirit works in cross-cultural mission to a Great Tradition religion.

Because my point here concerns the idea of a modest response to Pentecostal ministry, I will begin with the basis for that assertion, starting on the outside and working into my own experience in Thailand. Clearly, there are some large Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries present in places with Buddhist populations; therefore, in what sense do I mean 'a modest response'? First, as a decades-long reader of the prayer guide *Operation World*, I could not help but notice as I prayed through the Buddhist countries of the world, that there were no striking anomalies in the number of Pentecostals and Charismatics as compared with non-Pentecostals. For example, where Christianity grew large (e.g., South Korea, Cambodia), everybody grew; and where things were small and slow, everyone was slow. Second, over my years of working in Asia, I have interacted with colleagues in other countries with Buddhist populations; and it is always a story of challenges and slow growth. Lastly, my own experience as a Pentecostal missionary with a Thai Pentecostal organization leaves the impression that all Protestant Christian entities here grow relatively slowly. While some Charismatic/Pentecostal churches have become large and developed their own networks, the reality is that, outside of the mother church, the

daughter churches remain small and within the size range of all other Protestant churches.

My suspicions about this were confirmed by Martin Visser's doctoral research on conversion patterns among Thai Protestants. What he found was a mixed bag quantitatively when it came to Pentecostals and Charismatics.⁴ He separated out growth among the ethnic Thai from tribal peoples; those are the numbers to focus on in Table 1. Note that he uses the term 'Charismatic' to include Pentecostal as well as Charismatic groups. What is of interest relative to my argument is that denominational missionary-founded non-Pentecostal/Charismatic churches grew at an annual average growth rate (AAGR) of 5.1%, with non-Presbyterian groups under the Christ Church of Thailand (CCT) growing at a rate of 7.6%, whereas those founded by Pentecostal denominational missionaries grew at only 3.6%.

⁴Marten Visser, *Conversion Growth of Protestant Churches in Thailand*, vol. 47, *Missiological Research in the Netherlands* (Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer, 2008). Visser designed his research such as to ensure that the factors of theology and geography did not interfere with the analysis. To that end, he used a three-fold division geographically—Bangkok, provincial capitals, and rural—and a three-fold division theologically—the Christ Church of Thailand (CCT), which is a member of the WCC; Pentecostal groups, which emphasize charismatic gifts (particularly speaking in tongues and healing); and all other denominations outside the CCT, which share an evangelical, non-charismatic identity (8). Using those categories gave him a 3x3 matrix on geography and theology, and he sampled 10 from each category. He ended up collecting data from 94 churches with a total of 3,197 respondents (9). Because it was a study on conversion church growth, Visser used the annual conversion growth rate (AACGR) as the variable to represent conversion growth. The research showed that the annual average growth rate (AAGR) of Thai churches reaching ethnic Thai of 4.2% is mostly explained by conversion growth, with biological growth being comparatively small (10).

Table 16. Protestants per denominational grouping

Denominational grouping		Denominations*	Chur-ches	Mem-bers	% of total Protes-tants	AAGR members since 1978**
CCT Presbyterian Districts	Thai	11	407	49,314	15	1.2
	Tribal	9	133	15,695	5	12
	<i>Total</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>540</i>	<i>65,009</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>2.1</i>
CCT non-Presbyterian districts	Thai	5	194	20,194	6	7.6
	Tribal	5	590	77,522	24	6.6
	<i>Total</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>784</i>	<i>97,716</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>6.7</i>
Non-charismatic mission founded Denominations	Thai	34	669	32,126	10	5.1
	Tribal	27	412	28,146	9	10.2
	<i>Total</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>1,081</i>	<i>60,272</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>6.6</i>
Non-charismatic independent Denominations	Thai	4	58	2,364	1	9.0
	Tribal	9	68	4,513	1	N/A
	<i>Total</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>126</i>	<i>6,877</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>13.8</i>
Charismatic mission founded denominations	Thai	12	340	23,114	7	3.6
	Tribal	9	40	3,082	1	N/A
	<i>Total</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>26,196</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>4.1</i>
Charismatic independent denominations	Thai	4	493	30,952	10	16.8
	Tribal	2	4	352	0	N/A
	<i>Total</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>497</i>	<i>31,304</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>16.9</i>
Non-denominational Churches	Thai	N/A	385	22,008	7	9.9
	Tribal	N/A	99	6,359	2	N/A
	<i>Total</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>484</i>	<i>28,367</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10.8</i>
Churches of unknown affiliation	Thai	N/A	100	5,669	2	N/A
	Tribal	N/A	30	1,638	1	N/A
	<i>Total</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>7,307</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Total	Thai	70	2646	185,741	57	4.2
	Tribal	61	1,376	137,307	43	8.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>4,022</i>	<i>323,048</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>5.4</i>

Table 1. Average Annual Growth Rate of Thai Protestants Among Ethnic Thai, 1978-1978

Visser's classification of 'independent church' movements includes those founded by Thai people and not by denominational missionaries. Within that category, non-Charismatic independents grew at a 9.0% annual rate, while Charismatic independents grew at 16.8%. This latter number, however, needs an asterisk, because it reflects primarily the growth of one movement, which turned out to be very controversial and was eventually asked to leave the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT), one reason being the 'swallowing' of existing churches into its system. The movement eventually imploded to where now several streams of these churches are back under the EFT.

Before looking at what we might learn from our engagement with the Buddhist world, let me clarify what I mean by 'a Pentecostal response'? Over the years, I have puzzled over things when people talk

about ‘a Pentecostal view’ of this or that. Certainly, there are unique emphases that come from our pneumatology, but I have not always been clear as to whether or not there are specific Pentecostal ways of looking at those things.

One day I posed the question of a unique Pentecostal viewpoint to a theologian friend, David Tremontozzi of Continental Theological Seminary, and found his answer very helpful. In his view, when talking about Pentecostal theology, we are looking to account for the experience of the Holy Spirit in ‘doing’ theology. David illustrated it thusly: if Pentecostal theologians think in certain ways about the work of the Spirit in the Bible, how does that inform how we think when looking at a completely different subject? In this way, there *is* a unique Pentecostal response of viewpoint on any subject, because that response is informed by our experience and understanding of the Spirit.

With David’s perspective in mind, I want to frame the ‘invitation’ that the Buddhist world presents to Pentecostals not in terms of what we are doing among Buddhists, but rather in terms of what could or should be explored from a Pentecostal perspective as it relates to our efforts to plant and grow the church among Buddhist peoples. I admit that Pentecostals probably have not tended to look to their failures, or lack of success, as a source for theological reflection. However, for many of us laboring in the Buddhist world, that lack of robust success has pushed us to ask questions we might never have asked if things had just worked. I am going to suggest two areas (likely there would be others), both based on personal interest gained from my own experiences.

The first area has to do with something firmly within the Pentecostal mission wheelhouse—signs and wonders. To set the stage, I’ve always felt uncomfortable in missions strategy and practice with silver-bullet, single-dimension kinds of answers. Some of my interaction in the Buddhist world with Pentecostals (both local and expatriate) reveals the logic that, since Pentecostals have been successful in what are classed as ‘power encounter’ kinds of things, we should certainly be successful among Buddhists if we would just rely on the power of the Holy Spirit in signs and wonders. As already noted, the problem is that this claim has not held true among Buddhists. While we have signs and wonders aplenty, this has not resulted in robust planting and growth of churches that outstrips non-Pentecostal efforts.

From listening to many Thai conversion stories, the vast majority of those stories have included some kind of experience with spiritual power. Thus, in essence, it stops being an independent variable that can influence other things if everybody has it more or less. If people are experiencing power in some way, but it is not resulting in conversions that stick and does not lead to solid churches, then we need to consider

other variables. It has been simply assumed in the West that people interpret power experiences mediated through a Christian as having something to do with God and this Jesus and has moved them towards faith. But this is simply not the case in the Buddhist world; it's much more complex.

While definitely needing to keep the biblical emphasis on signs and wonders, what does our Pentecostal experience and understanding of the Holy Spirit's work say about an ambiguous response to power or about reinterpretations of power? Is there a lens of the experience of the Spirit to help us query why signs and wonders have not been sufficient in bringing about the longing for response to the Gospel? We Pentecostals have been used to accounting for our successes through the lens of our experience of the Spirit but not our failures. What Pentecostal 'tools' do we have for people who start to follow Jesus because of an experience of power but then leave him when he seemingly doesn't come through for them later?

The second area is, in my opinion, the one needing the most reflection, because it's arguably the great need in most of the Buddhist world where you have any level of response. It starts with the Buddhist's perception that the Christian faith is alien; and in most of the Buddhist world, ethnicity and being Buddhist are intimately tied. Thus, to become a Christian is to deny one's nationality/ethnicity. This perception has been reinforced where people have responded positively to the Gospel and churches have developed but, for the most part, with very foreign forms. In Thailand, the result is that, after nearly 200 years of Protestant Christianity and some 300,000 ethnic Thai Protestant Christians, Christianity is still seen as the religion of the 'white western world'. And it's still hard for many to conceive of a Thai person becoming a Christian.

What is important here to my point is that Thai Protestants do not see the way they live out their Christian faith as being somehow foreign; rather it's just the right way to follow Jesus that was handed down or that they were born-again into. And Thai Pentecostal Christians are just the same. People coming from the outside see clearly the borrowing of western Evangelical forms in everything—e.g., ways of doing evangelism, framing of the Gospel story, the music, the structure of church services, use of 'Christianese', the altar call-style crisis conversion for professing faith and praying the sinners prayer, small group structures, emphasis on individualism in decision-making, a general disdain or reticence to use ritual, gatherings focused around preaching, and one-to-many communication, to name a few.

Thai Protestant Christianity shares a rather consistent version of the way that the Gospel is propagated and churches are formed and grow. You have your denominational and doctrinal flavors; but in the main,

there is a constrained set of ways in which the Christian faith is lived out and practiced that tends to be very foreign in its forms and ethos. When Pentecostalism does something different, it does so within the parameters of those foreign forms, which intensify the experience. If a particular form would include bearing witness, then Pentecostals might do it more boldly and consistently. However, what's apparent to outsiders walking into Thai churches and Thai society is that a major obstacle to acceptance of the Christian faith is its 'foreignness'.

In teaching future pastors and workers at our small Bible school, I developed a little scenario to see if I could tease out from them any kind of connection between cultural issues and Thai response. It is common for Christians in ministry to talk about—and acknowledge—the ethnic Thai response to the Gospel as being slow. One day I asked my students to think about who or what is to blame for this slow expansion of the Gospel. Obviously, we cannot blame God, so what are the other possibilities? It fascinated me that each time I did this, the response progression was the same—i.e., first, blaming themselves (the Christians); second, blaming the Thai people as being spiritually darkened; and third, blaming Satan who blinds them.

I would next press the students to think of something else. However, no one ever came up with an answer that looked at cultural and structural issues. Yet from the perspective of cross-cultural workers, there are all kinds of impeding issues that result from using foreign forms rather than thinking about how to do something in a way more appropriate for Thai culture.

I would close our session by illustrating my point using just one cultural dimension—that of decision-making. In the individualistic West, people can make their own decisions; but in most other places, the decision-making process ranges from the need to consult and get approval all the way to absolute obedience and sanctions for non-compliance. I would then illustrate how evangelistic methods of westerners are extremely individualistic (i.e., western) and generally ignore family dynamics, which is one reason why so many 'professions of faith' never become a part of a local church. I remind them that they're not thinking like Thais when choosing a way to relate to people and their families as they attempt to share the Gospel.

All this raises a number of questions regarding the relationship of our Pentecostal experience to what happens when the Gospel crosses into a new cultural setting. When we talk about cultural and structural issues, these are the arenas of contextually sensitive ministry. And it is in these arenas where local Christians are making decisions on how such biblical functions as gathering for worship, evangelism, discipleship, etc. are to be carried out in their own cultural setting. If these things matter for the

progress of the Gospel, then why is it that Pentecostals (both local and expatriate) don't relate these kinds of choices and decisions to their Pentecostal experience of the Spirit? Or farther, why have Pentecostals not been led by the Spirit in some way to crack the hegemony of foreign forms in the Thai Protestant church that clearly are a hindering factor in Thai response? And why have they not been led by the Spirit to find a contextual solution to the identity issue that keeps so many people from responding?

For over twenty years now, I have been involved in helping new missionaries and those involved in graduate programs think about contextual issues. It's interesting to me that people often see this as something technical and conceptual but not spiritual. One reason this may be the case is because very few Pentecostals have written specifically on the subject of contextualization and the role of the Holy Spirit.

An exception to this is John Easter, who did his doctoral research on the role of the Spirit in contextualization in Malawi. He noted that

despite the rising presence of Pentecostals and Charismatics among the ranks of the global Church and the subsequent influence leading to a renewed interest in the Spirit's work in the world, scarcely has any serious discourse of the Spirit's activity in the contextualization process taken place.⁵

His literature review of Pentecostal reflection on contextualization comprises but two pages; and in a content footnote in which his scholarly work on the relationship between the Holy Spirit and mission theology and practice going back two decades, there were only six entries.⁶ I am not familiar with all of them, but none addressed the kinds of questions raised above that are very pertinent to ministry in the Buddhist world.

The one person who has written explicitly about Pentecostal contextualization is Allan Anderson. In his view:

Pentecostalism has contextualized Christianity, mostly unconscious of the various theories behind the process, and mostly unnoticed by outsiders. The experience of the fullness of the Spirit is the central plank of Pentecostal and Charismatic theology, and it is in this focus on experience that contextualization occurs. . . . Rather than being theorized about, a contextual

⁵John Easter, "The Spirit, Context and Mission: The Contextualization Practice of the Malawi Assemblies of God with Implications for Pentecostal Missiology" (Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2011), 23.

⁶Ibid., 22, footnote 28.

theology is acted out in the rituals, liturgies, and daily experiences of these Pentecostals.⁷

He has definitely captured something very important in the dynamic of the way Pentecostals operate. In his research on David Yonggi Cho of Yoido Full Gospel in Korea, Anderson says:

One of the main reasons for the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism has been its remarkable ability to adapt itself to different cultural and social contexts and give authentically contextualized expressions to Christianity. Pentecostalism is inherently adaptable to contextualization: the vibrancy, enthusiasm, spontaneity and spirituality for which Pentecostals are so well known and their willingness to address problems of sickness, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, evil spirits and sorcery has directly contributed to this growth. We see these features in the ministry of David Yonggi Cho.⁸

In his work on Cho, Anderson shows that Cho was responding to the influence of the worldview of shamanism that permeates and underlies Korean society,⁹ transforming symbols in a synthesizing process where Pentecostalism interacted with Korean shamanism and Buddhism and Korean spirituality via such things as Prayer Mountain and dealing with grief and the need for healing.¹⁰ From this perspective, the emphasis on blessing and prosperity was his “theological counteraction” to the *han* (grief) created by the ravages of the Korean War.¹¹

I think this is a great start on thinking about the work of the Spirit in context issues; but there are still large unexplored areas where Pentecostal cross-cultural workers need to be reflecting on their experiences through the lens of pneumatology. What Anderson and others document about the Pentecostal experience on the ground, and what he acknowledges is an unconscious process, falls into a pattern I call ‘auto-contextualization’. By this I mean that local Christians embedded in culture make automatic culturally-based decisions about things they do as a Christian that they don’t reflect on. This is not a

⁷Allan H. Anderson, "Contextualization in Pentecostalism: A Multicultural Perspective," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 41, no. 1 (2017): 34.

⁸Allan H. Anderson, "The Contextual Pentecostal Theology of David Yonggi Cho," *Asian Journal for Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 1 (2004): 102.

⁹*Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 104.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 115.

spiritual process *per se* nor one that's guided by the Holy Spirit. For instance, in America, pastors don't have to be told to keep their church grounds and buildings clean and neat. That already being a value, when you become a Christian and start attending church, 'clean and neat' is going to follow, for we innately know that a dirty environment will not be long tolerated. Thus, if you want folks to keep coming back, such things need to be attended to. Another area of auto-contextualization is in the way people lead—It is from the gut, from what Carrithers calls narrative knowledge, not the paradigmatic knowledge of seminars and the classroom.¹²

The kind of auto-contextualization that Anderson seems to describe is where people who are embedded in the ethos, longings, and quests of that cultural setting experience the Holy Spirit and automatically begin to shape their responses through the traditional channels of that culture but now via the power of the Spirit and the Gospel. I think Anderson has nailed it regarding Cho, in that this is not syncretism, but rather Pentecostal answers presented through the channels of Korean spirituality. Such is truly contextual work that's Spirit-driven because local people are experiencing the Spirit and being moved by him to work in the lives of others through familiar channels—the resulting 'version' of faith being very local and indigenous on those dimensions.

Looping back to my earlier point concerning the Buddhist world's modest response to the Gospel of the Pentecostals, what I have been trying to illustrate is that there are other contextual decisions lying *outside* of this auto-contextual phenomenon that are implicated in the slow Gospel expansion among Buddhist peoples. In fact, Pentecostal ministry among them seems to have the same earmarks that Anderson notes, but is not resulting in response and in robust communities of faith. It has to do with contextual decisions that are not automatic; and as a culturally embedded Christian saved into a particular 'version' of the faith, I do not see them due to my Christian experience filters.

It is at the nexus of the version of faith, particularly the forms that one has received for how one 'does church' (i.e., the entire gamut of beliefs and practices as a people walk with Jesus) in that setting, plus the relationship of those forms to other potential local options to express the same biblical functions. Certainly, I think the Holy Spirit is concerned about this for his people, and thus, is worthy of the kind of Pentecostal reflection Trementozzi is talking about. It is precisely here where I think the modest response among Buddhists opens the door for looking at something that has apparently not been broached by Pentecostal

¹²Alan R. Johnson, "An Anthropological Approach to Leadership: Lessons Learned on Improving Leadership Practice," *Transformation* 24, no. 3 & 4 (July and October 2007).

practitioners. One of John Easter's key findings in his work with Malawi Assemblies of God (MAG) pastors seems to point in this direction:

Second, while acknowledging the Spirit's role in supernaturally aiding the contextualization process related to both evangelism and discipleship, the findings also confirm the struggle of respondents to adequately address how MAG pastors go about analyzing diverse contextual dynamics inherently part of their contextual framework.¹³

John told me that, when he was doing focus groups and talking about cultural issues, how excited the participants got and were asking why they did not do this kind of thing in their Bible training.

What I am wondering about is the work of the Spirit in helping us see things that lie outside the normal range of our thought processes, where things like our local cultures remain invisible to us and where we only see them when coming into contact with other cultural patterns. John's research (as illustrated in Figure 2) shows that we need to do more work on the relationship between learning about culture and the work of the Spirit in applying this in our ministry.¹⁴

History and our own experiences remind us it is quite possible to have a powerful work of the Spirit that then ossifies into a particular way of expressing spirituality once powerful in its original setting but loses its impact when local culture changes. Interestingly, this seems to have happened in Korea where spectacular Protestant growth slowed in the mid-1980s and stopped altogether by 1995.¹⁵ Culture change and ethical issues were a part of this across Protestantism, yet somehow Pentecostals' experience of the Spirit did not render them immune to these issues or enable them to see that such issues were also present in their version of faith. If developing contextually sensitive ministry requires being able to see things that are cultural about our own version of faith, what is the role of the Spirit in promoting or enabling that kind of self-reflexivity?

¹³Easter, 254.

¹⁴Ibid. 252.

¹⁵Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 106.



Figure 2. Role of the Spirit in Contextualization Among Malawi Assemblies of God Pastors.

Whose Pentecostal Response Are We Looking at?

Are we looking at Pentecostal cross-cultural workers, or local Pentecostal leaders and churches, or Pentecostal national church movements in total? I think all three of these are critical stakeholders, and each has a unique role to play. In what follows, I will discuss these three kinds of groupings through the lenses of my three decades' experience as an Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) missionary in Thailand and my work in developing the Institute for Buddhist Studies at APTS in Baguio, Philippines.

In the first third of my missionary career, thinking about the Pentecostal stakeholders never crossed my mind. Being involved with local churches in the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) environment, my colleagues and I were all doing our best to plant and develop churches and strengthen the TAG movement. In the late 1990s, I was asked to help establish an Institute for Buddhist Studies at APTS. An institute focusing on Islam, put on by the Center for Ministry to Muslims (now Global Initiative), was already up and running during a semester break period each year. With the idea of adding other institutes over time, one focusing on the Buddhist world was next in line. Its purpose would be to train western and majority world cross-cultural workers and local Christians to better engage Buddhist peoples.

Tasked with this role, I started talking with missionaries, local Christians from Buddhist backgrounds, and national church leadership. One of the questions I asked them had to do with how the fact that they were communicating the Gospel with Buddhists had impacted their approaches. It was from their responses that I began to get a real education. What was initially surprising was the similarity of responses between the cross-cultural workers and the local Christians—so much so that it made me wonder if the latter's views had not been picked up (either explicitly or implicitly) from missionary influence. The third

response was only given by local Christians. Here are each of the three typical responses, followed by my analysis of its meaning and implications.

1. “We don’t need to learn about Buddhism because these people are not good Buddhists.” This answer was so pervasive that I actually had to change the name of the trainings from Buddhist Studies to Ministering to People Influenced by the Buddhist Worldview. As someone who spoke Thai, it seemed quite incredible to me that expats and local Christians alike could claim Buddhism was not an issue, since the terminology and concepts are woven warp and woof throughout the language. Thus, I started trying to connect with new workers by taking them on a Buddhist holiday to a local temple that was jam-packed with people and activities and telling them not to let anyone convince them that Buddhism was somehow unimportant.

As I thought about this, I came to realize that this likely stemmed from mapping an orthodox Protestant understanding of what a good Christian is back onto local Buddhists. Because people did not regularly attend temple, engage in traditional religious spirit/cult kinds of activities, and/or read Buddhist texts, meant they were not really Buddhists, but rather they were ‘folk Buddhists’. My response was that we are all folk-something, since there is no religion practiced that’s not culturally embedded. We are folk-Christians with our own versions of faith influenced by both the Bible and local culture that cannot be easily unwoven.

2. “We don’t need to study Buddhism because that won’t help in getting people to respond.” Both the missionaries and the local Buddhist-background believers pushed back on the idea that learning about Buddhism would be helpful. Even when I explained that we were not advocating the study of Buddhism in order to argue with or convince them in point-by-point comparisons, the respondents still didn’t think it was necessary. Their reason was that there’s a standard routing in testimony stories and that, by simply being in relationship with and bringing people to church, they will gradually respond over time. All of this could happen without Buddhism *per se* ever being broached. For cross-cultural workers doing ministry in the context of a Buddhist-background church, there is evidence that this works, so why waste time doing something that’s not necessary. What was problematic for me in all of this is the stark reality of their being millions of Buddhists that lie outside of the scope of what their version of faith is reaching. I came to label this the working-in-the-Christian-bubble mentality, where the few

results we have from running our version of faith justifies its continued use and makes learning more about the Buddhist context irrelevant.

3. “Studying Buddhism is for foreigners; we, being born Buddhist, know what this is all about.” This was the comment of local Buddhist-background Christians. Although outsiders coming may not think the people they’re working among are serious Buddhists, they are at least aware that Buddhism has something to do with things. I found this response to be a reflection of the ‘Christian bubble’ perspective and also the assumption that being born into it means auto-contextual work would happen. As I have argued above, that has not happened where there are so many ministry ‘things’ local Pentecostals do that are patently foreign in origin and not helpful in their local context.

This disinterest on the part of local believers from a Buddhist background was expressed in a case study back in year 2000 when the Southeast Asia Network (SEANET), an interdenominational network of people focusing on the Buddhist world, was formed. Over the years, there has been a lack of participation from Buddhist-background Christians. Held annually in Thailand, very few Thai have participated. The two who have been most involved are believers whose graduate study advisers had urged them to look at the Christian-Buddhist interface and cultural issues.¹⁶

I went to visit one of them at his local church to talk about issues of context. He told me the reason contextualization was such a difficult topic was that Thai pastors are enamored with church growth and when he would talk about cultural issues they would think of it as another method to help their church grow. When they realized it was not a method for church growth they would lose interest. He said he found it very difficult to get Thai pastors to listen to him talk about issues of local culture and the gospel. The Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT) actually asked him to train new missionaries in Thai culture in the hopes that perhaps they could influence Thai pastors they connected with. He did tell me that if he can get a fellow Thai pastor to really listen to what he is saying about cultural issues, they do begin to grasp the importance of being more sensitive to Thai cultural dynamics for communicating the gospel and living out the Christian life in the Thai setting. However, the

¹⁶Nantachai and Ubolwan Mejudhon did their doctoral work at Asbury Seminary and were encouraged by Darrell Whiteman to look seriously at Thai culture. Bantoon Boonitt did his doctoral work in England and was challenged by John Davis, who worked many years in Thailand, to look at the Christian-Buddhist relationship. These experiences made all of them much more sensitive to Thai cultural issues as they relate to the communication of the Gospel and the shaping of the Christian community. Both Mejudhon and Boonitt participate regularly in SEANET.

lack of there being an agreed-upon Thai term for the whole idea of ‘contextualization’ means it is challenging even to broach the subject.

Having thought long and hard as to why Pentecostal workers plus Buddhist-background believers, pastors, and national church leaders pay so little attention to the Buddhist context they work in, two things come to mind. First, Buddhism is not radical-other like Islam. The fact that there are Buddhist-background, above ground, legal churches takes the edge off needing to learn about it. Second (and conversely), in the Muslim world where church movements are very small or non-existent, one feels the pressure to have to ‘figure things out’ a bit more. The presence of an existing church with its foreign forms creates that ‘Christian bubble’ where, from the inside, it looks like everything is working pretty well.

Where Do We Go from Here in Shaping a Pentecostal Response to the Buddhist World?

I am grateful to AJPS for the vision of producing a theme issue on the Buddhist world. I find a number of things happening today encouraging as I look back where we started twenty years ago. For instance, there are new cross-cultural workers coming into my own organization—the AGWM—who are convinced of the need for more contextually sensitive approaches. Being Pentecostal practitioners, their reflection and research will help us grow in our understanding of the role of the Spirit in contextualization. Mark Durene, AGWM’s Area Director for the Southeastern Asian mainland, has started “Change the Map,” a prayer movement for the Buddhist world. This has led to collaboration between the three AGWM regions that cover the three major streams of Buddhism.

Also, there are some documented church planting movements now that are experiencing Charismatic phenomena; much can be learned from their experiences. And in Thailand, there is a group of Thai pastors now writing and publishing about issues of Thai culture and the Christian faith, which is something that has not happened before. Thus, this is a good time for those of us in Pentecostal circles to pray, think hard, and listen to the Spirit as to how we are to bring the Gospel to the Buddhist world in the days ahead.

Regarding particular areas we need to work on, let me say first that I think all three of the stakeholders I have identified have important roles. In my view, we should start with our biblical texts and ask what does it truly mean to be Pentecostal? Then, we need to take the insights from those texts and use them to challenge the versions of faith we are part of as well as our own methods of work. At the same time, we should be

asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to us the culturally informed parts of our faith that tends to remain invisible to us. This helps to initiate a process where we learn to continuously ask the Spirit to keep us from ossifying our forms, and to reveal the need to find new forms for communicating the Gospel and living as God's people in Buddhist societies. My hope is that focusing on the Buddhist world will be the start of significant Pentecostal reflection and discussion about the work of the Spirit in developing indigenous forms of the Christian faith.

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Buddhism in Vietnam

by Jason Morris

Introduction and Thesis

For two millennia, Buddhism, one of the major world religions, has sought to provide a means through which humanity can encounter the divine, escape reality, and find peace. It has widely impacted the spiritual landscape of Vietnam for the past thousand years. Consequently, local and cross-cultural Christian workers in Vietnam must seek to effectively engage Buddhists when sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this article, I will discuss the history of Buddhism in Vietnam—its introduction into Vietnam, its spread throughout Vietnam, and its practice in modern-day Vietnam. Then, I will then make key observations for facilitating missiological engagement with Vietnamese Buddhists. These two major elements serve as a foundation for Christian workers to gain a better understanding of Buddhism in the Vietnamese context, and to more effectively engage Vietnamese Buddhists with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Delimitations

This paper does not attempt to address global Buddhism due to the expansive development of Buddhism over the past 2500 years. There is much debate among religious studies experts and Buddhist scholars on the number of official schools of Buddhism. This article will only refer

to the two major historical branches: *Mahayana* and *Theravada*. These developed within the first two hundred years of Buddhism.¹

Buddhism in Vietnam

Buddhism was first established in northern India by Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as Lord Buddha. In the mid-500s BC (Gethin 2010, 23), it would have been hard for him to imagine the impact that this religion would have in Asia and around the world.

Within the first 300 years (Farhadian 2015, 145) of the birth of this religion, due to passionate Buddhist monks and influential political leaders in India, Buddhist missionaries began carrying the message of Buddhism outside of India. Buddhism made its way to Vietnam and became a significant part of the spiritual fabric of the Vietnamese people. While syncretized with the cult of spirits/ancestral worship, Buddhism has survived and become one of the country's largest organized religions. Buddhism is widely practiced throughout modern-day Vietnam. It has become a defining worldview for many people who do not actually ascribe to its religious tenants.

Early History of Buddhism in Vietnam

Although some scholars assume that Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam from China, "historical evidence indicates that Indians first brought Buddhism to Vietnam" (T. T. Nguyen and Hoàng 2008, 9). Northern Vietnam was along the direct sea route between China and India, so it became the center of activity for Buddhist propagation (SE Asia Project Staff 1966, 11). While the exact date is unclear, the religion clearly had made its debut in Vietnam by the second century AD:

Indian merchants often traveled in the company of Buddhist monks, who would pray for peace, a smooth passage on the seas and good trade. . . . Monks on Indian trading ships certainly

¹At the second Buddhist council, held in Vaisali in Northwestern Bihar around 350 BC, a division rose among the monks gathered for this council over the interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures (Noss and Grangaard 2018, 192). This disagreement led to the irreparable division of the Buddhist religion that resulted in the formation of its two major branches. Those branches would eventually become known as Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions (Bowker 1997, 174). Initially the Theravāda group was larger, due to their strict conservative interpretation of Buddhist scripture, but in modern times has become the smaller group, while the Mahāyāna tradition, which appeals more to the laity and common people because of its loose interpretation of scripture and emphasis on experience, has become the largest branch of Buddhism (Farhadian 2015, 148).

arrived [in Vietnam] during the first century AD, but it wasn't until the end of the second century AD when monks' names appeared on passenger list (Xuan Thanh Nguyen 2020, 9).

Early popular attractions of Buddhism included its power to tame nature, and foster agriculture. "Buddhism sank deep roots in the Vietnamese psyche because all its metaphors had to do with water" (Kiernan 2017, 93). It also continued the tradition of focusing prominence on selected Viet women. This symbolic affinity with local Vietnamese religions resulted in a deep connection with the spiritual practice of the people.

Vietnamese Buddhists teach the following:

By the time that Buddhism was introduced into China, twenty Buddhist Towers had already been built [in Vietnam], more than 500 monks trained and fifteen books of Buddhist sutras translated in Luy Lau. . . . The foundation of the Buddhist center in Luy Lau was probably influenced by Mahayana Buddhism (T. T. Nguyen and Hoàng 2008, 19).

"At Luy Lâu . . . Vietnamese monks, follow Indian style, wear clothes made of red material, and do not follow Confucian rites in their relationships with other people" (Kiernan 2017, 93). The class of people coming through Vietnam from India at that time were monks, diplomats, students of Sanskrit, and other religiously cultured people (Mole 1964, 9).

Season of Buddhist Popularity in Vietnam

Buddhism established itself among Vietnamese traditional religious practice and thought soon after being brought to Vietnam, yet its advance stagnated for some time in the early Middle Ages. Then, between AD 940-1570, Buddhism hit a growth spurt (Kiernan 2017, 17). During the Dinh dynasty, approximately AD 971, there was a policy to support Buddhism. Though not declared Vietnam's official religion, Buddhism was understood to be its foremost organized religion (Xuan Thanh Nguyen 2020, 21). Early Jesuit missionaries who arrived in Vietnam in the seventeenth century noted that "Buddhism enjoyed greater prestige in Vietnam than in China, and that there were innumerable pagodas and idols" at that time (Phan 2006, 83). This was a significant period in Vietnam's development as an independent nation, beginning with the Lý dynasty (AD 1009-1028) and it coincided with a season of growth for Buddhism.

Although some of the rulers within the Lê dynasty, AD 980-1009, not to be confused with the Lý dynasty, practiced and respected Buddhist teaching, it was the famous Buddhist monk, Van Hanh, who helped overthrow the Lê dynasty to help the first king of the Lý dynasty take the throne (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 2766). This act of heroism by a Buddhist monk to help establish the Lý dynasty seems to have helped Buddhism rise to a new level of respectability within the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people.

Kiernan notes that the Lý dynasty was marked by economic growth and political independence:

The Lý era was the first long and relatively stable period in independent Vietnam. . . . The Lý dynasty slowly moved to assemble the regions of Đại Việt into a more centralized kingdom. . . . It forged a new Việt political culture that mingled indigenous spirit worship with Buddhism . . . [and] other northern cultural influences (2017, 148).

The Lý dynasty was the first Vietnamese ruling power to implement something similar to what the Indian king Asoka had done in India several century's earlier, that is making a religious declaration for the Vietnamese nation state regarding Buddhism as its official religion. "King Ly Thai To, the founder of the Ly Dynasty, was the pupil of the Ly Khanh Van and was initiated into the monkhood. . . . and fully supported Buddhism" (Xuan Thanh Nguyen 2020, 25). This deep commitment to the religious, philosophical, and spiritual aspect of Buddhism under the Lý dynasty continued with the next ruling family.

Under the Trần dynasty, Buddhism built on the popularity it had gained under Lý kings. The Lý dynasty was the first ruling family to promote and advance Buddhism from a position of political power, but under the Trần dynasty, Buddhism became the national religion (Xuan Thanh Nguyen 2020, 33). "During his 33-year reign, from 1225-1258, Tran Thai Tong governed the country while studying Buddhism. . . ." (Xuan Thanh Nguyen 2020, 34). When Trần Thai Tong's son, Trần Nhan Tong, came to power, his personal devotion to Buddhism through scholarly thinking and writing helped solidify Buddhism as Vietnam's national religion.

Buddhism's Season of Decline in Vietnam

Under the Lý and Trần dynasties, from the tenth to fourteenth centuries, Buddhism gained popularity and expanded throughout Vietnam. But, in 1428, the Lê dynasty, headed by local hero Lê Lợi,

seized control of Vietnam (Tran Trong Kim 2015, 199). He not only changed the name of the country to Đại Việt, but also prioritized Confucianism. This left Buddhism no longer protected or promoted by the ruling family (Kiernan 2017, 200). With the coming of the Lê dynasty, “Buddhism had clearly been forced to yield its place to Confucianism . . . ” (T. T. Nguyen and Hoàng 2008, 165-66). On a national scale, Buddhism declined throughout the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.

During the Trịnh, Nguyễn, and Minh Mạng rule, and the coinciding period of French colonial rule, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were spurts of Buddhist popularity at the grass roots level. But, Buddhism remained largely unsupported by national/official rulers. Despite some Nguyễn lords’ personal affinity for Buddhism, Confucian philosophy and religious ideals largely superseded Buddhist thought throughout this period (Kiernan 2017, 276). Thus, Buddhism in Vietnam began to decline under the early Le Dynasty and continued in decline until the 1920s.

This extended period of decline in Buddhism’s popularity and its lack of official support from the courts should not be understood as a replacement or removal of Buddhism. At the grassroots level, the religious and spiritual ideals of Buddhism had sunk deeply into the cultural and spiritual worldview of many Vietnamese people from north to south.

Twentieth-Century Buddhist Revival in Vietnam

After several centuries of stagnation, a combination of factors merged to fan into flame a national Buddhist revival in Vietnam in the early twentieth century. Buddhist historians and scholars agree that this revival was neither sustained nor defined by the political ebb and flow that happened throughout the twentieth century in Vietnam. Philip Taylor notes that this revival took place

in a transnational context when many Asian countries, from the nineteenth century on, faced similar crises brought on by modernization and imperialism. . . . From the 1920s, Vietnamese Buddhist reformers revitalize[d] their religion inspired in part by the Chinese monk Taixu’s (1890-1947) blueprint to modernize and systematize *sangha* education and temple administration (Taylor 2007, 252).

The tagline for this Buddhist revival, initiated by Taixu, was “Buddhism for this world” or in Vietnamese, *Nhan Gian Phat Giao*.

Taixu “. . . believed that Buddhism had become ossified in China and needed to be reformed into a force that would both inspire and improve society” (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 2567). Reform-minded Vietnamese Buddhists were most interested in Chinese efforts to re-tailor Buddhism to the needs of a rapidly-changing world (Goscha 2016, 170). Much of this renewal of Buddhism was not led by traditional monks or scholars but rather by Buddhist professionals from medical and educational sectors of society (Taylor 2007, 251).

This revival was unique in many ways. One notable difference was that the center of the movement came from modern urban areas rather than rural mountainous areas.

Nguyen notes:

New [Buddhist] centers began to spring up on in large cities such as Saigon and Hanoi. Such new centers were composed of large pagodas, modern monastic schools, and printing facilities for the dissemination of books, magazines, newspapers (T. T. Nguyen and Hoàng 2008, 271).

In addition to the shift in training and the publication of material, this Buddhist revival also called for clergy to find ways to engage in humanitarian relief through the development of relief organizations, medical clinics, and helping the poor and oppressed (Goscha 2016, 170). The focus on humanitarian involvement was due partly to a new interpretation of the fundamental teaching about alleviating human suffering. This new interpretation of the old message moved the focus of Buddhism off of the afterlife, reincarnation, and nirvana, and placed significant emphasis on the here and now (Taylor 2007, 258). The positive impact of these humanitarian organizations was seen in part during the severe famine of 1944-1945, when Buddhist relief agencies helped throughout Northern Vietnam.

Finally, the Buddhist revival that began in the early twentieth century began to prepare the way for a unified Buddhist Church² throughout Vietnam. By this time both Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism³ and various sects of these major branches were practiced. Historically, Buddhism’s major branches could peacefully coexist but not operate under a unified institutional banner. While maintaining

²Although possibly a bit unusual to the Christian community, the word “Church” as associated with the Buddhist movement in Vietnam and in other countries is an acceptable and often an official part of the name.

³See footnote on page 1 for an explanation of Theravada Buddhism.

aspects of their respective identities, this revival brought together Vietnamese Buddhists from every sect of Buddhism:

An important event in the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, and the results of the movement to revive Buddhism, occurred in 1951 in [the city of] Hue: the regional Buddhist organizations gathered to establish the General Association of Vietnamese. This was considered to be the first campaign for uniting Buddhism in Vietnam (Xuan Thanh Nguyen 2020, 66).

Just one year after the legal recognition of this historic Buddhist association, the political landscape changed due to the 1954 Geneva Accords (Gheddo 1968, 57). This effectively divided Vietnam into two nations following withdrawal of French colonial powers. This, too, impacted the development of Buddhism.

In South Vietnam under the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, Buddhism experienced explosive growth. “Under Diem there is no doubt that Buddhism enjoyed the fullest religious freedom. . . . From 1954-63, Buddhism amply developed in South Vietnam and became clearly aware not only of its religious identity but also of its political strength” (Gheddo 1968, 176). In December 1963, at the Xá Lợi pagoda in Saigon, another significant Buddhist council further stirred the revival of Buddhism and moved the community even more toward a unified Buddhist Church (Xuan Thanh Nguyen 2020, 72).

Blended Expression of Buddhist Thought and Practice in Vietnam

Vietnamese Buddhism, introduced by Indian Buddhist proselytizers and merchants, fortified and propagated by both Vietnamese royalty and Chinese rulers, has seemingly found a permanent place in the Vietnamese culture. Its blended rendition of Buddhism is influenced by both major branches, the Mahāyāna and Theravāda schools. Bowker notes, “Vietnamese Buddhism differs from that of other mainland SE Asian Buddhist countries in that it was both Theravadin and Mahayanist from an early stage” (1997, 177). The Mahāyāna school of thought was likely the first to reach Vietnam from India and theologically remains dominant in Vietnam. The syncretistic nature of Vietnamese spirituality has since the early AD 1000s blurred the line between the two major branches (K. S. Nguyen 2019, Kindle: Loc. 517). As mentioned, the 1951 meeting in Huế that established the General Association of Buddhists, was a major step not only in the Buddhist revival, but also in formally bringing all Buddhist branches together under one blended heading (Xuan Thanh Nguyen 2020, 66).

Another significant formal attempt to blend the various schools of Buddhist thought was the 1963 meeting that saw the founding of the United Church of Vietnamese Buddhism (also called the Association of Unified Buddhism). “In this organization of unified Buddhism an attempt has been made to integrate the two great currents of Mahayana and Theravada to high-level contacts and discussions between bonzes in (sic) layman of both currents”(Gheddo 1968, 268).

This organization provided a unified voice for Buddhists as they sought to protect their religious faith and stand against the injustices of the Vietnam War (Topmiller 2000, 234). In addition to providing a unified platform, “The United Vietnamese Buddhist Church . . . united Theravadins and Mahayanist[s] in a single ecclesiastical structure” (Bowker 1997, 177). These initiatives to unify Buddhism had far-reaching impact in blending the major branches and various sects of each branch.

Following the reunification of Vietnam in 1975 under communist rule, a congress convened in Hanoi in 1981 to establish a new association. The purpose was to unify Buddhists in a manner compatible with the one-party government that had reunified Vietnam, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. “The Congress set up the Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation, approved the Charter and Action Program under the motto ‘Dharma-Nation-Socialism’” (Xuan Thanh Nguyen 2020, 74). The establishment of this association satisfied the government and provided a national platform for a unified Buddhist voice throughout the country.

Summary of Buddhism in Vietnam

Vietnamese Buddhism embodies the slogan of the early twentieth-century Buddhist revival, “Buddhism for this world.” It lends religious and spiritual components of both major currents, while at the same time embracing social responsibility for the here and now (Taylor 2007, 284). As Xuan Thanh Nguyen notes, “Vietnamese Buddhism is the convergence of both Mahayana (from the North) and Theravada (from the South) . . . while also being influenced and shaped by Confucianism and Taosim as well as Vietnamese folk religions” (Nguyen 2020, 93).

Numbers differ widely regarding current-day numbers of Buddhist adherents within Vietnam. Buddhism remains a major player on the religious scene. Buddhist experts indicate that about 12-18 percent of the Vietnamese population are practicing Vietnamese Buddhist (Kane 2015). The Vietnamese government census shows that 19.8 percent of the population claim to be Buddhist (Vietnam Public Records 2009, 1). It is believed by religious studies researchers, however, that at least 50

percent of the Vietnamese population—with many not actively practicing Buddhism—aspire to some aspects of a Buddhist worldview.

Missiological Applications

The prevalence of Buddhism in Vietnam in both practice and worldview necessitates that Christian workers, desiring to engage Buddhists with the gospel of Jesus Christ, seriously consider the implications of this religion on the average person. Understanding Vietnamese Buddhism and the rich religious tapestry of the nation, coupled with the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, enables the Christian worker to contextualize and communicate the gospel comprehensibly to the Vietnamese Buddhist mind.

In the following paragraphs I explore a few missiological insights that aid in contextualizing the gospel so that it can be understood, and so that the deeper questions Vietnamese Buddhists may have can be resolved.

Knowing the Vietnamese Orientation to Buddhist Doctrine

A working knowledge of the doctrinal tenets and ideological perspectives of global Buddhism will sometimes, but not always, prove helpful. In some instances, this kind of knowledge may be unnecessary for Christian workers in Vietnam. Due to the syncretistic nature of Vietnamese folk religion—including Buddhism—(Nguyen 2019, Kindle: Loc. 517), simply knowing the official perspective of global Buddhism is insufficient when dealing with Vietnamese Buddhists. This is because: (1) Confucian and Taoistic thought have greatly influenced Vietnamese Buddhism; (2) blended aspects of both major branches of Buddhism, Mahāyāna and Theravāda, have also joined into one national Buddhist religion. This syncretistic expression of Buddhism must inform evangelistic engagement with Vietnamese Buddhists. In Sri Lanka and parts of India, one may engage in deep theological discussion with Buddhists from the official doctrinal position of global Buddhism due to one's familiarity with Buddhist scriptures (Fernando 2019, 166). Such an approach is likely to prove unsuccessful in Vietnam due to a lack of emphasis on doctrinal teaching. Vietnamese Buddhists do not like to think deeply about religious practices, choosing a more mystical and less philosophical approach to religion and spirituality. In a conversation on October 30, 2019, Khoi Phan, a former Buddhist and shaman, expressed to me that despite philosophical and religious contradictions between aspects of Vietnamese folk religion in Vietnamese Buddhism, many choose to accept both religions at the same time but do not want to talk

deeply about it. Understanding contrasts between Vietnamese Buddhism related to Buddhist doctrine at large can greatly inform cross-cultural workers when engaging Vietnamese Buddhists with the gospel.

Awareness of Key Spiritual Ideas Among Vietnamese Buddhists

In addition to understanding the Vietnamese perspective on Buddhist doctrine, one must also see the critical importance of remaining aware of the broader perspective of spirituality embraced by Buddhist practitioners and those with a Buddhist worldview.

Though not a formalized religion with a holy book, monks, or temples, the animistic practice of spirit worship is likely the oldest and most practiced form of spirituality within Vietnamese culture. It is often combined with Buddhism. Animistic practices of Vietnam remain deeply embedded in the social, religious, and psychological makeup of the people and thus bend the rules of Buddhism, creating a sort folk Buddhism (Bowers 2003, 4):

The cult of spirits, . . . extends back to the origins of the race, preceding imported philosophies. . . . Often described as animism, spirit worship has been described by many writers as a Southeast Asian cultural substract, an endemic religion, tied to place an enduring through time (Taylor 2007, 16).

Father Leopold Cadiere (1929, 275), who served in Vietnam from 1882-1945, believed that “the underlying web of Vietnamese religion is pervasive animism.” The cult of spirits is as old as Vietnamese culture itself and is the altar at which all other religions are expected to bow. Reg Reimer observes that veneration of ancestors is one of the most prevalent aspects of the cult of spirits:

The veneration of ancestors is the most widely practiced religious ritual in all of Vietnam. This is a high form of animism which ascribes spiritual power to the spirits of the parties’ family members. . . . The rituals for honoring ancestors are among the most highly developed Vietnamese cultural institutions (2011, 6).

In discussing folk spirituality within Vietnam, Peter Phan states,

Vietnamese indigenous religion is characterized by a belief in a multitude of spirits . . . and above all by the cult of ancestors.

This is the primary religious matrix into which [other religions have been] amalgamated (2006, 92).

Religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, which many assume to be official Vietnamese religions, are only Vietnamese to the extent that they have assimilated the cult of spirits. The philosophical aspects of these three main religions have been syncretized with the cult of spirits (Phan 2006, 27). Folk Buddhism often thrives in this type of religious and spiritual milieu. In Vietnam, such syncretized folk Buddhism departs from many of the high religious ideals of reincarnation and nirvana that are central to traditional Buddhism. It embraces a more pragmatic spirituality for the here and now and the afterlife (Bowers 2003, 6).

A Need for Truth, Grace, and Power

A keen understanding of Buddhism and its localized expression within Vietnam is nonnegotiable. Moreover, the cross-cultural gospel worker must maintain a tenacious commitment to sharing the truth of the Word—seasoned with grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Understanding Vietnamese Buddhism and its worldview assumptions only serves the cross-cultural evangelist when that information helps contextualize the gospel into a clear, understandable presentation of the good news of Jesus. In order for Vietnamese Buddhists to be saved, the grace and truth that came through Jesus must be unashamedly presented (Peiris 1980, 32). God has extended his grace to Buddhist people, and the truth must be declared for them to know about this great offer of grace (Thirumalai 2003, 158). In discussing aspects of engaging folk Buddhists, Russell Bowers states, “if we love [Buddhist] people one of the things we will urgently share with them is the words [of truth] they need to hear” (Bowers 2003, 71-72).

The Scriptures are clear regarding the importance of gospel ministry being carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to fill and empower his people to complete the task that he had given them (Acts 1:8):

The church, God’s new creation (II Cor. 5:17), is created by the empowering of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, as the incipient church gathered together, “suddenly a sound like a blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house . . . all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Waltke and Yu 2007, 295).

Through Spirit-empowered prayer and gospel proclamation, the forces of darkness are broken. People can be set free by the truth of the gospel (Peiris 1980, 31). The Holy Spirit gives cross-cultural workers the necessary power to boldly proclaim the message of grace and truth in a manner understandable to the Vietnamese mind.

Conclusion

Around the world and throughout time and a myriad of religious constructs, people have sought to quench their spiritual thirst, bring peace to their hearts, and gain hope for eternity. In Vietnam, a syncretized version of Buddhism is one way people have tried to quench their spiritual thirst. This article clarifies Vietnamese Buddhism by tracing its introduction and formation throughout history. With this basic understanding of how Buddhism has taken shape and how it is practiced in Vietnam, cross-cultural gospel workers can better comprehend Vietnamese Buddhism. In the power of the Holy Spirit, they can more clearly communicate the message of Christ's grace and truth.

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Signs and Wonders Necessary But Not Sufficient

by Alan Johnson

There is a popular assumption in many Pentecostal circles that if something powerful happens in Jesus' name—a healing, dramatic answered prayer, dream—conversion to Jesus will immediately follow. Signs and wonders are seen as the answer to the mission problem of a slow response to the gospel. My thesis in this essay is that among the great world religions with their vibrant folk religious practices “signs and wonders” acquire a much more ambiguous status. While works of power are necessary to bring people to faith in such environments, they are generally not sufficient in and of themselves to create a robust commitment to Jesus. I begin by defining “signs and wonders” and then offer a definition of the notion of “necessary but not sufficient” as it relates to encountering God’s power. In this section I narrate some of my experiences with people in the Thai setting where the manifestation of God’s power was not a fast track to conversion and which caused me to start investigating this subject. In the second part I theorize as to why works of power are not always sufficient to produce faith in the context of a world religion like Buddhism and then in the third section look at the biblical evidence for a mixed response to miracles. Finally, I examine some of the implications for ministry on the ground among people with worldviews where signs and wonders are not likely to lead to immediate allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Defining “Necessary But Not Sufficient”

When we look at the idea of miracles in the Bible there is a diversity of terms in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek that in general can be categorized into three distinct emphases. There are discrete sets of words that carry the notions of distinctive and wonderful, mighty and powerful, and meaningful or significant (Cressey 1996, 771). These terms are expressed in English translations by a variety of words like “miracles,” “wonders,” “signs,” “might acts,” and “powers” (1996, 771; Hofus 1971, 620–35). In missiology the idea of “power encounter” is often used as a broad cover term for the miraculous but as developed by mission theorists it

actually has a very specific meaning as a kind of experience of God's power. In this essay I take the definition of signs and wonders given by Greig who examines the lexical field of power in the New Testament and concludes that signs, wonders and miracles denote healing, deliverance from evil spirits and spiritual gifts (1993, 137–38). Similarly Grudem notes that "signs and wonders" can be used as a stock expression for miracles (such as Ex 7:3, Deut 6:22, Ps 135:9, Acts 4:30 Rom 15:19) and that three times signs, wonders and miracles appear in combination (Acts 2:22, 2 Cor 12:12 and Heb 2:4) (1994, 356). For my purposes here Grudem's definition of miracle fits well with this broader coverage: "A miracle is a less common kind of God's activity in which he arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to himself" (1994, 355). Thus the kinds of events that I am speaking of are encounters with God's power in a broad sense with the divine activity pointing to God and arousing wonder.

The missiological concept of "power encounter" had a very specific original setting in the South Pacific islands when it was coined by Alan Tippett and was later broadened by current theorists to include healing and deliverance from demons (Kraft 2000, 775). Kraft sees power encounter in a rubric of spiritual warfare as dealing with ground level issues of inner healing, deliverance, and inter-generational curses and a host of other power related practices that both enslave people and are manipulated by them (Ma 2010, 186; Kraft 2005, 361). In his model of the three encounters of truth, power and allegiance, power deals with the affective or feeling realm and the normal routing would be that power encounters move people to a greater appreciation of truth and on to allegiance (Shaw 2003, 179, 191).

In my reflections here on signs and wonders and their relationship to conversion the idea of encounters with power includes this more specific use of power encounter but goes beyond it to include things that point people beyond the natural realm and create a sense of wonder. This can include things like dreams or visions, more obvious miraculous answers to prayer such as a dramatic healing for oneself or another, or even an answer to prayer of a seemingly small event but which has sign value for the person who prayed. In such a case the "supernatural" part is the juxtaposition of the answer experienced to the timing of the prayer.

In order to set up my definition of the notion of signs and wonders being necessary but not sufficient to bring people to faith, I will begin by narrating some specific events that caused me to question my original assumptions. I came to Thailand with the baseline understanding from my Pentecostal background that once Thai people experienced the power of God it would set them on the sure road to becoming a follower of Jesus Christ. This has turned out to be true, but in a more qualified sense,

and not nearly as “automatic” as I first thought. Over my years of listening to Thai people tell their stories of how they came to faith in Jesus Christ, there is an unmistakable theme—the frequent demonstration of God’s power particularly in healing and unusual answers to prayer. Relatively few come to faith just through someone sharing the Gospel verbally or reading Scripture. Convert narratives are peppered with experiences of the supernatural. However, I also began to accumulate a great deal of evidence first from my own ministry experiences and later through hearing similar stories from others that forced me to rethink the signs and wonders/conversion relationship.

One of the first incidents happened when we were showing the JESUS film in a village on the edge of a major city and praying for the sick. We discovered that a woman had been healed of back pain and sent her son to the gathering the next night to also be prayed for. We found out where this woman lived and went to visit her a few days later. Her living area was filled with all kinds of Buddha images. We sat down, telling her we heard from her son that her back pain had been healed. When we asked how she was feeling, she surprised us by saying “horrible,” because her back pain was back. We asked her what happened and she said she came home from our gathering and bowed before her images and gave thanks to Buddha for healing her. Soon after that her back pain returned. When we offered to pray for her, she put up her hands and refused saying, “These are two different powers that don’t get along.” This was the first time I had met an instance of a person receiving prayer in Jesus name but giving thanks to Buddha.

Another time a small house group that I had started in a slum was told that a man who lived in their community was dying. So we went to pray for him; he was unable to rise, and doctors told him they could not help him. We prayed. Several weeks later I ran into him. He was walking and looking healthy and I asked him what happened. He said he got better. So I told him I would visit him. When I met him I went over how we had prayed in Jesus’ name and he got better and would he like to follow Jesus? He said no. So I reviewed everything again and asked the same question. He said no again. When I asked him why not, he told me that he had previously done what Thai’s call *rap ong*, which is to invite a spirit to indwell you generally for the purpose of being healed from some ailment. They are taught that if you deny this spirit and do not make its annual offering it will drive you insane or kill you. Since in the past he had done this he was unable to follow Jesus, even though that particular spirit had been unable to heal his nearly fatal ailment.

More recently a local Thai church that I work with developed a relationship with a family that has a child with Down’s syndrome. He also had a hole in his heart and the parents were told that it would

require surgery one day. This church was actively helping the family, who were quite poor, taking them to the doctor when the child was sick as well as bringing them to church and praying for the little boy's healing. At one point the doctor said it was time to do the surgery but when they did another test before prepping for the surgery, they discovered the hole was closed and the boy was totally healed. The local Thai pastor was very upset after all of this prayer and help in Jesus' name that upon his next visit to the family he discovered the mother had put a Buddhist amulet around her son's neck. He was dumbfounded. The mother continues to remain friendly and to talk about faith with us but has not become a Christian.

In addition to my own personal experiences and the things that I have heard from others, I found supportive empirical evidence in the work of Marten Visser on Protestant conversion patterns in Thailand (2008). Visser developed a hypothesis based on the work of Edwin Zehner who found in the convert narratives he collected the themes of love and power. Visser tested to see whether or not perceived miracles are as important in bringing people to a decision to become Christians as experiences within social relationships. He found that only 21 percent of respondents listed a miracle as the most significant factor in their conversion and concluded that "perceived miracles play a decisive role for a significant minority, but experiences directly set in social relationships are decisive for four times as many people." (ibid, 137).

Experiences like this set me on the path to try and understand what is happening around the nexus of supernatural power and moving towards or away from Jesus. I began to formalize my interviews with converts and to question their experiences of God's power and its role in their decision to become a Christ follower. What I began to see more clearly was that for people who came to faith the supernatural was embedded in a set of relationships with believers and other experiences. This fit well with what Visser found in his research. In trying to find a way to explain this I landed upon the idea of signs and wonders being necessary but not sufficient in and of themselves to bring people to faith. Thus by "necessary but not sufficient" I mean that powerful manifestations alone generally do not result in robust faith unless they are happening in a set of conditions that facilitate turning to Jesus.

With this definitional work as background, I will now offer some possible explanations as to why signs and wonders alone are often insufficient to bring people to faith by looking at Buddhism and how it is practiced in Thailand. I then proceed to examine the biblical data to see if there is a mixed response to miracles there.

Impact of Local Religious Context on Insufficiency of Signs and Wonders

In the folk Buddhist world it is not hard to see that miracles, healings, dreams, visions and remarkable answers to prayer are vitally important to people coming to faith in Jesus. It does not take long to realize that you can talk about religion, compare religions, and point out the excellencies of Jesus, yet it will make very little sense to those listening. Local people are convinced of the superiority of the belief system they were born into and are aware of the difficulties that will accrue to them if they leave it. Works of power grab the attention of people; they shake up and destabilize worldviews, opening people to new options. I have heard over and over again in Thai conversion testimonies how a person had a problem and “tried everything” they knew—visits to temples, shrines, ceremonies to reverse bad luck and misfortune, meditation, making extra merit all to no avail. Then someone told them that Jesus can help, and prayer in his name brought results.

It is a bit harder to understand why powerful supernatural manifestations might not always be sufficient to bring people to faith or keep them in it. Practical experience from people working in the Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist worlds shows that it is not just a straight linear movement from a power encounter to following Jesus. In trying to shape a more nuanced view of the signs and wonders/conversion relationship I have found it fruitful to look in two different directions. The first, which I will deal with in this section, examines how the local religious context impacts the person who experiences God’s power. At the individual level this concerns their interpretive framework and then at the social level the religious context provides filters for making sense of the kind of experiences I have narrated above. The second, which I will examine in the section below, looks at Scripture and shows that in biblical history works of power and signs and wonders were no guarantee of a faithful response to Yahweh in the Old Testament or to Jesus in the New Testament.

Andrew Walls talks about the three great intakes of peoples into the Christian faith, each of which has shifted the center of gravity of the faith. The first was when Jewish Christians proclaimed the good news to Greeks and brought Hellenistic civilization to faith in Christ, the second was when the barbarian peoples, who were seen as the destroyers of Christian civilization, turned to the God of the Christians; and the third has been the “massive movement towards Christian faith in all the southern continents” that is still happening today (1996, 68). Walls notes that “the obvious feature which these three great intakes of Christians have in common is that each has consisted overwhelmingly of adherents

of the primal religions; by comparison, converts from the other religious tradition have been few” (ibid.). In trying to account for why this is the case Walls introduces the idea that while taking on the Christian faith caused great social change, it also “was often part of the mechanism of adjustment to social change” (ibid., 68–69). Primal religions under the impact of social change found tools for coping with this change particularly in the areas of values, hierarchy of leadership and the provision of a universal point of reference, “linking the society with its traditionally local and kin-related focus to a universal order” (ibid., 69).

I think that Walls’ observations here can be turned around to provide a useful perspective on why the great religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam have proven less susceptible to the Christian faith. Not only do their religious systems give them tools to deal with social change, but the interpretive schemas of people raised in these religious worldviews provide a powerful force that is constantly pulling all experiences back into their frames of reference and plausibility structures. This makes the woman’s experience I narrated above more understandable. While we prayed for her back to be healed in Jesus’ name, her Buddhist worldview provided her a more compelling explanation of why she got better.

In folk Buddhist worldview Jesus is just one of many power options. Jesus is inside the boundaries of *samsara* and is on par with the many kinds of demi-gods and powerful beings who have enormous stores of merit but who at the end of the day are still subject to the law of karma and are in need of enlightenment. Others have achieved enlightenment but choose to remain as *bodhisattva* in order to help other sentient beings. Practically, what can happen is that people will turn to Jesus initially but with the internal caveat that if things do not work out they will seek out other power sources. So you can see people make a profession of faith, come to church, read the Bible, and even bear witness, but all the time keep their options open should Jesus not “deliver” what they need. This leads to people becoming disappointed when prayer does not “work” and a shift to engage other powerful beings for help. What I have observed is not so much a syncretistic playing of both sides as the end result but rather that people in these circumstances move away from faith and the church on their own.

In one church I worked in a couple who had a business failure and were in great financial straits began to attend the local church. They experienced divine provision, mediated in part by a dream with very specific instructions. They attended church services regularly and were studying the Bible. However, when they had recovered and started a new business it required that they bid on projects. After the loss of a crucial bid they began to go to a local shrine to ask for help, while initially

attending church. As time went on, rather than continuing along in a dual state, it was not long before they simply stopped attending church and moved away from their faith.

Local religion also provides a powerful social system that dampens response to miracles. In many societies religion is woven warp and woof into everything and is central to personal and national identity formation. When a person comes to faith in Jesus it places them outside of the group and in the eyes of others; they are no longer seen as an insider. Thus the compulsion to conform can overcome the worldview destabilization that an answer to prayer or miracle creates. Social pressure is often combined with the pull of the interpretive framework when a convert goes through difficult times. They are told that the reason for their current problem is that they have left the ancestral ways. This kind of constant pressure can wear down those who have experienced signs and wonders in the past and yet have troubles in the present that do not seem to resolve easily with prayer.

Another source for insights into why encounters with God's power may not be enough to move people to religious change comes from the work of Horton and Fisher who proposed conflicting theories in the 1970s and 1980s on the conversion of African's practicing traditional religion to Islam and Christianity. Horton saw the pre-Islamic or pre-Christian cosmologies and the socio-economic matrix as the source of change linked with Islam or Christianity acting as catalysts (1975, 219–21). Fisher disagreed and saw the religion (either Islam or Christianity) as having the momentum and unleashing new forces (1985, 153, 156). The insight that seems relevant to our discussion here is Fisher's observation that what begins to break down conditions and creates the space for change either in the traditional religion cosmology (Horton's view) or in the initial stage Fisher calls quarantine, before new local converts actually come in, is "fundamentally compatible" (1985, 156).

The key here seems to be conditions creating an environment open to change. If this is the case in the move from traditional religion to Islam or Christianity, it would seem to be just as likely to apply to a change from Islam to the Christian faith. The difference however would be that where an encounter with power is itself an agent of change in the traditional worldview, challenging the superiority of their gods, it does not have the same effect in a great tradition religion. This is because great tradition religions not only create and reinforce identity but have ultimates, whether liberation from *samsara* in Buddhism or Hinduism or paradise in Islam, that are not destabilized by an encounter with power in the same way as a traditional religion. They are true no matter what kinds of situations prevail. By contrast, traditional religion needs to

deliver results and a power encounter in Tippett's sense (see Kraft 2000), or miracles that show the superiority of God's power provide a direct challenge. This then links back to my observation above about the reinterpretive power of great tradition religions. An encounter with the living God's supernatural power can be re-absorbed much easier under religious concepts found in the great tradition religions.

The Biblical Evidence of Mixed Response to Miracles

Biblically we also find that mighty works are insufficient to draw out faith and obedience. In the Pentateuch, from the Exodus to the renewing of the covenant before crossing the Jordan to take possession of the land in Deuteronomy, there is arguably no cohort of people who has ever seen mightier works. Yet they continually forgot Yahweh (see the prophetic testimony in Amos 5:25–27, cited by Stephen in Acts 7:42–43), and they actually worshipped other gods in the sojourn in the desert even after seeing all of Yahweh's mighty works.

Jesus himself upbraids Chorazin and Bethsaida for their hard-hearted rejection of the mighty works he did there that did not lead them to repentance (Matt 11:20–24; Luke 10:13–15). Early in Jesus' ministry his healing, rather than stimulating faith, draws a reaction against him for breaking Sabbath laws (Matt 12:1–14; Mark 3:1–6; Luke 6:6–11). Only one of the ten lepers healed in Luke 17 returns to give thanks to Jesus, the raising of Lazarus in John 11 gets a very mixed response, and the healing of the ear of the high priest's servant after Peter cuts it off during Jesus' arrest does nothing to inspire faith in those who have come to arrest him (Luke 22:49–51).

John's Gospel goes even further than the Synoptics and develops the idea of the inadequacy of a faith based on signs. Keener points out that while John shares with the Synoptic tradition the idea that signs faith is inadequate in such texts as Matthew 12:38,39; 16:1–4; Mark 8:11,12; 15:32; Luke 11:16, 29, signs “perform a more ambiguous function in the fourth Gospel, which emphasizes the potential hiddenness of God's revelation to those who may not prove to be persevering disciples” (2003, 275). Keener says that while the synoptics use signs to authenticate Jesus' missions, John places them in a Christological context and uses them and their connected discourses to interpret Jesus' identity and call for faith (*ibid.*).

Keener observes that, while John frequently mentions that many “believed” in Jesus (2:23; 7:31; 10:42; 11:45; 12:11, 42), at least in many of these cases this faith proves inadequate to preserve for salvation. John here echoes earlier biblical portraits of human nature in general and perhaps of recipients of God's revelations in particular; for instance, the

Israelites believed when they saw Moses' signs (Exod 4:31), but their faith collapsed when it was challenged (Exod 5:21–23). (ibid., 746)

Signs are not unimportant in John. The story of Thomas shows how signs-faith, while seen as inadequate is still valid faith (ibid., 275). "If they would not believe Jesus' words and identity directly, Jesus invites them to believe by means of his works (10:38; cf. 14:11); these were his Father's works (10:37; cf. 5:17), hence revealed his origin" (ibid., 830). Keener affirms that signs serve a revelatory purpose but "they do not control one's response, and response to the Spirit's testimony in the word is a higher stage of faith, they are among Jesus' works which testify to his identity (10:32, 37–38; 14:10–11; 20:29–3)" (ibid., 275). He concludes that signs are not negative, just inadequate:

Thomas's unwillingness to believe without seeing reflects a thread that runs throughout the Gospel: many respond to signs with faith (1:50; 10:38; 11:15, 40; 14:11) and refuse faith without signs (4:48; 6:30), but unless this faith matures into discipleship, it must prove inadequate in the end (8:30–31). (ibid., 1208)

Thinking about signs-faith in this way has helped me to understand the phenomena of partial healings I have seen over my years in Thailand. It used to puzzle me how some people would receive a great measure of healing and yet be left with a specific physical problem. I have now come to see such partial healings as having a kind of parabolic function where people can either choose to seek more light and go deeper or to turn away. It is Jesus' role to reveal his glory (John 2:11) but there is an inherent ambiguity that allows for varying understandings. The sign invites to faith, but the ongoing physical problem can serve as a reminder that a relationship with Jesus will not be predicated solely on benefits conveyed.

Some Missiological Implications of Mixed Response to Signs and Wonders

In this section I discuss briefly four implications for cross-cultural ministry that follow from the thesis that signs and wonders are necessary but not sufficient to bring people to faith. My hope is that the reflections here can provide grist for the development of ministry methods that incorporate signs and wonders as a part of a larger strategy for evangelism and discipleship.

Let me begin by saying that I am not intimating here that there are people who would pray for miracles to happen for people and then

simply leave them on their own. People who believe God for signs and wonders to confirm the proclamation of the Gospel are very interested in people becoming Christians. What is problematic is when people feel like the hard work is done when a work of power happens and push for a “profession of faith” without much concern for ongoing discipleship. People often wonder why converts do not “stick” or will not come to church. To rely on works of power without engaging worldview issues can short circuit the process of rooting people in faith.

A reductionist approach that sees signs and wonders as the silver bullet of missionary strategy, the single answer to bring people to faith, can discourage cross-cultural workers from doing the kind of labor intensive cultural homework that will help to deal with the worldview issues of the potential convert.

In what follows I develop four areas that can help start us on the road to ministry approaches that will help provide the environment where encounters with God’s power can more easily facilitate the movement to conversion and discipleship.

1. A key first step is to prepare specifically to deal with worldview issues that are related to understanding signs and wonders. If we know that people can reinterpret what has happened through prayer in Jesus’ name in terms of their own religion, we can prepare the ground for understanding by teaching that Jesus is not bound by the worldview they hold. Helping people to see that Jesus is outside of *samsara* and not subject to it means Jesus is qualitatively different than all beings that are bound by karma.

2. We need to begin to develop field-based research on the three encounters of power, truth and allegiance (Kraft 2005, 364). Knowing their order and timing before and after their conversion could enable us to build grids for helping people navigate their current encounters and prepare for those that are to come. Since so many Thai experience something supernatural in their journey to faith, learning how they made meaning from their encounter with God’s power could be extremely helpful to those working in discipling seekers and new converts. It also helps us to know how to pray when we understand better where a person is in their journey.

Thai conversion narratives I have listened to show that most of the people who persevere and become solid Christians had all three of these encounters, but not in the same order. Power is the most common because it awakens interest. However there are people who will begin with a tentative allegiance to Jesus by committing to his people and later on strengthening that through encounters with truth and power. Others are confronted with truth, through studying Scripture or some exposure to the Christian message, and then often it is power that moves them

to full commitment to Jesus. I am wondering if more research on this would not reveal a kind of developmental sequence or set of pathways that could be similar to what J. Robert Clinton did with leadership development in *The Making of a Leader*. If it turns out there are discernible patterns this could guide us in the evangelism and discipleship process to know what kind of experiences and biblical content to insert and in what appropriate sequence.

3. If signs and wonders are necessary but not sufficient I believe it also means we should be more intentional about setting up strategies that go beyond only exposing people to God's power and include assessing the claims of the gospel. We can let people know that the Jesus who can heal their body or deliver them from evil spirits or provide for financial needs can also help them come to know the living God personally and free them from the cycle of rebirth to live in his eternal family. Chris Wright in his article "Salvation Belongs to Our God" looks at the breadth of the idea of salvation in both Testaments:

Since the experience of salvation lies within the historical covenant relationship, it has a very broad and comprehensive range of significance—in both Old and New Testaments. "God saves" covers a huge range of realities precisely because of the immense variety of circumstances in which God's saving engagement with people takes place through the great sweep of biblical history . . . So in both Testaments, then, God saves people in a wide variety of physical, material, and temporal ways from all kinds of need, danger, and threat. But of course, and also in both Testaments, God's saving action goes much further. The Bible recognizes that all those proximate evils from which God saves his people are manifestations of the far deeper disorder in human life. Enemies, lies, disease, oppression, false accusation, violence, death—all of these things from which we pray to be saved are the *results of rebellion and sin in the human heart*. That is where the deepest source of the problem lies". (2010, 4, italics in the original)

Signs and wonders are very often salvation from what Wright calls proximate evils and as such can serve as signposts to a more ultimate salvation from the source of all such evils. Framing works of powers in this way has important methodological implications as we share our faith. It is tempting to make Jesus into the one who can solve all of our problems, giving a nod to sin and brokenness with God. In a folk Buddhist world people will seek help but do not have a notion of being broken in a broken relationship with their creator. Telling more of the

story of God's salvation from proximate and ultimate evil can help provide interpretive grist for them as they experience God's power in their lives.

4. Finally, helping Thai people deal with the disappointment of unanswered prayer is needed. The Thai worldview that looks to powerful spiritual beings of great merit who are still in *samsara* and can be supplicated for help with life's problems can set them up for disappointment when God does not answer prayer. When people with desperate problems hear about Jesus and their prayers are answered it starts their process towards faith. The back side of this is that there are also many people who experience the same thing and begin to move towards faith or make a full profession of faith, but upon experiencing unanswered prayer they begin to seek help from other spirit beings.

It is a spiritual version of what happens in social relations with patrons and clients; when the flow of benefits diminishes clients will seek new patrons. Developing theological resources to help people understand biblical prayer as based in relationship rather than the tit-for-tat of a transactional relationship where promises are made and fulfilled is critical. If the Christian faith is presented only in patron and client terms where Jesus becomes the big patron dispensing benefits, then it is too easy for new believers to simply move on when the benefits stop.

Conclusion

Signs and wonders are absolutely necessary in the process of drawing people to faith in the Buddhist world but not sufficient in every case to bring people to a robust faith. When we understand the inherent ambiguity of works of power among people in the world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam we can begin to add appropriate content and experiences to our evangelism and discipleship that will facilitate people to become Christ followers for the long haul.

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Mobilizing Laity to Witness: A Pentecostal Perspective by Mark Rodli

Introduction

Martin Visser revealed that in Thailand only three out of one hundred lay Christians bring someone to faith in their lifetime; in other words, only 3.4% of all lay Christians.¹ Although it might be expected that the four major Pentecostal denominations would have a somewhat higher percentage than other churches, their conversion growth rate was only slightly higher than the general Thai conversion growth rate of 4.2%. Pentecostal churches reflect similar numbers to the non-Pentecostal groups.² This small conversion growth is an obvious impediment for the Thai church.

Increasing the witnessing of laity may be a big help in expanding the Thai church. However, the answer may also rest in Pentecostal theology and its orthopraxis. This paper examines how an implemented Pentecostal theology increases the efficacy of efforts in mobilizing laity for witness by looking at the theological notion of the priesthood of all believers, and probes Pentecostals driving impetus for witness through the radical inclusion of all peoples brought by the outpouring on all peoples.

Biblical Theology: 1 Peter 2:7-9

Pentecostal theology imbeds itself in a biblical theology that sees God's people as agents in the story of God's redemption of all peoples as seen throughout the Bible. 1 Peter 2:4-10 provides a clear example of a biblical theology of God's people in witness through their identity as followers of Christ.

¹Marten Visser, *The Growth of the Protestant Church in Thailand* (2008), 11. Of the 320,054 Thai lay Christians then, only 10,909 were a part of conversions which is 0.034 per person per year.

²Marten Visser, *Conversion Growth of Protestant Churches in Thailand* (Zoetermeer, The Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2008), 102.

Identity from Old to New

Peter drew from the Old Testament where he “took the central concept of Israel’s self-understanding and transferred it to the members of the communities to which he was addressing his letter: the idea of election.”³ The communities that Peter was addressing were scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). This election expands further as Peter shows that election came upon those who identified as aliens and exiles of the Dispersion (1:1-2:11).⁴ Peter draws from powerful Old Testament imagery and history that identified Israel as aliens and exiles in the land for much of Israel’s early history. Peter’s audience consisted of Christian communities often ostracized by society. Thus, the words “chosen race” spoke life to communities that received the letter. The history of Israel and the church in 1 Peter dealt with a tension of blessings to the nations and confinement within Israel or the church itself. Valdir Steuernagel poignantly writes that “Fortunately, the letter is a document that helps to get balance between identity and mission: chosen yes, but not closed to outsiders. Chosen for witness, in word and deed.”⁵

Since local society tended to reject Peter’s audience, Peter constructs Israel’s identity in Christ. Peter points to an identity in which status comes from God, not society. Joel Green argues that while dealing with the shame/honor concept, “1 Peter 2:4-10 is a profoundly theocentric text, with human valuations dismissed in favor of divine, and with God’s valuation regarded as decisive and ultimate (e.g., vv. 4, 5, 9, 10). Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the measures so important for determining status in the wider world of 1 Peter are irrelevant.”⁶ This changes status from being determined by human valuations to being determined by God. Peter reveals that freedom comes through the individual’s identity in Christ, which puts faith at the forefront. Therefore, as Green asserts, “Faith, then, has a hermeneutical role, allowing one to see what could otherwise not be seen. From a point of view illumined by conventional wisdom, Jesus and his followers are humiliated, rejected, ostracized, but from a perspective radiated by the passion of Jesus, they are God’s elect, honored.”⁷ Peter focuses on developing the identity of

³Valdir R. Steuernagel, “An Exiled Community as a Missionary Community: A Study Based on 1 Peter 2: 9-10,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 40, no. 3 (2016): 199.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 202.

⁶Joel B. Green, *1 Peter, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 57.

⁷Ibid., 58.

his audience through the imitation of Christ. Peter's audience exists already as an imitation of Christ by being "the living stones," rejected by humans in God's perspective, elect in God's perspective and honored.⁸ Hence, Peter sketches "an interpretive canopy under which to relish in their corporate status before God, a status that is theirs not so much in spite of their having experienced rejection in the world, but on account of it."⁹ Peter's development of identity conceptualizes the status before God as an honored one because the rejection of the world has far-reaching implications for the church.

Revealers of God to the Nations

In 1 Peter 2:4-10, the Apostle draws from Exodus 19:2-6 to reveal Israel's identity as a priestly nation. Significantly, in the Old Testament, priests functioned as stewards of the knowledge of God.¹⁰ Priests mediated between God and the rest of the people. This means that "priests are leaders in the religious establishment. They represent the people to God and sustain the life of their religious community by exercising ritual and symbolic authority."¹¹ However, God did not intend only Levites to receive the role of priests, rather God intended his people to carry a certain priestly role as people to the nations.¹² This makes the law important. God purposed the law to help Israel live out an attractive lifestyle before the nations.¹³ Peter's use of Exodus 19:3-6 highlights the parallel of the audience's priesthood identity and their role of bringing the knowledge of God to the nations.

Peter wants his audience to know that they, as God's people, already function as revealers of God to the nations. 1 Peter 2:9a tells the audience who they are by building an understanding of their role to the nations from Exodus 19:3-6. Digging deeper, Peter focuses on the declarative mandate of witness. Peter emphasizes that as a people of God, his audience is responsible to proclaim the gospel to the nations. For this reason, Pentecostals are tasked to live this proclamation out as lay

⁸Ibid., 60.

⁹Ibid., 55.

¹⁰Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Academic, 2006), 124.

¹¹Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religions: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), Loc. 6011, Kindle.

¹²Wright, 331.

¹³Michael W. Goheen, "The Biblical Story of Narrative Theology," in *Contemporary Mission Theology: Engaging the Nations*, ed. Robert L. and Paul Hertig Gallagher (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).

persons and pastors, informed by a rooted biblical theology of witness through their identity in Christ, drawn first from scriptures like 1 Peter 2:4-10 and enhanced by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit as seen in the book of Acts.

Pentecostal Theology: Acts 2:16-21

The empowerment for witness in Acts 1:8 drives Pentecostal theology and experience. Luke speaks of the Spirit as the impetus behind the witness of the early church.¹⁴ The Spirit's driving impetus for witness should increase the efficacy of those empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness by the radical inclusivism of all peoples so that nothing prohibits the believer from witnessing. Acts 2:16-21 clearly establishes this.

Joel 2:28-29

The Pentecostal driving force for witness in Acts 1:8 plays out in Acts 2:16-21. In Acts 2:16-21, Peter's use of Joel 2:28-29 is poignant. Daniel Teier shows that Joel 2 is foundational to Peter's sermon because the "beginning explains the outburst of revelatory activity in light of Christ's pouring out the Spirit."¹⁵ Peter stresses the empowerment upon on all flesh. The Spirit falls on all believers, and it insinuates an equality in the diverse outpouring of the Spirit upon genders, economic situations, and social positions. In Acts 2:16-21, Peter expresses that nothing should prohibit any believer from proclaiming the gospel because the Spirit poured out on all flesh, diversely.

Gender Issues

The Spirit's outpouring brings equality to gender issues. Joel's prophecy "declared the eradication of any gender barrier in the spirit of prophecy."¹⁶ In an age where women were considered below men in nearly all respects, equality for women was unique for the Jewish and Hellenistic cultures. Yet, the outpouring on women proved vital for the early church. There are many instances of women ministering in the New Testament. Just in Romans 16 alone, women count for ten out of twenty-

¹⁴William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 97.

¹⁵Daniel J. Treier, "The Fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32: A Multiple-Lens Approach," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 1 (/ 1997): 21.

¹⁶Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary V 1 Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 882.

six individuals that Paul commends. The Spirit ministered through lay women empowered by the Spirit.

Social and Economic Barriers

Both the Apostle Peter and the Prophet Joel spoke words concerning economic and social barriers. The gift of the Spirit came upon anyone of any situation. Peter mentions specifically slaves on several occasions because they represented the lowest class economically. People owned slaves yet slaves, too, equally shared in the same inheritance of the Spirit. Philemon 1:12-16 illustrates this beautifully.

While people often regarded slaves in economic terms, other social barriers are unearthed through the term “slave.” For instance, since slaves made up the lower class, class barriers plainly existed. Likewise, power barriers displayed the fact that slaves still possessed little or no power. Yet, the Spirit removed class barriers and power-distance, and slaves found freedom in the Spirit to witness. Again, Philemon 1:12-16 proves a great example.

Whether a person was a victim of prejudice or not, God’s spirit poured out on them. In fact, Peter’s use of Joel’s prophecy denotes those that were not male, those of any age, those without money or property, and those without power. Frank Macchia writes, “Tongues allow the poor, uneducated, and illiterate among the people of God to have an equal voice with the educated and the literate.”¹⁷ God’s Spirit poured out declares everyone sits equally at the table of God’s people. Pentecostal theology enlightens the church, showing that God’s people hold the power of the Spirit for witness to the peoples of the earth, equally. As Luke wrote Acts 2, he believed that empowerment needed to characterize the entire church.¹⁸ The church, equalized by God’s Spirit, speaks to a world full of inequality by first being a community of God living in equality and witnessing in equality.

Community of Believers

A true Pentecostal theology constructs itself on the concept of a community of believers unmarred by gender inequality, racial inequality, power inequality or social and economic inequality. The Spirit of

¹⁷Frank D. Macchia, “The Struggle for Global Witness: Shifting Paradigms in Pentecostal Theology,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, ed. Murray A. Dempster, Bryon D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Oxford: Regnum Bks, 1999), 19.

¹⁸Keener, 881.

prophecy arose for all the community of God's people, which differs from the former days (Old Testament) when only chosen leaders received the charismatic gifts of the Spirit.¹⁹ Yet, Pentecost fulfilled a contrasting story of the gift for all humankind.

As Joel 2 promised the Spirit poured out on the whole nation, now Pentecost promises the Spirit poured out on all people belonging to God, no matter their gender, race, social, or economic statuses. This universal outpouring of the Spirit fell not just on Israel but on all who believe. In fact, those present to hear Peter's sermon represented a diversity of peoples. Many different people from numerous nations received Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit birthed and nurtured Gentiles (i.e. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, etc.) in the body of Christ.²⁰

Moreover, the intention of the Spirit being poured out on all flesh was to draw a new community together for a purpose—to witness. Robert Muthiah writes that the practice of witnessing actually built up the priesthood of believers by first pursuing witness as a group, and that corporate witness solidified their identity as priests, and secondly, by actual expansion through people coming to Christ through their corporate witness.²¹ Witness, generally stated, should be done as a community, which the church should exemplify. Paul proves to be another great example. Paul never goes alone. He constantly surrounded himself with a community of believers as they preached and taught the gospel.

Pentecostal theology increases the efficacy of mobilizing efforts by the Spirit's outpouring on all peoples. Its equalizing effect wipes away all inequality and power struggles for the purpose of witness. It takes a community of believers to accomplish it.

Implications

A Pentecostal theology derived from a diversity of outpouring for witness rooted in biblical theology speaks to everyone. The increasing efficacy of the biblical mandate to witness expressed through Pentecostal theology carries significant implications. Probing Thai culture furnishes a clearer understanding of the implications.

¹⁹Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 69.

²⁰Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(S): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, vol. 20, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 42.

²¹Robert A. Muthiah, "Christian Practices, Congregational Leadership, and the Priesthood of All Believers," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 182.

Power Issues

Every culture deals with power issues. Anita Koeshall notes, “The distribution of power lies at the heart of any human social organization and shapes all interactions and relationships.”²² The church has also struggled with power issues since its inception. The disciples fought over who the greatest was in Luke 22:24-30. Sadly, Christians also chase after power.

Power-distance

Geert and Gert Hofstede and Michael Minkov’s seminal work, *Cultures and Organizations* provides insights into various different cultures. They designate power-distance as one of the several different primary features of cultures and describe power-distance as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.”²³ Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov’s Thailand score of 64 establishes Thailand as a high power-distance nation.²⁴ This means Thais expect inequalities because equality does not truly exist.

Thailand’s high power-distance permeates Thai culture. Thais generally avoid proactive behavior because they wait for those of senior status and authority to make a decision. As a socially legitimate method of leadership, decisions originate from the top and must be followed. Those that speak up or who are against change challenge the one in power in Thai culture.²⁵ This hierarchical feature dominates much of Thai life. Thus, for Thais, power is constructed not by influence or personality, rhetoric, or education, rather, the culture creates power through position and the status associated with that position or rank.²⁶

Thailand’s high power-distance presents a problem for the Thai church. Koeshall points out how church structures can mimic the

²²Anita Koeshall, "Navigating Power: Liquid Power Structures for Molten Times," in *Devoted to Christ: Missiological Reflections in Honor of Sherwood G. Lingenfelter*, ed. Christopher L. Flanders (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 66.

²³Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival*, 3 ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010), 61.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 58.

²⁵Douglas Rhein, "The Workplace Challenge: Cross-Cultural Leadership in Thailand," *International Studies in Educational Administration* 41, no. 1 (2013): 45-46.

²⁶Theerasak and Brian Corbitt Thanasankit, "Understanding Thai Culture and Its Impact on Requirements Engineering Process Management During Information Systems Development," *Asian Academy of Management Journal* 7, no. 1 (2002): 108.

culturally-accepted hierarchies.²⁷ Thailand's strong hierarchy often stifles equality and the calling of lay workers. Subsequently, laity are not proactive, but expect the pastor to perform the witnessing. As a result, high power-distance contributes to small laity-assisted conversion growth.²⁸ This counters the power-restructuring of Pentecost that saw God's Spirit fall regardless of power, gender, age, social or economic class, and did not allow human power constructs to asphyxiate witnessing. Peter's focus on the priesthood of all believers reminds us of the role of all Christians to proclaim the gospel. The clear hierarchy for us is Jesus as High Priest (Heb. 7).

Theology of Power

Koeshall campaigns for the development of a theology of power. God's plan for humanity was that at creation, "God entrusted humans with the power to make decisions . . . the ability to make a difference in their environments, and to act 'otherwise' or outside of a predetermined pattern."²⁹ God created human beings to think and make decisions. However, with sin came the manipulation of power, which meant the desire to have dominion over other people (Genesis 3). However, Jesus taught differently. Koeshall writes, "The call to His [Jesus'] followers consists of a life where the power that one possesses is to be expended that others can live."³⁰ Much like Jesus, Christians must be power-givers, who seek to use their power for the glory of God alone. Instead, Koeshall advocates for a redeemed power which is, "embodied in redeemed agents invested in a lifestyle of self-emptying for the sake of others."³¹ It would be advantageous in my opinion for the Thai church to seek such redeemed power in its own Thai culture.

Change ensues not just from the top down but from the grassroots, also. By re-locating itself among the lay workers, the Thai church eliminates the disconnect that previously ensnared Thai evangelistic forms. Now, each denomination and each church serve as a covering

²⁷Ibid., 70.

²⁸It must be acknowledged other factors including in what way Christians present the gospel may contribute to these low numbers.

²⁹Koeshall, in *Devoted to Christ: Missiological Reflections in Honor of Sherwood G. Lingenfelter*, 70.

³⁰Ibid., 73.

³¹Ibid., 76. "Redeemed power is (1) the capacity and ability to act (dynamis) made possible by Spirit baptism, physical strength, talents, and intellectual and material resources that have been developed through discipline and maturity; and (2) the freedom (exousia) made possible when the community recognizes the Spirit's gifts in individual members and creates space for them to develop their gifts and to function in service to others."

and a structure for releasing. Tension will likely occur at first, but if all parties seek a redeemed power embodied in redeemed agents as seen through the Pentecost event, then the Thai church will see increasing growth through its pastors and its lay leaders, resulting in strong churches and new church plants. It does not eliminate hierarchy, nor does it make an egalitarian structure to only re-create a power structure. Rather, it looks at a biblical use of power to empower and release others to be the priestly people of God.

The missionary's task is to walk with the Thai church in redeeming its power structure. By exemplifying a redeemed power in their own organizational structures, missionaries can help the Thai church ask questions about the Thai church's own power structures. It entails deep dialogue about implicit Thai structures and requires deep relationships and friendships with the Thai church in order to seek God's best for his church.

Thai examples

Thai perceptions of an empowering prototypical ideal leader exist. One prototype, Larry Person's suggests, emanates from within the facework form of *barami* or accumulated goodness. The meaning of accumulated goodness clusters into two general categories: virtue and hegemony or raw dominance.³² Persons believes most Thais view *barami* as a true accumulated goodness due to virtue. *Barami* originates in the truly virtuous person who selflessly uses social capital to empower and mobilize others to work together for good of the collective.³³ Thus, for Persons, a *barami*-style leader truly cares for others not themselves.

Persons builds his view from David Conner's concept of *barami*.³⁴ Conner posits that *barami* begins in the moral goodness or virtue of the individual and makes the case for *barami* as the culturally-desired foundation for leadership.³⁵

³²Person, 54-55.

³³Ibid., 57.

³⁴Much of the idea of *barami* in leadership originated from Thai scholar Sunataree Komin's work that suggests *barami* as a unique leadership trait to Thais, and *barami* allows the leader to command respect, love, loyalty and sacrifice from others Sunataree Komin, "Value Added Perception of Thai Effective Leadership." (paper presented at the 23rd International Congress of Applied Psychology, Madrid, Spain 1994), 35.

³⁵David William Conner, "Personal Power, Authority, and Influence: Cultural Foundations for Leadership and Leadership Formation in Northeast Thailand and Implications for Adult Leadership Training" (Northern Illinois University, 1996), 240, 74-76.

However, Alan Johnson encourages caution in the use of *barami* as a preferred leadership prototype. First, in Johnson's research amongst urban poor people in a slum,³⁶ *barami* often carried a negative sense.³⁷ Second, Johnson points out that Conners acknowledges some negative meaning prescribed to *barami*.³⁸ Johnson believes, rather, that Conner downplayed or dismissed "evidence of linguistic diversity and multiplex usages, particularly as it relates to *barami*."³⁹ Persons admits a possible negative meaning⁴⁰ but unconvincingly sides with Conners suggesting Conner downplayed the negative meanings because many of their informants "claimed that it represented a case of false attribution."⁴¹ However, Johnson correctly feels discomfort with "telling native speakers what is the correct understanding of a term that they seem to have quite definite ideas about."⁴²

Johnson provides an alternative prototypical leader in the value of trustworthiness (*chuathuu*). Johnson believes trustworthiness creates a stronger link to the prototypical model as it provides "the conceptual link between the prototypical model and how people actually construct leadership in daily activities."⁴³ Trustworthiness, then, became a preferred model because it opened the door for a broader group of people to be involved in leadership, and it is much more connected with observable behavior which better lends itself to the complexities of daily life.⁴⁴

Both *barami* and trustworthiness (*chuathuu*) exemplify a prototypical leader that conveys, albeit in different socio-economic groups, a somewhat empowering preferred leader. While *barami* has merit as a prototype model amongst certain groups in Thailand, the trustworthiness model provides a more tangible example that addresses community life. Trustworthiness seeks to bring more people into the decision-making arena, where *barami* still tends to be reserved for a select few, exacerbating an already-existing power-distance and

³⁶Lang Wat Pathum Wanaram Community (LWPW).

³⁷Alan Johnson, *Leadership in a Slum: A Bangkok Case Study* (Oxford: Regnum Bks Intl, 2009), 92, 188. *Barami* is often coupled with the term *jao pho* (mafia or mogul). Interestingly, Alan Johnson's research was done amongst the urban poor in a slum community in Bangkok. Both Conner's and Person's research engaged upper tiered leaders in middle-class to upper class situations.

³⁸Ibid., 92. See where Conner's admits to some informants seeing *barami* as negative Conner, 261.

³⁹Johnson, 92.

⁴⁰Person, 54-55.

⁴¹Larry S. Person, "The Anatomy of Thai Face," *MANUSYA: Journal of Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2008): 65-66, http://www.manusya.journals.chula.ac.th/files/paperonline/Larry_ThaiFace_Final_p53-75.pdf. (accessed October 14, 2020).

⁴²Johnson, 92.

⁴³Ibid., 108.

⁴⁴Ibid., 115, 18. Trustworthiness was also the dominant term used for considering leaders.

unempowering problem. *Barami* and trustworthiness give the best examples of what power-giving and empowerment could look like in the Thai culture outside of Jesus and could breathe life into the development of a Thai Christian identity.

1 Peter 2:4-10 Revisited: Re-facing by Creating a New Christian Identity

Each culture endeavors to create its own unique identity. There is little to no discussion, however, on Thai Christian identity or that a formation of one exists. Thai Christian leaders seem to think little about a Thai Christian identity. Consequently, most Thais wrap their identity around Buddhism. The common Thai saying goes, “To be Thai is to be Buddhist.” Even if they love Jesus, being a Buddhist entangles itself into their Thai identity, and Thais feel that following Jesus requires them to give up being Thai.

Christianity’s “foreignness” coupled with a Buddhist Thai identity generates a divide between Thai Christians and the ninety percent of the population of Thailand that regards itself as Buddhist. This may just give Thai Christians a sense of a loss of face (*sia na*).

Thai identity is swathed in face or facework. “Face,” as Christopher Flanders refers to it, is “a metaphor representing a type of interpersonal social honor and identity projection.”⁴⁵ Everyone desires to be a “face person” or as Flanders expresses it, “an individual who is recognized, holds some level of status and honor, is distinguished or outstanding in some particular fashion.”⁴⁶ Sunatree Komin expresses how important this “face-saving” value is for Thais by suggesting it is, “the first criterion to consider in any kind of evaluative or judgmental action. To make a person ‘lose face’, regardless of rank, is to be avoided at all cost, except in extreme necessity.”⁴⁷ Therefore, face in Thailand dominates the social scene, and becomes a tool for Thais to evaluate who “fits in” to their society. Persons believe “face” consists of five different modes.⁴⁸ However, it is the last one, endogenous worth, that drives the rest of the concept of face because it is the “essence of being your own

⁴⁵Christopher L. Flanders, *About Face: Rethinking Face for 21st-Century Missions*, vol. 9 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 1.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 122.

⁴⁷Suntaree Komin, “Culture and Work-Related Values in Thai Organizations,” *International Journal of Psychology* 24 (1990): 691. Thais value face as one of their highest values.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 74. They are prestige (*nata*), honor (*kiat*), public acclaim (*chuesiang*), accumulated goodness (*barami*), and endogenous worth (*saksi*).

person.”⁴⁹ Endogenous worth, drives Thais’ view of self-worth and identity, and forms the link to an individualism in a collective society.

Consequently, Thais create positions by the status associated with wealth, position, rank or popularity driven by facework. These entail statuses created through human valuation. However, in 1 Peter 2:4-10, Peter exhorts the believers to see themselves as those identified and honored by the valuations of God not humanity. Today, this means pastors and leaders should not view others as inferior, but as equals, regardless of culturally-determined statuses and positions since all belong to Christ. Leaders and laity alike received their endogenous worth not within themselves or from others but through Christ. As imitators of Christ, Thais received face (*dai na*) from God, not from humans and the social structures of culture. Our face coming from God realigns the church to focus not on individual statuses derived from human valuation but on a community whose identity comes from God.

Change Starts with Leadership

The prototype model leader through *barami* or trustworthiness provides an indigenous example. However, prototype leadership models, help little with actual change in leadership modes based on existing models of authoritative power. Leadership resides not in universal and macro-theories, but rather it is embedded in social setting. Johnson suggests that improving leadership starts in the, “disassembling and reassembling, the untangling of the explicit and implicit, and the challenging of conventional wisdom of leadership on the ground so that practitioners can see themselves and their setting with increased clarity.”⁵⁰ This means that for leaders deeply embedded and implicit values like hierarchy form much of the leader’s behavior. Sadly, these values are seldom brought into discussion. These implicit values continue to occur even if they are contrary to the ideal leader because they are pre-programmed into the Thai leadership model. Thus, leaders continue to “manifest behaviors that they themselves would be suspicious of in the follower role, and this creates a self-reinforcing cycle of behavior that feeds the suspicion.”⁵¹

For the missionary, this phenomenon delivers major insight into training Thai leaders. Too often, universal, macro-strategies often based on non-indigenous paradigmatic or cognitive prototypes do not dig into

⁴⁹Ibid., 64.

⁵⁰Alan R. Johnson, "An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Leadership: Lessons Learned on Improving Leadership Practice," *Transformation* 24, no. 3 (2007): 216.

⁵¹Ibid., 217.

implicit knowledge that remain assumed, hidden and unexplored. Therefore, the cycle of suspicion endures since the assumed, hidden and unexplored intricacies of Thai leadership continue without any helpful dialogue. The missionary is tasked with intentionally seeking understanding in Thai leadership. This means working within Thai churches creating the much-needed relationships and friendships required to speak into their lives. That takes time and effort of learning the language and culture all the while making relationships. It also means listening actively in order to learn how to train.

Following relationship-building, the missionary will need to employ the insights from the study of leadership to bring to the surface what is normally unexplored and unnoticed, which “involves facilitating people to dialogue about how and why they default to unproductive leadership patterns and why culturally-preferred behaviors remain for the most part ideals.”⁵² It takes a Thai church willing to explore those hidden, assumed and unexplored leadership traits which necessitates members to “find cultural resources that will help them to value and integrate into practice their own culturally-preferred forms of leadership.”⁵³ Leadership training requires dialogue. Since, any change or growth will not happen overnight, the missionaries’ role in dialogue is even more imperative. If the missionary creates deep relationships built on trust, dialogue may occur on issues that have remained hidden, assumed or explored, and the process of discovering and growth will follow.

Conclusion

Pentecost equalized all people through the outpouring of the Spirit for empowerment to witness. Rooted and informed in biblical theology through 1 Peter 2:4-10, Pentecostals draw on the empowerment of the Spirit poured out on all types of people of all levels as a priestly community. It is an empowerment of the whole church for witness, not just a selective few in church leadership. Biblical theology shows one’s identity and status is under God’s valuation not humanity valuation. For the Pentecostal movement whose identity and status is understood as under God’s valuation and that sees all laity mobilized to witness, the implications are great because it draws from new dialogue and redeeming power by leadership in the Thai church. As Thailand Protestants, including Pentecostals, struggle to shed light on the scarcity of evangelism engagement, a fully implemented Pentecostal theology rooted in biblical theology, serves to realign the Thai church back into

⁵²Ibid., 219.

⁵³Ibid.

the center of God's mission. If the Thai church allows the Spirit to empower and release the laity for witness, numbers like three out of one hundred lay persons bringing someone to faith will expand exponentially.

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**“We Are Glad You Are Here”:
Teaching in the Local Church in Cambodia¹**
by Darin R. Clements

Introduction

I had the privilege of preaching for a church’s first Easter service in Cambodia’s Kompong Speu Province in 2011. The Church in Cambodia was still almost entirely in its first generation at that time, so celebrating Easter was a new idea for many fellowships. This particular church was doing so for the first time, after I had challenged the pastors in my Pentateuch class to develop culturally appropriate holidays that honored Scripture and connected them to the Church worldwide. When my student invited me to preach, I was delighted. When he asked me how to conduct an Easter service, I encouraged him to talk to a Cambodian pastor I knew who had already been celebrating Easter for a few years.

The pastor opened the service by welcoming everyone in the culturally appropriate way, acknowledging guests who had come from other Christian groups in the area. Then he said, “And we want to welcome all those of you from the community who are not Christians. We are glad you are here with us today.” I admit I was shocked, for in my culture we do not speak to guests like that in worship services because we prefer to minimize the differences in order to avoid embarrassing people publicly. When communion was taken that morning, he politely instructed his Buddhist guests to abstain. No one was offended because Cambodian culture looks favorably on people who live according to their religious identity.

I recount this experience here because it illustrates how the Assemblies of God of Cambodia (AGC), as a first-generation church in a majority-Buddhist nation, presents the Good News.² While churches in other majority-Buddhist nations work to create cultural bridges, many Christians in Cambodia follow the practice of presenting God’s promise

¹This article presents the research found in Darin R. Clements, “A Multiple Case Study of Approaches to Nonformal Christian Education among Assemblies of God of Cambodia Churches” (PhD diss., Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines, 2019).

²The AGC is one among many groups that take the approach I am describing here.

of salvation on its own terms without using Buddhist forms. They often address the concerns of the surrounding Buddhist worldview in very intentional ways, but they do so without direct confrontation or methods that would be considered disrespectful to the national religion.

This approach was evident in my study of nonformal Christian education (CE)³ in four AGC churches. They did not use Buddhist forms of pedagogy or Buddhist vocabulary,⁴ even when their teaching was specifically directed toward children or adults outside the church.⁵ Instead of adjusting to the majority religion, the churches in this study developed their approach to teaching with reference to the national educational system. As the research findings show, these churches function as teaching communities with counter-cultural notions about the teaching-learning process.

Context of the Study

Cambodia is a majority-Buddhist nation that has enshrined Buddhism as the state religion in its constitution. Official statistics vary, but they typically place the percentage of adherents well over 90% of the population.⁶ These statistics are based on national ID cards, not actual adherents. They do not take conversions into account, nor do they seem to fully represent non-Buddhist groups like Muslims and animists. Making allowance for these factors, the Joshua Project reports that 82.2% of Cambodians are Buddhist.⁷ Regardless of the country's religion mix, Buddhism dominates the worldview of ordinary Cambodians, shapes the Khmer language, and even accounts for the abundance of holidays in the calendar year.

The first 400 years of Christian church history in Cambodia saw very little growth; however, such has not been the case over the last few decades. From the arrival of the Dominican Priest, Gaspar de Cruz, in

³Nonformal Christian education refers to CE that is intentionally structured but lacks formal assessments and formal accreditation.

⁴Christian terms like 'God', 'prayer', 'sin', 'salvation' and 'eternal life' are appropriated from commonly known Khmer words. However strongly supported by Bible translations, they have been invested with meanings that often do not match their meanings for Buddhists. In my experience, Christians simply use the terms with little effort to explain the differences for the benefit of Buddhist listeners.

⁵Teaching for the community addressed topics like farming techniques, parenting, hygiene, and child safety.

⁶For example, the World Factbook puts the Buddhist majority at 97.9%. See "Cambodia," The World Factbook, last modified February 16, 2021, Cambodia—The World Factbook (cia.gov).

⁷"Cambodia," Joshua Project, <http://joshuaproject.net/countries/CB> (accessed February 19, 2021).

the 16th century⁸ to the beginning of evangelical missions by the Christian & Missionary Alliance in 1923,⁹ Christianity struggled to take root in the nation. It continued to grow slowly throughout much of the 20th century but never exceeded a few hundred evangelical believers.

Then, starting in 1970, the Church experienced remarkable growth (up to as many as 10,000 people) as missionaries were given freedom to work by the besieged, pro-West Lon Nol government between 1970 and 1975.¹⁰ However, after Phnom Penh, the capital city, fell in April 1975, the Church was decimated by the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979), then further suppressed under Vietnamese occupation (1979-1989). In 1989, only an estimated 200 Christians remained in the country.¹¹

But in 1990, things began to change; according to the Joshua Project, Christian adherents presently make up 3.4% of the population, with the annual Evangelical growth rate being 8.8%.¹² Interestingly, that turn-around parallels the progress in national development, including strong gains in the education sector. Expansion of the education system has been one of the key items in the National Strategic Development Plan, resulting in impressive increases in primary and secondary school enrollments. Universal access to primary school is now within Cambodia’s grasp, although teacher quality remains a concern.¹³

Considering these development indicators plus the general growth and organizational development of the Cambodian Church since 1990, it would seem reasonable to expect to find local churches developing effective approaches to CE. However, the lack of such development is indication of a serious gap in the picture of the Church in Cambodia. Thus, this research sought to describe, explore, and compare nonformal CE among a set of AGC churches that has achieved a relatively strong level of CE development.

⁸“Church’s History,” Catholic Cambodia, <http://catholiccambodia.org/eng/community-history> (accessed December 4, 2014).

⁹Brian Maher and Seila Uon, *Cry of the Gecko: History of the Christian Mission in Cambodia* (Centralia, WA: Gorham Printing, 2012), 17.

¹⁰Steven Hyde, “A Missiological and Critical Study of Cambodia’s Historical, Cultural, and Sociopolitical Characteristics to Identify the Factors of Rapid Church Growth and Propose its Future Prognosis” (PhD diss., Bethany International University, Singapore, 2015), 46.

¹¹Barnabas Mam, *Church Behind the Wire* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 346.

¹²“Cambodia,” Joshua Project, <http://joshuaproject.net/countries/CB> (accessed January 19, 2021).

¹³“Net primary enrollments increased from 83.8% in 1992 to 96.4% in 2012, and net secondary enrollments from 16.6% in 2000 to 35.1% in 2012.” See Prateek Tandon and Tsuyoshi Fukao, *Educating the Next Generation: Improving Teacher Quality in Cambodia*, Directions in Development: Human Development (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015), 1, <http://dx.doi.10.1596/978-1-4648-0417-5> (accessed June 9, 2015).

The Assemblies of God of Cambodia

Since this research was delimited to the AGC,¹⁴ a brief overview of its history is an important piece of context for the findings that will be discussed. The first resident Assemblies of God missionaries arrived in Cambodia from the United States in June 1990 under protocols with the Cambodian government to establish two children's homes, to open a medical clinic, and to teach English.¹⁵ Over the next few years, additional AG missionaries arrived from France, the Philippines, Australia, and Malaysia. At times in its history, the Assemblies of God Missionary Fellowship has been comprised of as many as 14 nations, including missionaries from North America, Central America, Northern Europe, and across Asia.

The AGC was formally organized in 1997 having 12 recognized pastors and 12 churches;¹⁶ it was led by a five-member national committee with Kheok Srin serving as chairman. By year 2000, the AGC numbered about 20 congregations with an estimated 1,000 constituents.¹⁷ In 2010, it further organized into six districts with locally elected committees. By 2013, it reported having churches in all but four provinces out of a total 24 cities and provinces. And in 2016, the AGC numbered 202 churches,¹⁸ 59 formally recognized pastors, 183 leaders, and 13,360 members' (5,944 adults and 7,416 children).¹⁹

Statement of the Problem²⁰

The phenomenon of recent church growth in Cambodia without concurrent development in discipleship programs or nonformal Christian education raises many questions, especially considering the rapid development of the nation's education system since 1993²¹ and an almost national obsession with formal education as a means of social mobility and family security. This research attempts to address these two gaps by describing, exploring, analyzing, and understanding the nonformal CE

¹⁴Clements, 17.

¹⁵Carolyn Dorsey, "Information Regarding the Founding of the Assemblies of God Work in Cambodia" (Springfield, MO, May 2005).

¹⁶National Executive Committee of the Assemblies of God of Cambodia, "Presentation AGC Info 2012" (Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2012).

¹⁷Clements, 13.

¹⁸Includes all levels of development.

¹⁹ National Executive Committee of the Assemblies of God of Cambodia, "Report of Churches of Assemblies of God of Cambodia 2015," (Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2015).

²⁰Clements, 4-5.

²¹The current constitution was promulgated in 1993, opening the way for massive foreign assistance in educational development.

approaches of four AGC churches representing two different socioeconomic situations.

Significance of the Study²²

This research and its findings are significant in two ways—transferability and the literature gap. The first is that significance lies not in their *generalizability* but in their *transferability*. Generalizability requires a representative sample, whereas transferability “refers to the fit or match between the research context and other contexts as judged by the reader.”²³ The goal was to particularize the research and bring out the ‘Khmerness’ of the cases in order to make a contribution to thinking about Christian education from a Cambodian context.

The findings should prove transferable to three contexts. The first and second contexts are the AGC (the primary stakeholders of the research) and the wider Christian community in Cambodia because the teaching ministries of local churches have not developed to that extent that their numerical growth has. The third context is the development of nonformal CE in similar socioeconomic situations and educational environments. Churches in socioeconomic and educational contexts like Cambodia encounter obstacles at a fundamental level when they begin to develop an approach to nonformal CE. They face dynamics that differ from the West, where overall education levels are good and Sunday School was once a powerful force for spiritual formation and community education.

With regard to the literature gap, the literature generally lacks a lens for thinking culturally about and conducting CE in contexts like Cambodia. An abundance of good CE literature has been produced by the West and is utilized in much of the rest of the world. This literature strives to work with current educational philosophy and aims at universal principles. The problem for contexts like Cambodia, however, is that these theories and approaches were primarily developed in and for western socioeconomic situations where people have high levels of literacy, strong national education systems, relatively healthy economies and sufficient resources for curriculum and teacher training.²⁴

²²Clements, 21-23.

²³Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012), 113.

²⁴For a full discussion of the literature, see Clements, 29-99.

Research Design²⁵

The design of this research followed the multiple case study approach of Robert Yin. According to Yin, “Case studies are the preferred method when (a) ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context.”²⁶

The research design began with this central question directed toward a set of cases: “What approaches to nonformal CE have been developed by AGC churches?” The cases were then described, explored in depth, and analyzed through six procedural sub-questions over a series of phases.²⁷ The four cases included two cases each from two socioeconomic situations—the capital city and provincial location. The primary criterion was that each church had succeeded in developing a sustained approach to nonformal CE. Data were collected using ethnographic methods in order to have both emic and etic perspectives of the AGC approaches to nonformal CE.²⁸ Table 1 provides an overview of the research design following the procedural sub-questions.²⁹

²⁵Clements, 24-27.

²⁶Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed., “Applied Social Science Research Methods,” ed. Leonard Bickman and Debra J. Rog, vol. 5 (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 2.

²⁷John W. Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2014), 134-135.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 470-471.

²⁹The value of social science research depends on the reader’s ability to audit the credibility and dependability of the research from which findings have been drawn. For a full explanation of the research methodology, see Chapter 3 of “Research Methodology” in Clements, 100-136.

Table 1. Research Design Overview³⁰

	<u>Central question</u> : <i>What approaches to nonformal CE have been developed by AGC churches?</i>
Case selection, informed consent	
Data collection	<u>Sub-question 1</u> : <i>How are approaches to nonformal CE organized in each case? What is the rationale for each organizational approach?</i>
	<u>Sub-question 2</u> : <i>How did the current approaches to nonformal CE among the cases originate and then develop over time?</i>
	<u>Sub-question 3</u> : <i>How are teachers recruited, developed, and resourced in each case? What ideas about teaching and learning influence this process?</i>
	<u>Sub-question 4</u> : <i>What are the perceived contributions of the approaches to nonformal CE to the health and mission of each case?</i>
Focus groups (member checking, additional perspectives)	<u>Sub-question 5</u> : <i>How do approaches to nonformal CE among the cases reflect the educational context?</i>
Cross-case analysis	<u>Sub-question 6</u> : <i>How do approaches to nonformal CE among the cases compare across socioeconomic situations?</i>

Presentation of Findings³¹

This multiple case study of nonformal Christian education among AGC churches yielded 12 findings in four categories, which I used to construct a descriptive model. Figure 1 presents the simple four-level model for thinking about nonformal CE in Cambodia constructed from those findings. The transferability of the model lies in its potential use as a lens for thinking about nonformal CE in other contexts. Figure 2 at the end of this section is the full descriptive model of approaches to nonformal CE among AGC churches developed from the findings.

³⁰Clements, 24.

³¹Ibid., 266-278.

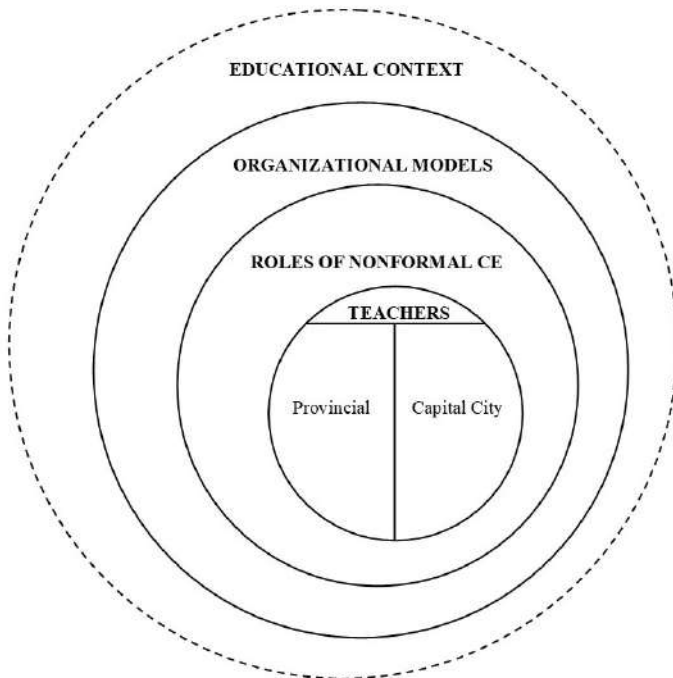


Figure 1. A four-level model for thinking about nonformal CE in Cambodia³²

Organizational Models and Nonformal CE

Finding #1: The congregations in this study functioned like small churches in which nonformal CE pervaded organizational models and dominated church activities.³³

Even though they were among the largest and most well-developed congregations in the AGC, the cases did not have CE departments. Rather, they operated like small churches with a high level of integration between programs and a deeply vested leadership that was involved in all areas of church life.³⁴ Nonformal CE was one of the pervasive

³²Ibid., 268.

³³Ibid., 271.

³⁴Mark Edward Simpson, "Christian Education in the Small Church," in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 159-166.

elements of church life and accounted for a large portion of weekly and annual activities.

I am addressing organizational structure first because the leadership of each church determined the values and policies to be carried out in every other category. The organizational structures expressed the leadership’s values through the qualifications, appointment, and equipping of the teachers. The qualifications of teachers expressed ideals about Christian life and ministry that the church wanted to perpetuate. The process of teacher appointment reaffirmed those values and empowered teachers to carry out their ministry under the leadership’s authority. I am listing Findings #5, #6, and #7 here because they demonstrate the connection between the organizational models and the teachers (also see Figure 2 at the end of this section):

Finding #5: The top leadership of the cases in this study were directly responsible to appoint nonformal CE teachers.

Finding #6: Regarding teacher selection, the cases in this study valued genuine personal faith, faithfulness to the church, submission to leadership, and evidence of a gift and love for teaching. Secondary considerations included teaching experience, education levels, and Bible knowledge.

Finding #7: The cases in this study trained children’s teachers informally by having the new teachers work with experienced teachers and semi-formally by sending all teachers to seminars.³⁵

Roles of Nonformal CE

The continuum of roles examined by this study ranged from internal (i.e., focused entirely on people within the church) to mixed (i.e., focused on people outside the church for their benefit and with a view to bringing them into the church) to external (i.e., focused on people outside the church for their benefit without regard to affiliation with the church). The focus of the nonformal CE in the cases was found to be primarily internal. Typical for Pentecostal congregations, the Bible was the authority and primary source of lessons, with discipleship flowing from that Bible-focus through application to daily living. This emphasis on practical faith was critically important to both the leadership and the teachers.

³⁵Clements, 273.

Finding #2: The nonformal CE of the cases in this study had a strong internal focus that emphasized Bible knowledge, discipleship and personal faith through nurture.³⁶

Personal faith through nurture (as opposed to crisis-conversion experiences) as a primary role of nonformal CE was one of the most critical findings of this study. The emphasis on personal faith meant that individuals could not simply become members by application or by physical birth into a Christian family. Somehow, without altar calls in Sunday services and teachers inviting students to *tvay kluon* (“give themselves”) to Jesus in class, people were coming to personal faith. That experience of personal faith was validated through public testimony, faithful participation in church life, and water baptism.

The nonformal CE of the cases had external foci as well. Education was one of their primary means of engaging the surrounding community. They accomplished this role two ways—(a) through formal education in the form of pre-schools, Christian grade schools, and youth outreaches offering supplemental education, and (b) through lessons on health, hygiene, civic morals, family dynamics, and agricultural development. Some of these efforts were for the benefit of the community and for evangelism, while others were purely for the benefit of the community in the name of Jesus. Although all four churches in this study engaged in external CE efforts, the provincial churches had a stronger level of social engagement, especially through their village cell groups, than did the capital city churches.

Finding #3: The cases in this study used education as one of their primary means of social engagement.

Finding #4: The provincial cases in this study had a stronger level of social engagement through nonformal CE than the capital city cases.³⁷

Nonformal CE Teachers

Findings #5, #6, and #7 have already been included above as a point of interaction between teachers and organizational models. Passing over Findings #8 and #8a for the moment, I now turn to the circle in Figure 2 (at the end of this section) labeled ‘Teachers’. That circle includes four general differences between teachers in provincial and capital city cases. The dynamics undergirding these differences are expressed in Findings #9 and #10.

³⁶Ibid., 274.

³⁷Ibid., 275.

Finding #9: Educational and economic opportunities affected the availability and longevity of nonformal CE teachers.

Finding #10: Children’s ministry was a function of the youth ministries in the provincial cases.³⁸

The arrow pointing away from the provincial teachers in Figure 2 is dashed to indicate general conditions that can affect the availability and longevity of teachers. ‘Limited opportunities’ meant that youth must leave the community for higher education and employment. Even so, young people bring an energy and an enjoyment of teaching children that seems to be absent in the older generations. Following this dynamic, both of the provincial churches made teaching children’s classes one of the main functions of their youth ministries. As a result, children’s classes comprised a significant portion of their nonformal CE activity. On the other hands, adult classes received much less attention, being designed more to provide regular fellowship or to respond to felt needs. By contrast, the capital city churches had teachers from across the generations and regular classes for all ages and groups. They also had fewer opportunities for youth to begin serving through teaching.

Reflecting on the Educational Context

Figure 1 above depicts the educational context as encircling the other three nested levels of the model. Figure 2 at the end of this section shows how the organizational models and the teachers interact with the educational context in two different ways. At the bottom of the model, the arrow coming up from the box labeled ‘Educational Context’ toward ‘Teachers’ shows that the educational context provides teachers with their formal education. Using secondary education completion for comparison, Finding #11 notes that the overall education level of the teachers in the cases was relatively high:

Finding #11: The education level of all teachers across the cases was high compared to national statistics. At least 70% of teachers had completed or were in the process of completing secondary education.³⁹

³⁸Ibid., 275-276.

³⁹Ibid., 277. In 2016, the Cambodian government reported an upper secondary education completion rate of 6%. See National Institute of Statistics, *Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2016* (Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Ministry of Planning, October 2017), 48, <https://www.nis.gov.kh/index.php/en/> (accessed November 26, 2018).

Findings #12 and #12a are expressed in two locations in Figure 2. The opposing arrows between the ‘Educational Context’ boxes and the ‘Organizational Models’ at the top and the ‘Teachers’ at the bottom show that both the leadership and the teachers had negative perspectives of what they considered to be common teacher models and attitudes in the government education system at the primary and secondary levels. Their rejection of those norms was intentional and thoughtful.

Finding #12: The focus groups rejected the norms for teacher attitudes and teacher-student relationships that they perceived in the national school system as unacceptable for teaching in the church.

Finding #12a: They also rejected aspects of the national school system that they perceived as harsh, authoritarian, and dehumanizing in favor of a holistic approach to nonformal CE that is characterized by warm, encouraging relationships between teachers and students.⁴⁰

Lastly, Findings #8 and #8a were formulated from the perspectives of both the teachers and the focus groups regarding ideal teacher models. They express values that run contrary to the common formal educational experiences of the people in these churches (Finding #12a). I have placed them at the end of this explanation of the model because they draw the entire model together around the teachers.

Finding #8: The teachers and leadership in the cases valued teacher models that emphasized teacher competency and responsibility, student growth and success, and caring relationships between teachers and students.

Finding #8a: They rejected teacher models that emphasized knowledge transmission without attention to student development and that depicted unrealistic teacher involvement in the lives of students.⁴¹

Teachers are the main force of nonformal CE. They carry out the mission of the church in tangible ways and embody the values of Christian life and thought that the church wants to cultivate and pass on. The cases in this study valued teachers who felt that teaching was a responsibility that requires competency and knowledge. In other words, teachers must have something to share with their students. All the cases rejected the mechanical transmission of knowledge and skills as being

⁴⁰Clements, 277.

⁴¹Ibid.

inadequate for teaching in the church because it engaged just head and hands while leaving out heart (i.e., spiritual and moral character). Though often imperfectly realized, their ideal CE teachers love to teach, love their students, and feel the weight of responsibility to share God’s Word in such a way that the students’ lives are transformed, they grow to maturity in their faith, and they’re ready to serve according to God’s plan for their lives.

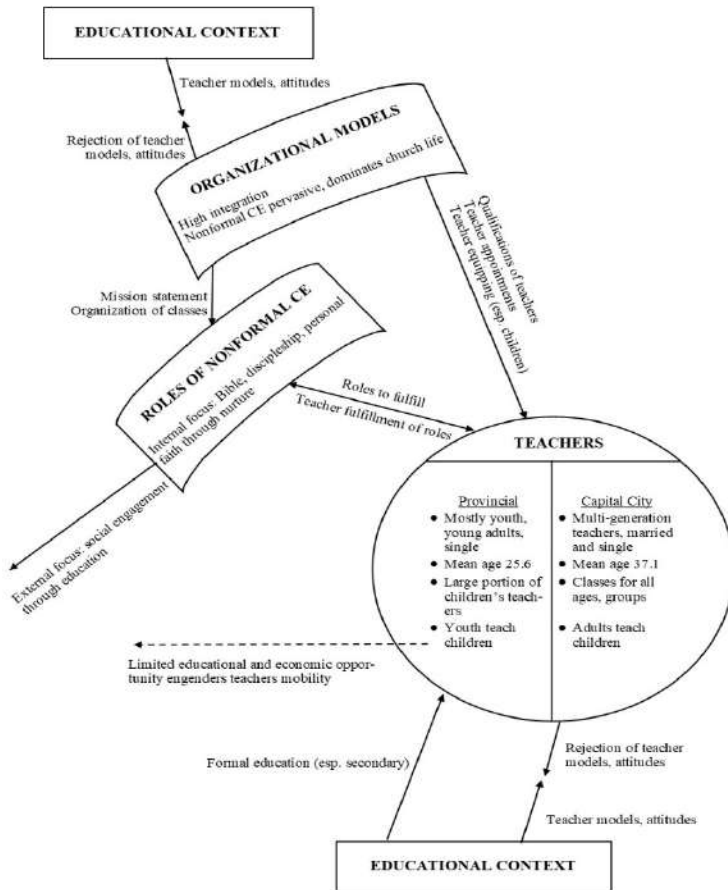


Figure 2. A model of approaches to nonformal CE among AGC churches⁴²

⁴²Clements, 272.

Implications for Nonformal CE in Similar Contexts⁴³

The findings of this multiple case study point to at least eight implications regarding nonformal Christian education among ACG churches. Some of these implications reflect positive findings from the data, while others reflect areas that could be strengthened. All are possible areas of transferability for churches with similar dynamics or in similar contexts. The eight implications that the findings revealed are as follows:

1. CE does not have to be a department in the church.

The literature I reviewed tended to address issues related to the departmentalization of CE in the local church because such was a natural progression for churches in the West.⁴⁴ As the churches became more sophisticated, they offered increasingly specialized program choices, which had to be maintained by people having specialized skills. In contrast, none of the cases in this study had a CE department or even a CE committee. Rather, nonformal CE pervaded their organizational models and activities in highly integrated ways.⁴⁵ I would offer the observation that all these cases were ‘teaching communities’⁴⁶ at heart; thus, I’d be surprised to see them develop CE departments as churches in the West have done.

2. Teaching is a good way to engage the community.

Teaching is natural to ACG churches. My field notes are full of reflections on how the research case churches taught through songs, testimonies, exhortations, sermons, ceremonies, and classes. When churches are genuine teaching communities, they can use their gift of teaching to help their communities—from literacy to educational support to social needs.

3. Prioritize the personal faith of teachers in the teacher-selection process.

I was surprised that the cases in this research prioritized genuine personal faith over biblical literacy in the selection of teachers. This choice was more than a pragmatic one made by a first-generation church. Indeed, it was the opposite of looking for ‘warm bodies’ to teach. The

⁴³Ibid., 287-290.

⁴⁴See Mark W. Cannister, “Organizational Models of Christian Education,” in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 150-157.

⁴⁵See Clements, 190-192 for a discussion of the data.

⁴⁶Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy Among the Oppressed* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 124.

case churches knew that vibrant, personal faith and a love for teaching would naturally be accompanied by a desire to know the Bible more; they also knew that the teachers would share that faith and their interest in the Scriptures with their students. Teachers cannot pass on what they do not possess; thus, personal faith is of vital importance.

4. Make teacher development an ongoing priority.

Teachers in formal school systems are usually required to participate in in-service training on a regular basis, in addition to the formal training they received to become teachers. In contrast, because most teachers in local churches are untrained volunteers, the leadership is responsible to provide basic training for new teachers and, hopefully, occasional training as their teaching ministry grows.

Most of the teachers in the cases in this research had been teaching for less than three years, which indicates that the churches were faced with continuous turnover. The stage of life of the volunteers teaching children was the main reason for this dynamic. There are many good reasons for youth and young adults to be involved in teaching children. Churches that want to cultivate this kind of volunteer-teaching ministry need to be proactive about training to ensure both the quality of teaching and a satisfying, fruitful experience for the volunteers.

Although church leadership may be able to do the training of teachers, there are many other good options, such as seminars and workshops. One excellent approach used by the cases in this study was to send teachers for specific-curriculum training. Some of the best teachers I observed gained their skills from curriculum workshops. Also, leadership assigned new teachers to work with experienced teachers, which is good if the experienced teachers are skillful. However, choice of mentors is important because mentors can only pass on what they themselves possess, both the good and the not so good.

5. Provide training for all teachers in the church, not just children’s teachers.

When we talk about teacher training, the discussion can easily move towards children’s teachers to the neglect of youth and adult teachers. Those who teach these groups are typically untrained volunteers as well. Training should be provided for all teachers and include philosophy of the ministry of teaching, basic teaching skills that are appropriate to the group they teach, the teacher’s spiritual disciplines, and biblical literacy.

6. Contextually appropriate curriculum is important.

Many teachers in this study said they had difficulty understanding, preparing, and explaining lessons. However, those who had a curriculum

with which they felt comfortable reported being more confident in their teaching and connected their students to the Bible more effectively. In contrast, those who created their own lessons, taught from material not designed for CE classes, and/or taught the stories from a children's Bible tended to be unclear as to the main point(s) of their lessons and were less effective in connecting the biblical text to daily life.

Notice, in defining curriculum, that I chose the words 'contextually appropriate' instead of the word 'contextualized', which implies a curriculum that uses cultural forms like as artwork and story-telling techniques. I am recommending something more mundane. Context-appropriate curriculum is easier for teachers to understand as they prepare and is more natural to use as they engage their students.

7. Youth *can* teach children.

With good supervision and mentoring, youth can be very effective as children's teachers. Many of the youth in this study said they loved teaching children. They also said that they experienced much growth in their faith as they prepared the lessons, prayed for their students, and tried to "live so that my life teaches."

The provincial churches had made teaching children one of the main functions of their youth ministries. In contrast, social stability of the city churches seemed to make it more difficult to connect the youth ministry and the children's classes; however, the youth who were involved made good contributions to children's classes and grew in their faith as they did so.

8. Learn from the educational context.

The churches in this study benefited from their nonformal CE context by evaluating what they perceived to be negative models. In other situations, a more formal educational context can provide good pedagogical principles and models for teacher-student relationships that match biblical ideals, make sense culturally and fit a church's style. It would be wise for churches to learn from good models in all levels of formal education, in adult education programs and in the educational approaches of other Christian traditions.

Conclusion

Teaching is one of the most basic functions of the church. As a Pentecostal denomination, the Assemblies of God-Cambodia has a high view of Scripture and a high expectation that God still speaks through his Word today. They read the Bible, listen to the Bible, sing passages from the Bible, study the Bible, and call the Bible their daily spiritual

food. Thus, it is not surprising that this first-generation church in a Buddhist-majority context simply presents the Bible on its own terms when proclaiming the Good News in their communities.

I still have questions about why the church growth I witnessed during 22 years in Cambodia (1997-2019) has not been accompanied by stronger growth in the ministry of teaching. The reason why the four churches represented in this research stand out from the norm is because they have cultivated a culture of teaching that strengthens the faith of their people as well as helps their communities. These four taught me much about teaching in the local church that has implications beyond the context of Cambodia. It is my prayer that what I learned from them can be useful to help other churches develop a culture of teaching as well.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Daniela C. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019). xii + 257 pp. \$49.99. paperback.

In this inspiring yet eruditely crafted vision of a Pentecostal public theology, Daniela Augustine delineates a theological ethic and practice of imaging God's face for the "common good," in manners robustly counter to contemporary de-humanizing violence against "ethnic, religious, political, cultural" human alterity (4, 11, 15). Coupled with her "Prologue" that biographically grounds the book's major themes within her 2011-2012 field research in Eastern Slavonia (where much of the violent ethnic-religious rooted 1990s Balkan conflicts transpired, leading to the break-up of the former Yugoslavia), Augustine beautifully explicates this vision through four chapters and a concluding "Epilogue."

Hence, we might also classify this work as a practical theology aimed towards funding practices within the liturgical life of Christian community, and its acts of witness within the public sphere. Yet I must stress that for Augustine, this public sphere comprises the whole world rather than just one immediate national locality. Her work is thus deeply missiological, with a consistent horizon aimed towards enjoining our accountability as Christians towards human and creational flourishing worldwide.

For those not familiar with its history, the phrase "common good," is a stock political notion dating back to Aristotle. We might at a base level define it as mutually recognised needs and aspirations a people might agree they share with one another, regardless of perceived differences. Hence, through her Prologue and first chapter ("From the Common Image to the Common Good") Augustine presents a "Pentecostal" contribution to a Christian vision of the "common good" emerging from the biblical imagery of "Pentecost" (9-10, 19, 49-51, 59-60).

She consistently argues how its imagery theologically suggests five themes that together clarify this vision. First, Pentecost paradigmatically portrays the inclusive "hospitality" of God, comprising the welcoming of human diversity within the *shared* "space" of Christ's body (51). Second, being "human" created in the image of the triune God, pre-eminently

means lovingly living for the *good* of “others,” particularly, those *different* from ourselves (9, 11, 27), which thus defines our human vocation (17, 27). Third, this responsibility derives from the “common image” we mutually mirror to God our creator (13-14, 27-28). Fourth, practicing this vocation describes the pedagogical ascetics that brings us into Christlikeness (11, 16-17, 27, 45-46, 52-54), and how we image God’s likeness within creation (21, 28, 46, 60). Finally, this divine pedagogy comprises the great lesson of the Eucharist. Namely, that God gives us the world to share with those different from us (11).

In chapter two (“From the Iconoclasm of Violence to Love as the Life of the New Creation”) Augustine applies this pneumatological vision to the problematics of human violence. Working from the first fratricide rooted in Cain and Abel’s “sibling rivalry” over perceived “limited goods” (65-89), she roots violence to this enduringly perceived predicament. She suggests then that human violence comprises iconoclastic efforts towards dismissing the “divine face” within human otherness (71-72, 77).

Drawing from the Old Testament prophetic tradition, Augustine’s antidote comprises “repentance” (101-102), meaning from “iconoclasm” to “covenantal accountability” towards the “face of the other” (107). Diagnosing how this malice malignantly shapes both market economies and human behaviour through its de-humanizing “secular liturgies,” in chapter three (“Recovering of Eucharistic Being in a Market-Shaped World”) Augustine delineates how practicing the Eucharist should pedagogically discipline us with practices of “sharing” aimed for global healing and flourishing (127-132, 145-147, 153-159). Then in chapter four (“From Forgiveness to the Common Good in the Spirit’s World-Mending”) she elucidates how practicing forgiveness primes us with visionary motivation towards actually labouring for the common good with those different from us, worldwide (164, 174).

In her Epilogue, Augustine weaves her first-hand interviews with Christian Balkan war survivors, into “a Hagiography of a Community Committed to the Common Good.” By “hagiography,” she refers to how their lives exemplify the “saintly life as a form of embodied, communicative ethical practice,” offering “a concrete, applied model of Christian ethics” (227). Hence, from these gathered chronologies of people practicing forgiveness, and “Christian peacebuilding” for the

good of their enemies during the war, the Epilogue presents a lived commentary on Christian “love”; here defined as “an embodied commitment to the well-being of the other, perceiving their physical and spiritual flourishing as inseparable from” their own (206).

Augustine thus posits that such “hagiographies” can iconically function as mediators of grace, empowering us towards “peacebuilding and reconciliation, economic justice, socio-political inclusion, and ecological renewal” (228). Frankly, I found these closing pages the most winsome and innovative part of Augustine’s work. Yet actually, we might best recognise that its inspiration rises not foremost from her poetic prose, but from the suffering labours of these Eastern Slavonian “saints” inspiring us through their example—to the true way of “Christoformation” (227).

Biographically speaking, this book reflects Augustine’s own Eastern European heritage and many years of ministry within that region, coupled with ecumenical involvement with the Eastern Orthodox tradition. In fact, Eastern Orthodox theology deeply funds this book’s themes. Along with Lévinasian-Derridean hospitality themed philosophy, Augustine has skilfully woven these elements into a brilliant, Pentecostal public theology for the “common good.” On a practical and level, she also regularly suggests how this theological vision translates into both liturgical practices of spiritual formation and missional practices of public witness and service.

I might add that, like her past works, this book exemplifies Augustine’s unique ornately-rich writing style. Yet as an example of constructive theology, her prose remains refreshingly inspiring, and provides us another needful Pentecostal foray within the genres of public, political, and even liturgical theology in the key of Pentecost. For these reasons, I recommend this book as a needful volume not only in these areas, but as inspirational resource towards a Pentecostal practice of spiritual formation and missional life style.

Monte Lee Rice
Victory International Church, Singapore

Henning Wrogemann, *A Theology of Interreligious Relations, Intercultural Theology: Volume Three, English edition* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2019). 528 pp. \$45.00 Hardcover, \$44.99 Ebook.

Henning Wrogemann, the Chair for Mission Studies, Comparative Religion, and Ecumenics at the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel, Germany, in *A Theology of Interreligious Relations* proposes to move away from a cognitive interpretation of the theology of religion and focus on “the phenomena at issue in real interreligious relations” (347). Wrogemann problematizes the existing interreligious models as “purely rational interpretive approaches” (21) that fail to consider the implications of diverse lived realities. Therefore, Wrogemann begins the book with an “obituary” (14) of the traditional threefold typology—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (chapters one and two) and lays out an interdisciplinary discourse spanning thirty-five chapters divided into six parts, where knowledge is assembled from identity theories, social science theories, and theological inquiries to propose a theology of interreligious relations.

In Part one (chapters three to nine), Wrogemann critically evaluates the existing theology-of-religion models based on how those approaches measure up in relation to Christian tradition. Wrogemann classifies the current models as revisionist (John Hick and Paul Knitter), interpretive (Michael von Bruck and Mark Heim), selective (Francis Clooney), and interactionist (Amos Yong). Such an evaluation aims to point out the inadequacies of those approaches in meeting the relational dynamics among people while holding fast to the Christian tradition.

In Part two (chapters ten to fifteen), while omitting Hinduism from the discussion, Wrogemann maps how Islam and Buddhism engage with other religions. Wrogemann evaluates the Islamic and Buddhist views based on their transreligious basis, categorical neutrality, soteriological scope, nature of ultimate reality, motifs of interreligious appreciation, and freedom for reforms. After providing a brief account of Islamic reformism (chapter ten), Wrogemann critically engages with Islamic scholars Farid Esack and Muhammad Shahrur to understand the Islamic theology of other religions. In engaging with the Buddhist view of other religions, Wrogemann identifies particular Buddhist teachings (Four

noble truths, the parable of the raft, emptiness, skillful means, and three-bodies doctrine) and discusses their implications for inter-religious engagements (chapter thirteen). Subsequently, Wrogemann also engages with prominent Buddhist thinkers (Anagarika Dharmapala, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Masao Abe, Thich Nhat Hanh, and John Makransky) to demonstrate the varying Buddhist approaches towards other religions.

In Part three (chapters sixteen to twenty-two), Wrogemann puts forth the building blocks for the theory and theology of interreligious relations after highlighting six fallacies that undergird the traditional Christian theology of religion models. These include: a) the *rationalist* fallacy, where the models perform with the “presupposition that people are guided primarily by their thought processes” (213); b) the *individualist* fallacy, as the models assume that it is the individuals who make decisions; c), the *monolinear fallacy*, where approaches make sweeping calls to recognize the other religion failing to consider the “spectrum of different positions between the poles of recognition and rejection” (215); d) the *elitist* fallacy where such theologies not only assume a specific categorization of theological understanding of particular religions but also expect a “high level of interpretive competency” (215); e) the fallacy of *forgetting the body* (i.e., human corporeality) where emotionally determined speech acts, spaces, and non-verbal physical actions are ignored in the existing interreligious theologies; d) the *religionist* fallacy, namely, overemphasizing religious doctrines while ignoring the historical, relational, societal, regional, and political aspects of religions at the grassroots level.

Subsequently, Wrogemann puts forth the building blocks for the theory of interreligious relations as a corrective to these fallacies by engaging with: a) the complexities of social *identity*-making responding to the question of what identity means; b) social dynamics of *inclusions and exclusions*; c) intricacies of *recognizing* one another in society; d) role of *public space* in making interreligious relations; and e) the importance of *pluralism*. For Wrogemann, in addition to *multiperspectivity*, which is imperative in approaching these building blocks, factors such as *media*, which considers the human body as a “key medium of perception” (298); *performance*, considering the “way or form of (re)presentation” which leads to religious performative ritualistic action (299); *spaces*, social and imaginary spaces that influence the creation of interreligious

relations; *boundaries*, which are “complex strategies of initiating, adjusting and perpetuating boundary-defining actions” (301); and *actors*, the collective-we who plays a role in shaping the religious configurations, are essential in developing an interreligious relations theory.

In Part four (chapters twenty-three to twenty-six), Wrogemann reconsiders the commonly recommended practice of dialogue as an interreligious engagement. Wrogemann begins the discourse by explaining the “various theories of dialogue” (305) such as contact dialogue (interact on regular intervals to remain courteous), information dialogue (where verbal exchanges occur to gather religious information), consensus dialogue (in pursuit of transreligious truth), and persuasion dialogue (to persuade the other to one’s religious truth). However, Wrogemann further directs the discussion towards the complex nature of the dialogue beyond verbal exchanges on doctrinal matters. The matters of societal power (caste system, Islamic laws, Christian demonological discourses), religious vs. secular societal moral conceptions, use of silence, and non-verbal gestures in dialogues are discussed to demonstrate the need for a “semiotic dimension to the dialogical” (322).

In Part five (chapters twenty-seven to thirty-two), unlike the theology-of-religion models that attempt to block “out the issue of interreligious rivalry” (347), Wrogemann proposes a theology of interreligious relations that acknowledge “the fact that competition can play an ongoing and . . . productive role in interreligious relation” (348). For Wrogemann, any religious adherent who believes that his/her religion contains the life-promoting teachings will try to convince others of such conviction. Therefore, the right question is “not whether such powers and rivalries should be permitted . . . [but] how to deal with them” (352). Additionally, Wrogemann calls for an honest engagement with the harsh religious texts that are “used pejoratively,” referring to the religious other (353).

Therefore, in constructing a Christian theology of interreligious relations, Wrogemann interacts with some harsh biblical texts while employing a trinitarian framework for his discussion. Wrogemann engages with Old Testament texts that testify the jealous, angry, and vengeful Father God to “identify the life-promoting potentialities”

embedded within them that call for love, justice, and hope (367). In engaging with Jesus Christ, Wrogemann identifies the relationality of Jesus Christ, highlighting his emotionality and body language to provide a rationale for an interreligious communicative action. In discussing Holy Spirit's role, Wrogemann engages with 1 Peter to expound on recognition, where an "inclusionary-attractive lifestyle" is demanded of Christians as a basis for an ethics of interreligious recognition (395).

In Part six (chapters thirty-three to thirty-five), although unrelated to the book's central thesis, Wrogemann summarizes his *Intercultural Theology* trilogy where this book is the final volume. Therefore, Wrogemann understands the emergence of intercultural theology as a discipline in conversation with mission studies and religious studies attempting to provide a voice for various Christianities from the non-western world, both lived and doctrinal in its respective cultural, societal and neighboring religious configurations.

Collectively, *A Theology of Interreligious Relations* calls us to consider the importance of relations amid religious diversity. Within the broader Christian scholarship of inter-religious discourse, at first, Wrogemann's proposal may sound like a repackaging, as from the mid-twentieth century onwards, the mainline Protestants and Catholics have strived to convince the Christian world, namely the evangelicals, of the importance of relationship in religious diversity. However, unlike such previous attempts, Wrogemann's proposal is a breath of fresh air as he takes an interdisciplinary approach, gathering insights from social scientists and other theorists, along with theological reflection.

However, from a critical perspective, Wrogemann's proposal seems to sidestep two important aspects. First, although Wrogemann incorporates various interviews and life stories from the Global south to make the arguments, there is an evident lack of engagement with non-western scholars. Given that the scholars from the Global south have been living in an interreligious relational context for centuries and, at least since the 1938 Tambaram Conference, have been very active in debates and writings about interreligiosity, interacting with a few non-western Christian scholars (Stanley Samartha, Raimundo Panikkar, Vinod Ramachandra, Wesley Ariarajah and Ajith Fernando to name a few) would have added significant value to Wrogemann's overall thesis.

Second, although Wrogemann rightfully calls to consider relations as a theological imperative for interreligious engagement, other than dialogue, Wrogemann did not propose any constructive relational practices for interreligious engagement. As contemporary scholarship suggests practices such as friendship and hospitality as necessary, in addition to dialogue, Wrogemann's lack of engagement with such practices fails to elucidate how he envisions his theology of interreligious relations being practiced.

Nonetheless, these gaps should not deter anyone from engaging with the book. Along with the creative interdisciplinary approach towards religious diversity, the book's strength mainly lies in its critique of the existing theology-of-religion paradigm. Wrogemann's call for relations should be heeded as a gentle reminder to value the grassroots realities in our pursuit of theologizing, which too often solely relies on theoretical, philosophical propositions.

Allan Varghese
Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, USA

Kenneth R. Ross, Francis D. Alvarez, and Todd M. Johnson, editors, *Christianity in East and Southeast Asia*, Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020). 549 pages. \$230 hardcover.

This massive volume is the fourth in a series of volumes on global Christianity done through a “combination of demographic and interpretative essays by indigenous scholars and authors” (viii), following the successful pioneering efforts reflected in the *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010*. Each volume “is devoted to a continent, or sub-continent as designated by the United Nations” (viii). The series editors, Ross and Johnson, add a third editor for each volume which, in turn, has its own editorial advisory board, to define and shape the issues for each volume, as well as reviewing demographics and recruiting the authors needed for that volume (ix). In this case, the co-editor, Francis D. Alvarez, a Filipino Jesuit, heads a team of forty-three authors for this edition. In general, the authors represent a good cross section of Christianity, although the Pentecostal/Charismatic (PC) tradition, which represents 32% of the Christians in the region (9) are represented only by Wonsuk and Julie Ma (xiv-xviii). This may be partially explained by the fact that most of the other traditions have a longer history in Asia, including academics, but the number of qualified PC scholars in the region has risen markedly in the last thirty years and makes this imbalance somewhat difficult to understand.

This volume combines two regions, East and Southeast Asia. The book is divided into three sections, rather than chapters, with numerous articles or essays in each section. The Introduction opens the book with a lot of helpful demographic information on Christianity in the region, using an impressive and comprehensive array of colored maps and charts that are easy to follow. Alvarez then follows with a general overview of Christianity throughout the two regions.

The first section is called “Countries.” The essays that follow, in general geographically moving from north to south and west to east, describe the state of Christianity within the cultural, geographical and political context in each country. The second section is entitled “Major Christian Traditions” with separate articles on Anglicans, Independents, Orthodox, Protestants, Catholics, Evangelicals and Pentecostals and

Charismatics (PC). The separate section on Independents is indicative of the vast numbers of independent traditions in that part of the world. The PC is unique in that it cuts across all of these traditions.

The third section, “Key Themes,” includes essays on Faith and Culture, Worship and Spirituality, Theology, Social and Political Context, Mission and Evangelism, Gender, Religious Freedom, Inter-religious Relations, Migration and the Colonial and Postcolonial Context, all of which are critical themes in Asia today. Since signs and wonders are a significant part of Christianity in Asia one might have wished for a separate essay on this issue, but, overall, the subjects dealt with here are excellent and substantial.

The book concludes with an essay on the future of Christianity in the two regions by Mary Ho, several appendices and an exhaustive index in the back. Overall, the coverage is excellent, comprehensive, and well written. No footnotes are provided, but each article has a short bibliography. As with any book, especially one of this size, scope and magnitude, there are a number of issues that could have been addressed or treated in a somewhat different manner, which I would like to mention here.

Alvarez, in his introductory essay (24-26) appears to endorse the practices of Folk Catholicism while giving no hint to the plethora of Scriptures that denote a better way to deal with the realities of the spirit world, although he does accurately suggest that the growth of the Pentecostal movement may be linked to its emphasis on “the activity of the Spirit” (24).

Meehyun Chung (119-131) correctly notes that the emphasis in Korean Christianity on the role of the pastor and the weaknesses of this model, but she does not mention that the antidote is to give more emphasis to empowering the laity (129) in a manner consistent with Ephesians 4:11-12. She also well notes the tensions and struggles of authoritarian hierarchical leadership in the churches, but does not mention that this may also be a strong contributing factor in the numerous denominational splits in South Korea. She also gives scant attention to the Pentecostal movement there nor does she mention their strong spiritual and social impact on Korean society.

In their otherwise fine article on Thailand, Seree Lorgunpai and Sanurak Fongvarin do not even mention the animism that is so prevalent

in their country that has just as strong a grip on the people's lives, if not more so, than Buddhism. Unfortunately, Jayeel Cornelio, does the same regarding folk Catholicism in the Philippines (242-253), as does Daniel Pilario in his essay on Catholicism (310-22) in the section on *Major Christian Traditions*. Sulistyowati Irianto, writing on Indonesia (200-211), also does not deal with folk Islam or folk Protestantism, nor does she mention the PC Movement, except to acknowledge that they have been one of the fastest growing elements of Christianity in Indonesia from the years 1970-2020 (201). Given that they comprise 33% of the Christian community (9), this omission is difficult to understand.

The article on the Orthodox (283-294) by Nikolay Samoylov, with a case study on Korea by Korean Orthodox metropolitan Ambrose-Aristotle Zographos (Song-Am Cho), represents a study in lack of contextualization, which likely contributes to Orthodoxy's small impact. Only 62,000 of the nearly 282 million (0.0%) Christians in the regions considered are Orthodox (285), down from .01 in 1970 (284) and indicating that the growth of Orthodoxy has not kept up with other Christian traditions. They admit that the Orthodoxy in East and Southeast Asia is heavily impacted by the Orthodox countries, especially Russia. From references scattered through the essay, their churches appear to be comprised mostly of expatriates although more recent trends reflect a growing indigenous representation (283). The authors claim that the Orthodox have a "significant history in China, Japan and Korea" (283) but this is not substantiated by these figures.

Moreover, the lack of contextualization is clear in their admission that most of the liturgical texts used were imported and simply translated into Japanese (287), Kymer in Cambodia (287) and Laotian (291), and presumably other Asian languages. Although some indigenous texts have recently appeared in Japanese (287), this means that the cultures in which the liturgies were written were also imported with little effort to contextualize (287). What I find disappointing is that the authors show a lack of awareness of the obvious correlation between the lack of contextualization and the slow growth of Orthodoxy. One can hope that the recent trends noted here will lead to a brighter future for the Orthodox.

Julie Ma, my mentor for both my master's thesis and doctoral dissertation on animistic practices in the Philippines, contributes an

excellent essay on Pentecostals and Charismatics (335-347). She accurately roots the Pentecostalism of Asia in the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles from 1906-1909, and the Charismatic and Third Wave renewal movements in the States (335), as well as the impact of the Pyongyang revival in 1907 in her native Korea. Surprisingly, however, she does not give more than passing attention to the deep connection between the Pentecostal emphasis on the person and power of the Holy Spirit and the traditional religious consciousness nearly universal in Asia, except for mentioning things like power encounters (344), despite the fact that she gives significant attention to this in some of her other writings (i.e., *When The Spirit Meets the Spirits*, Peter Lang, 2000). In my own research over the last twenty-five years, mainly in the Philippines, I conclude that this deep spiritual connection may be more significant to the growth of the PC movement in Asia than the western roots of the Movement, although it does give rise to legitimate concerns about Folk Pentecostalism.

Alexander Chow's essay on theology (375-385) correctly notes the impact of western theology in Asia, but the thrust of his work deals with interaction with the formal writings and scriptures of the main religious traditions and some formal Christian responses to them. He correctly notes that "theology (or theologies) in East and Southeast Asia reflects the complexities and diversities of this vast region" (385). But except for mentioning Mateo Ricci's Chinese Rites Controversy, he ignores the animistic or traditional religious practices in Asia and their impact on theology. He also does not acknowledge the growing Pentecostal theological corpus at all, nor of the manner in which Pentecostals have successfully engaged the indigenous religious consciousness. On the other hand, his lacuna here should send a message to Pentecostals that they need to keep writing.

With these issues noted, however, I believe that the volume, magisterial in its sweep, makes an excellent contribution to scholarship in Asian Christianity and I heartily encourage a wide readership.

Dave Johnson
Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines

Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and K. K. Yeo, editors, *All Things New: Eschatology in the Majority World*, Majority World Theology Series (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2019). 159 pp. \$24.99 paperback.

The importance of Majority World theological voices is slowly being recognized by scholars in the western world, and the Majority World Theology Series is helping to promote these voices. The goal of this series is to produce “biblical and theological textbooks that are about, from, and to the Majority World” (third page of unnumbered front matter). *All Things New*, the most recent volume in the series, is a collection of essays that brings to light some of the eschatological beliefs held by Christians in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In this book, each region was represented by one biblical and one theological scholar, thus ensuring not only an inclusion of underrepresented theological and cultural voices, but also a diversity of approaches to the theological and hermeneutical nuances present in these cultures.

All Things New consists of an introduction, seven chapters, and some indices, including short bios for the contributors. Each chapter contains copious footnotes and a short list of suggested readings for those interested in further study. The essays are short enough to be read in a single sitting, though readers unfamiliar with the worldviews, theological movements, and political histories of the countries included in this volume may find some chapters difficult to follow on a first reading. This book provides some invaluable insights into Majority World Christianity and is worth the effort of reading.

The book opens with a brief introduction by Stephen T. Pardue in which he highlights the importance placed upon eschatology in early Christianity, including the ministry of Jesus, and laments its declining importance in most modern western systematic theologies. He moves on to discuss the important role eschatology plays in Majority World Christianity and then provides summaries for the seven chapters in this volume. Following this is a chapter by D. Stephen Long in which he attempts to answer the question of how to interpret apocalyptic literature for eschatology, interweaving this with the arenas of ethics and political theology. He presents Christian Zionism as “an eschatologically charged political movement that seeks to create political conditions that would

lead to the second coming of Jesus” (16); and he argues that while this teaching has little support from western New Testament scholars, it is still present and influential in many Majority World eschatologies. In the remaining half of his essay Long discusses the decline and reemergence of eschatology in western Christian thought, explores the relationship between apocalyptic, ethics, and political society, and ends by introducing his idea for an apocalyptic imagination that is more focused on God’s presence than anything else.

Chapters two and three, authored by James Kombo and John Ekam, are focused on the African worldview and Christian experience. Kombo, a Kenyan minister and theologian, discusses not only eschatology from an African worldview, but also how eschatology can be brought to bear on the larger African situation. He mentions that African Christians still ask questions about death and the existence of the dead after physical death, and that there are three critical aspects of the African worldview through which Christian eschatology can speak to the African situation: 1) their approach to death, dying, and living on after death; 2) the question of ancestors, spirits, and divinities; and 3) the modes of time, events, and seasons in African cosmology. He also lists six areas in which African theological thought can benefit global Christian thought. Ekem, a New Testament scholar from Ghana, explores Revelation as apocalyptic literature and, more specifically, how an African exegesis of Revelation 2:1-4 can impact Ghanaian eschatology. Before discussing his interpretation of this passage, he explores the different types of apocalyptic literature, some of the primary themes in this type of literature, and how poor hermeneutical approaches to apocalyptic have led to the extremes of religious fanaticism on one end, and apathy towards social, political, environmental conditions on the other.

Alberto F. Roldán and Nelson R. Morales Fredes introduce various Latin American eschatological movements in chapters four and five. Roldán, an Argentinian theologian, begins by explaining two types of dispensationalism, then explores eschatology in Spanish theological literature, three influential movements in Latin American theology and their social and political aspects, and concludes with the presence of eschatology in the songs of Evangelical Christians in Latin America. Fredes, a Guatemalan New Testament scholar, explores the kingdom of God from a Latin American perspective by discussing the Kingdom and

the Nicene Creed, four distinct theological viewpoints on the kingdom of God in Mark 1:14-15, then offering his own approach to the Kingdom and Christian discipleship. Of the four groups whose teachings he examines in this chapter, he classifies two as external influences on Latin American thinking—traditional Catholicism and dispensationalism—and two as internal or more logical to the Latin American context—liberation theology and the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL).

In the final two chapters some of the Asian eschatological and theological contexts are introduced by Aldrin Peñamora, a theologian from the Philippines, and Shirley S. Ho, an Old Testament scholar from Taiwan. Peñamora discusses the pluriformity of peoples and cultures of Asia, examines two Korean and two Chinese eschatological movements, then moves into a critique of eschatologies that focus too much on otherworldly eschatological hopes which cause their adherents to largely ignore the responsibility of attempting to transform their societies. Ho focuses her essay on three primary topics: Taiwanese exegesis of Isaiah 2:1-5, the Jewish-centered reading of this passage, and her proposal to combine this reading with a reworked version of Ta-Tung (a utopian vision). Both authors say that some Christian groups in China place a major focus on evangelizing Israel, and Jewish people in general, because they believe that this is part of God's plan for Chinese Christianity in the last days.

The only complaint this reviewer has with the material found in *All Things New* is one of the comments made by Long in the introduction. Long says that the restoration of Israel, something he considers to be one of the most important themes in eschatology, is present in the Nicene Creed. However, there is no explicit or implicit reference to Israel's restoration in the Creed and Long does not explain how or where this teaching is found in it. There are other beliefs and hermeneutical approaches presented in the book that may seem surprising or disagreeable to readers, but this is to be expected when reading theologians from different cultural and denominational backgrounds.

This reviewer believes that *All Things New* is a challenging read that will be a valuable investment for ministers and scholars interested in global theological perspectives. The volume's contributors present their topics clearly, provide ample footnotes and reading suggestions, and are

cognizant that they are presenting only a few of the eschatological perspectives present in the Majority World churches.

Stephen P. Todd
The Crossing Church, McCalla, Alabama, USA

Timoteo D. Gener and Stephen T. Pardue, editors, *Asian Christian Theology: Evangelical Perspectives* (Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library and Asian Theological Association, 2019). xv + 334 pp. \$43.99 hardcover; \$21.99 paperback; \$14.99 Kindle.

Years ago, the idea of articulating an *Asian Christian Theology* seemed implausible due to the broadness and diversity of Asia. The term *Asia* covers the five major regions of Central Asia, Eastern Asia, Southern Asia, Southeastern Asia, and Western Asia. The broadness of these geographic landmarks, the diversity of cultures and histories, and the multifariousness of the theological tensions within these regions were too daunting for scholars to even contemplate the idea of an *Asian* theology. Yet, now, the Asian Theological Association, in partnership with Langham Partners, considered it high time to offer a first attempt towards theologizing in the Asian Evangelical perspective. The aim is to provide a theological approach that is “biblically-rooted, historically aware, contextually engaged, and broadly evangelical” (2). In a large continent rife with popular—even folk—belief systems, the book’s collaborators faced the challenge of self-reflection and contextualization to provide much needed guidance for the growing number of Asian Christians.

Two premises undergird the book, *Asian Christian Theology: Evangelical Perspectives*. First is the knowledge that Christianity is still seen as a foreign religion in Asia, and therefore, many doctrinal statements are considered a “white-man’s” belief system. Second is that many different theologies and popular beliefs can confuse Asians on what true Christianity is all about. With these premises in mind, the book, which is composed of 16 essays, is divided into two parts. The first part is made up of eight essays on doctrinal themes ranging from Divine Revelation to Eschatology. The second part is made up of eight essays on contemporary concerns like suffering, Christians’ role in the public square, Jesus and other gods, cultural identity, and diaspora. In both parts, the book’s editors and authors ensured that the essays were theologies made by Asians for Asians. That is, pressing questions were answered in a way that would make sense to the locals, using local concepts or imageries that speak clearly to the immediate community without losing the ability to impact the global body of Christ. All essays were written academically well and aimed at enriching ecclesial engagement in the Asian setting.

A case in point would be Timoteo D. Gener’s essay on Divine Revelation and the practice of Asian Theology. After briefly surveying the Doctrine of Divine Revelation’s development globally, he puts forward a proposition for Asian theologians to use not just doctrinal

orthodoxy but also their lived experience as a theological resource, so that “the *reality* of the risen Lord is known in a localizing and directional way” (30). Basically, what makes this approach Asian is its use of context as a secondary source; recognizing that “Asia’s ‘gifts’ of spirituality, meditative prayer, the religions, and a strong family orientation are resources that could enrich the universal body of Christ, when appropriated discerningly” (32).

Lalsangkima Pachuau, in writing about cultural identity and theology in Asia, highlighted the missionary endeavors and cultural adaptation of notable people in Asian Church history like Francis Xavier of the Society of Jesus, William Carey, Adoniram Judson, and John Sung. Yisu Das Tiwari’s story was particularly interesting. Yisu Das, a Hindu Brahmin who converted into Christianity, experienced the conflict between his allegiance to Christ and his local culture (201). Because his Hindu Brahmin community rejected him, he had no choice but to exchange his community for the Christian community (201). At the end of his life, Yisu Das wished he could have remained in his previous community to witness to them (202). On the other hand, John Sung, a Chinese who was converted to Christianity, was at home with his Chinese folk culture and was able to reach many Chinese laity. However, he was often shunned by some pastors and church leaders for his style. His style though represented an “indigenous evangelism of grassroots-level Chinese Christianity” (203). From these stories one can see that in Asia there is a conflict between Christian faith and local culture, as well as a need to reconcile that Christian faith with the local culture. Pachuau proposes that it is possible to hold on to both of the tensions by submitting one’s culture to Christ’s transformative work; one can retain distinctive cultural traits, as long as one submits their community’s culture towards God-likeness (218).

Also, in his essay, Kang-San Tan used Hans Frei’s typology of theology for religious encounters in the Asian context to assist mission practitioners in interacting with non-Christian religious worldviews (279). Recognizing the multi-religiosity of Asia, Tan proposes that Christian theologians can take advantage of the differing religions and spiritualities, as an avenue to strengthen faith articulations while interacting with adherents of different religions. His proposition agrees with Ivan Satyavatra’s assertion in chapter eleven that Asian Christian theologians and practitioners have no choice but to participate in interfaith relationships because of the existence of religious pluralism. Satyavrata encourages theologians and practitioners to recognize the seriousness of these diversities, while proclaiming the uniqueness of Jesus and his gospel with courage, humility and sensitivity (229).

The above mentioned are just a few examples of how the book endeavored to theologically engage with the Asian church in mind. All in all, each authors' attempt to articulate a truly contextual Asian Christian theology is admirable. Each author dealt with the most pressing questions of their topic. There was also critical engagement between the Christian faith and the realities of diverse cultures all over Asia. Most importantly, each author proposes a way forward, giving readers, missionary practitioners, and future theologians a model for theologizing in a contextually-relevant manner.

There is no doubt that the editors, Timoteo D. Gener and Stephen T. Pardue, excelled in forging a pioneer academic literature not just for Asian Christians, but for global Christianity. It provides a much-needed tool and framework for Asian scholars. This book fills one's heart with hope that soon Asians can firmly say, "Christianity is every man's religion."

Lora Angeline Embudo Timenia
Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines

Robert P. Menzies, *Christ-Centered: The Evangelical Nature of Pentecostal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020). xxi + 166 pp. \$24.00 paperback.

Christ Centered “is, above all, a call to remember,” Robert Menzies remarks in the Introduction (xv). This review will summarize the content and impetus for this remembering and offer some brief comments on the work.

In the first two parts of the book, the author embarks on a pilgrim’s journey through the Evangelical origins and foundations of Pentecostal theology, offering snapshots that when viewed in tandem, support an unmistakable conclusion: Pentecostals, who affirm the authority of the Bible, cherish a personal relationship with Jesus and are committed to sharing the good news with all peoples, are firmly situated inside the Evangelical family (xv). Menzies seeks to strengthen the bonds of family unity by challenging generalizations, affirming shared commitments and history and highlighting ways in which the Pentecostal Movement and broader Evangelicalism have enriched each other’s theology and practice. In Part I (chapter 1), Menzies accomplishes this by examining the life and teachings of R. A. Torrey, who might be called the “Father of Fundamentalism”—or could he rightly be seen as the progenitor of the Pentecostal Movement (“his most faithful and significant theological heir,” according to Menzies, 3)? Torrey’s family background, scholarly community and negative personal experiences led him to distance himself from Pentecostals (24-33). However, much of Torrey’s work exerted formative influence on the movement: his understanding of Spirit baptism as a definite experience, which is separate from regeneration and that empowers witness; his penchant to elevate Lukan pneumatology and emphasize the normative link between the early church and believers today; and his “treasure trove of promises” approach to the Bible, especially Acts (31-33). Furthermore, Torrey’s example shows that just as not all Pentecostals are “wild-eyed enthusiasts,” other Evangelicals are not all “sterile rationalists” (139). Rather, our theology and praxis are remarkably similar.

Part II (chapters 2–4) focuses on the Evangelical foundations of Pentecostal theology. Menzies surveys the three most distinctive doctrines of the Pentecostal Movement in order to demonstrate that they

are firmly grounded in Scripture. This, he asserts, is the wellspring of the movement's longevity and the essence of its uniqueness among many charismatic movements in history that have failed to impact mainstream, global Christianity (37). In chapter 2, Menzies pleads for Luke's pneumatology to have a seat at the table along with Paul's. He interprets the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a prophetic empowering against the backdrop of Numbers 11:24-30 and other Old Testament texts that anticipate a corporate refining and a mobilization of God's people to fulfill Israel's calling to be a light to the nations (44-49). Chapter 3, on the other hand, invites the reader to examine glossolalia from Paul's perspective and with contextual sensitivity (1 Cor. 12-14 vis-à-vis other salient New Testament texts), particularly as doxological prayer, intercession, and a corporate expression of worship (56-70). Menzies concludes that Paul had a positive outlook on tongues, although Paul sought to correct abuse of this spiritual gift (71). Signs and wonders as the visible manifestations of God's kingdom are the focus of chapter 4. Menzies demonstrates through careful textual analysis that Luke "nowhere describes the kingdom of God as something that is simply internal and spiritual" (81). Rather, it is the "realm where God's authority is exercised and acknowledged" (81). As believers enter through faith, it is right for us to continue to pray for and expect miracles (Luke 11:2; Acts 4:21); this is part of our holistic, present-tense experience of salvation. Here, the author argues that the translation "the kingdom of God is *among* you" in Luke 17:20-21 better indicates the kind of kingdom Jesus had in mind (73-83). Menzies offers an Evangelical corrective to potential triumphalism by reminding Pentecostals that this "theology of glory" must walk hand-in-hand with the "theology of the cross" that is likewise anchored in the Bible (85).

In Parts III and IV, we see that the book's *remembering* has a future orientation and a very pressing relevance. First, Menzies examines the Evangelical trajectory of Pentecostal theology. He illustrates some of the Pentecostal Movement's contributions to the global Church through conscientious readings of Paul and Luke. Chapter 5 fleshes out how Jesus' *Abba* prayer encapsulates the Evangelical distinctives of "the gospel, personal relationship with God in Christ, and involvement in missions" (102). Pentecostals faithfully extend this intimacy through their experience, worship, and evangelism. In chapter 6, Menzies exegetes

Acts 2:17-21 in order to illuminate Luke's overall theological purpose—for believers to continue emulating the ministries of Jesus and the apostles. The author notes how Pentecostals' "their stories are our stories" hermeneutic (105) and commitment to worldwide evangelism align with and honor Luke's intentions.

Finally, Part IV (chapter 7) offers a nuanced rejoinder to Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's "Pentecostal Pneumatology of Religions" essay (in Kärkkäinen, ed., *The Spirit in the World*, 2009), and by extension, the work of Amos Yong. These prolific Fuller professors call for reflection on the Spirit's empowering activity and presence outside the realm of the Church. Their vision includes what they believe is a robustly Pentecostal theology of religions—but is this an accurate description? Menzies offers a brief synopsis of Kärkkäinen's essay then moves to address the issues of Pentecostal identity, biblical authority/theological method and inclusivism. First, Menzies pushes back against Kärkkäinen's conclusion that the diversity of the Pentecostal Movement precludes speaking of it as a whole, positing instead that Pentecostal identity is remarkably congruent in light of the movement's clear theological message and unwavering commitment to the biblical narrative and worldview (125-26). Second, he addresses the need for the primacy of the Bible in a truly Pentecostal theological method. While Pentecostals do indeed value social engagement and political action, this flows naturally from our grounding good news story. Menzies concludes that it is to Pentecostals' advantage to continue featuring "a message that clearly centers on the word of God" (130) rather than to place one foot in the political or social arena then stretch the other foot toward Scripture. Third, Menzies turns to Kärkkäinen's and Yong's inclusivistic theology of religions. This is not compatible, he argues, either with the beliefs of most Pentecostals or with the New Testament apostolic witness (132-36; see 136-37 for analysis of the particular vs. universal work of the Spirit). Many of Kärkkäinen's and Yong's theological constructs consist of familiar words (e.g., *empowerment*, *baptism in the Spirit*, *Pentecostal*) divested of familiar meanings. As a community, Pentecostals are not seeking to lay another foundation or to move the ancient boundary markers (to borrow analogies). Menzies queries whether their vaguely Spirit-oriented, phenomenologically-based, "expansive" theology that is informed by but not tethered to the Bible is at home in the Pentecostal Movement, and

the answer is a resounding “no!” This is precisely why the Pentecostal Movement must remain tethered to our Evangelical heritage and the commitments we hold in common.

I found this work to be fresh but not faddish; generous yet forthright; and well-documented but not inaccessibly academic. Menzies presents poignant, precise, and well-reasoned arguments. *Christ-Centered* is peppered with stories from his missionary work in Asia that impart humanness and heart, strengthen the credibility of his proposals, and temper the density of the work. This timely book succeeds in its mission to house the Pentecostal Movement inside the structure of Evangelicalism, built upon the foundation of Christ, the apostles, and the Scriptures, and to identify points of contact that can foster familial empathy and appreciation. Since it is mostly a compilation of essays written at different times and for various purposes, it is more like a stained-glass window than a panorama. However, the picture it presents is largely cohesive, except perhaps for chapter 5, which I thought wove together too many themes to constitute a focused contribution to the book’s development. In addition, I wondered whether R. A. Torrey might object to this “arranged marriage” with a Pentecostal bride. Finally, the author could enhance the book by using more gender-inclusive language (e.g., “every scholar worth his salt,” 111).

Faith Lund
Global Worker

Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit, Theology for the People of God* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020). xxxi + 543 pp. \$44.99 hardcover.

As one might assume from its name, the *Theology for the People of God* series endeavors to provide ecclesially-focused (i.e., in service to the contemporary church) theological perspectives not only on the traditional loci of systematic theology but also other relevant topics (xxi–xxii). Each volume in the series is written from “a theological outlook that is convictionally Baptist and warmly evangelical” (xxi–xxii). Moreover, each contribution is co-authored so as to foster the successful “integration of biblical and systematic theology in dialog with historical theology and with application to church and life” (xxii). Here, Andreas J. Köstenberger, research professor of New Testament and biblical theology and director of the Center for Biblical Studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri, contributes the biblical-theological presentation of pneumatology in the first half of the volume. Gregg R. Allison, professor of Christian theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, then presents the systematic-theological treatment of pneumatology in the latter half of the book. Both authors are well known for exceptional contributions to their respective fields, and this collaborative effort makes yet another fine contribution reflecting the kind of seasoned scholarly contemplation of the subject that one might expect from them.

“Part I: Biblical Theology” consists of eleven chapters. Following the first chapter, which covers introductory matters, the Old Testament is covered in four chapters, including the Pentateuch (chapter 2), the Historical Books and Wisdom Books (chapter 3), the Prophetic Books (chapter 4), and “The Old Testament’s Contribution to a Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit” (chapter 5). Next, the New Testament is covered in five chapters, including the Gospels (chapter 6), Acts (chapter 7), Paul (chapter 8), General Epistles and Revelation (chapter 9), and “The New Testament’s Contribution to a Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit” (chapter 10). Rounding out this section of the book are chapter 11, “A Biblical-Theological Synthesis of the Holy Spirit in Scripture,” and an appendix listing references to the Spirit within Scripture. One complaint here is that the arrangement involves the separation of Luke

from Acts and the piecemeal evaluation of the Johannine corpus (with John's Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation placed in distinct sections), thus obscuring their distinctive contributions.

"Part II: Systematic Theology" consists of fourteen chapters. This portion of the volume begins with "Introduction, Methodology, Central Themes, and Assumptions of a Systematic Theology of the Holy Spirit" (chapter 12). Next, one finds chapters on "The Deity and Personhood of the Holy Spirit" (chapter 13), "The Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity: Intratrinitarian Relations" (chapter 14), "The Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity: Trinitarian Processions and Missions" (chapter 15). Following these are chapters on the Holy Spirit vis-à-vis creation and providence (chapter 16), Scripture (chapter 17), angelic beings (chapter 18), human beings and sin (chapter 19), Christ (chapter 20), salvation (chapter 21), the church (chapter 22), and the future (chapter 23). Drawing the volume to a close are chapter 24, "Contemporary Issues in Pneumatology," and chapter 25, "Conclusion."

This volume represents a tremendous attempt at integrative collaboration between a biblical theologian and a systematic theologian, and for the most part the respective portions of the book nicely complement each other. At the same time, the more exegetically oriented reader may feel that some of the more speculative musings about intratrinitarian relations, eternal processions, and the like lack sufficient exegetical foundations.

One other area of concern pertains to the authors' remarks concerning Jesus's reception of the Spirit. They are rightly concerned to explain the activity of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus in accordance with a theologically sound christological and trinitarian framework. In the Gospels, "Jesus is shown to accomplish his ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit, but his possession of the Spirit is a function of his divinity rather than the latter being merely the result of the former" (55). Consequently, the activity of the Spirit in Jesus's ministry is properly "viewed within the context of a divine Christology and monotheism, designating Jesus as the Spirit-anointed Messiah and Son of God" (55). Köstenberger here distances himself from James D. G. Dunn (55 note 2). Later in the volume, Allison argues against what he regards as an improper Spirit Christology as exemplified by scholars like Gerald F. Hawthorne (362–66). Stemming from these theological

commitments over against some exegetically driven observations, the book contains some apparently tensive statements regarding Jesus's empowerment by the Spirit. On one hand we read, "Given that the evangelists consistently take note of the Spirit's coming upon Jesus at his baptism (Matt 3:16/ Mark 1:10/ Luke 3:22/ John 1:32–33), we are doubtless to understand that the Spirit empowers Jesus for the earthly ministry, which his baptism inaugurates" (213). Also, the Spirit "anointed Jesus for his messianic ministry (Acts 10:38)" (99), and "the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit at his baptism . . . marks the beginning of his messianic mission" (184). These remarks rather clearly communicate that Jesus was empowered by the Spirit for his ministry beginning at his baptism. This appears to be a sound interpretive conclusion. On the other hand, "from the beginning of the Son's incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth, continuing throughout Jesus's entire earthly life, and culminating in Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension, the Holy Spirit fills and enriches the God-man without measure" (362). "It is as the incarnate Son of God, fully divine and fully human, completely and always dependent on God the Father and completely and always filled with God the Holy Spirit, that Jesus proclaims the gospel of the kingdom, resists temptation, disciples the Twelve, confronts his enemies, performs miracles, suffers, is crucified, rises again, and ascends into heaven" (365; see 353: "[T]he incarnate Son is filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment of conception and lives the entirety of his earthly life in dependence on the Holy Spirit indwelling him"; also 63 note 27: "The conception of Jesus in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit suggests that he is filled with the Spirit from birth"). One is left wondering in what sense, then, Jesus receives empowerment at his baptism. Perhaps the authors believe that the "*public reception* of this boundless anointing by the Spirit occur[ring] at Jesus's baptism" (354, italics mine) is merely an outward display of what was already true in Jesus's prior experience. If so, it would seem that he is not actually *empowered* in any meaningful sense at that moment in time. In any case, it appears that theological concerns here may have overridden exegetical ones.

In chapter 24, a section entitled "Spirit-Emphasizing Movements" (464–70) surveys Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement, and third-wave evangelicalism, highlighting what the authors regard as distinctive elements as well as weaknesses. This section concludes with an

admonition: “Our pneumatology urges believers and churches to avoid easy reductionism by which Pentecostal and charismatic phenomena are dismissed as either the highest expression of divine blessing or the derelict result of demonic activity” (470). The authors affirm continuationism rather than cessationism (429–34), but they argue against any Pentecostal/charismatic notion of subsequence/separability, favoring instead the view that baptism in the Spirit occurs at salvation (85–86, 389–95). While I do not concur with the authors’ perspective on Lukan pneumatology in this regard, a short review is certainly not the place to engage such a complex debate in any thoroughgoing fashion. In any case, their interpretation and the supporting arguments are basically standard fare among non-Pentecostal evangelical treatments of Spirit baptism and thus perhaps warrant little further comment anyway.

Just a few other notable points from among many possible examples, presented here in rapid-fire fashion, include the following: explication of the non-gendered nature of God (231–32 note 24); acceptance of Calvin’s spiritual presence view of the Lord’s Supper (454); affirmation of the cessation of the apostolic office (444); discussion of worshipping and praying to the Holy Spirit (478–79); consideration of the Spirit vis-à-vis the eschatological future (457–61). Also noteworthy is a helpful section entitled “The Holy Spirit and a Theology of Religions” (470–76), which includes brief interaction with and response to Catholic inclusivism and Amos Yong as an example of Protestant inclusivism. Here the authors explicate their view as follows: “Our doctrine of the Holy Spirit, affirming the inseparable operations of the triune God and being inextricably connected to Christology, is a missional pneumatology that holds to exclusivism and rejects inclusivism” (474).

This book is packed with a wealth of informative evaluation of a full range of biblical texts and a wide breadth of pneumatologically relevant theological foci, all presented from a conservative evangelical perspective that is not only irenic in tone but also warmly open to the moving of the Spirit. It will serve as an excellent textbook for both undergraduate students and seminarians, as well as a most valuable resource for pastors, teachers, and scholars. Highly recommended!

Adrian P. Rosen
Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio, Philippines

Robert Oh, *Gap and Eul: Korean Patron-Client Dynamics in Church Planting in Cambodia*, Regnum Studies in Missions (Oxford: Regnum, 2020). vi + 120 pp. \$17.00 paperback, \$14.99 Kindle.

Robert (Bob) Oh is a Korean American mission mobilizer who spent twenty years planting Korean American churches in Southern California in the United States and many years working in Christian leadership development and discipleship in Cambodia. This book is a published version of the PhD dissertation he wrote for Middlesex University (Oxford Centre for Mission Studies), UK.

I personally had several conversations with Bob in Cambodia while he was doing this research. In the beginning, he was focused on the issue of aid dependency in missions, which continues to be a critical issue in Cambodia. As his research progressed, he adjusted his focus to patronage (e.g., patron-client social systems), which he asserts “governs most relationships in Global South cultures” (2). Missionaries and development workers from western countries tend to view patronage negatively as an unequal, exploitative economic relationship. Oh argues that this persistent view of patron-client relationships as a “social evil” or a “social ill, which has to be eradicated” (13) causes a lot of misunderstanding on the part of missionaries and national workers alike. This book offers “an alternative reading of aid dependency as a relational concept, rather than an economic one” (3).

Gap and Eul presents Oh’s research and findings in answer to this question: “How does the patron-client dynamic between Korean missionaries and Cambodian church planters offer an alternative understanding of aid dependency within the discourse of mission studies?” (3) He does this by first discussing the literature on patron-client relationships and aid dependency with specific reference to Cambodia and Korean missions (chapters two and three). These two chapters provide some of the most beneficial discussions of the book. Oh argues for a more balanced view of patronage: “Theoretically, a patron-client relationship is a fair exchange of power and labour, and it becomes a problem for those who are engaged in patron-client relationships only when power is exploited against the weaker partner” (14). He offers the Korean terms *gap* and *eul* (literally “first” and “second”) as alternative terms to help reframe the discussion. *Gap* and *eul* denote one person’s

relationship to another person in a given social situation. A person can be a *gap* in one relationship and *eul* in another (11-13). When a *gap* behaves toward a *eul* in an exploitative way, they are referred to as *gapjil*, which literally means “doing the *Gap*” (13).

Chapters four, five, and six present an extended case study of a Korean missionary referred to as Pastor Ted and the students in his church planting school, referred to as Cambodia Bible College (CBC). Each of these chapters examines a stage in the evolution of their relationships from 1998 to 2015. The three relational stages between Pastor Ted and the CBC pastors can be summarized as father to children, sponsor to clients, and partner to partner. The first stage was characterized by “relational dependency,” in which Pastor Ted provided for the physical needs of the students, made major life decisions for them, and directed their church planting efforts (59). The second stage highlighted Pastor Ted’s role as a First Order Broker between the primary patrons of his ministry (churches in Singapore and Korea) and the CBC church planters (74). At this stage, Pastor Ted was both *gap* to the church planters and *eul* to the primary patrons. Some of Pastor Ted’s actions and policies in this stage became a “problematic *Gap-jil* mode” as he dominated the decision-making process regarding the ministries of CBC church planters (83). Finally, the third stage represents Pastor Ted’s movement toward a patron partner role in the context of his desire for “relationship solidarity” and the “Cambodian pastors’ desiring and requesting more structural equality” (97). In other words, despite their financial dependence on Pastor Ted, some CBC pastors wanted “to have equal voices in making decisions, setting goals for themselves and seeking autonomy” (97).

While *Gap and Eul* does make a solid contribution to the discussion of aid dependency in missions, readers need to be aware of two “gaps.” First, the experiences presented in this book represent a specific case study that does not correspond to all other ministries in Cambodia. Missions in Cambodia is an extremely diverse enterprise. Some missions exemplify trans-national denominations and norms, while others prioritize the indigenous church principles of establishing self-governing, self-financing, and self-propagating Cambodian churches and national church structures (e.g., the Assemblies of God). Both sets of ideals have experienced degrees of fruitfulness in Cambodia, especially

when they actively seek to contextualize their approaches and do not actively work to dismantle Cambodia's patronage system.

Second, *Gap and Eul* lacks a substantive discussion of indigenous church principles, which were formulated specifically to mitigate against dependency in missions. Assemblies of God missionary leaders like Morris Williams and Melvin Hodges addressed dependency and partnership in their books *Partnership in Mission* (1986) and *The Indigenous Church* (1976), respectively. These two books were standard texts for missionary training in the US for many years, but they actually capture the missiology that has driven Assemblies of God missions around the world from early in the twentieth century to the present time. While Oh does make an honest, often painful assessment of Korean missionary practices in Cambodia, he does not take a serious look at how those practices differ from the indigenous church principles of the western missionaries who worked to establish the modern church in Korea. Instead, he focuses on literature that views the indigenous church principles espoused by western missionaries as a form of depersonalized, task-oriented, manipulation under the guise of "partnership" (8, 98). While *Gap and Eul* does contribute to the discussion on dependency, readers interested in how to form healthy partnerships in missions should consider reading viewpoints like those of Williams and Hodges as well.

Gap and Eul wrestles with the issue of aid dependency in missions in a way that successfully shifts the framing of the discussion from economic dependency to patron-client social dynamics, taking into account both the negative and positive aspects of patronage. Readers who are looking for a set of principles for avoiding aid dependency in missions will not find easy answers in this book. Readers who will benefit from *Gap and Eul* include those who want to better understand Korean missions, those who are interested in patron-client social dynamics in Cambodia, and those who want to think about patron-client relationships through an anthropological lens rather than an economic one.

Bob Oh has a YouTube channel where you can find more of his material in English and Korean: Dr Bob Oh TV. The channel includes a half-hour book talk about this publication: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICn_22eh7r0 (English Version).

Darin R. Clements
Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio, Philippines

Christopher Flanders and Werner Mischke, editors, *Honor, Shame, and the Gospel: Reframing Our Message and Ministry* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2020). xi + 221 pp. \$17.99 paperback; \$9.99 ebook.

In *Honor, Shame and the Gospel* editors Christopher Flanders and Werner Mischke have assembled fifteen essays that grew out of a 2017 conference of the same title. Because this is an edited book with essays from a wide range of authors, Flanders and Mischke's introductory chapter serves the critical function of explaining the purpose of the book and provides some foundational background for thinking about honor and shame. We learn there that the 2017 conference had its roots in a 2014 conference on orality and that it was the orality movement that saw how the biblical worldview filled with honor and shame serves as a linking point from the first century to the current century (xix). The subtitle to the conference and the book, *Reframing Our Message and Ministry*, reveals the underlying premise that global mission from cultural settings that are less focused on issues of honor and shame will benefit from the recovery of this aspect of biblical worldview and that such a renewed understanding will impact both theology and practice (xix-xx). The stated goal of the book is the hope that gaining insight into the dynamics of honor and shame will help cross-cultural workers to reframe the way they do ministry and communicate the Gospel as well as stimulate the ongoing honor-shame conversation (xxvii).

The introduction offers definitions for honor and shame (xx) and a series of ten statements that show how this topic relates to Christian ministry (xxi-xxiv). In Velli-Matti Kärkkäinen's brief forward and the introduction by Flanders and Mischke we learn that there are multiple value polarities in human societies and different cultures will prioritize them in different ways (xiv, xxiii). This clues the reader in that honor-shame and other value polarities such as guilt-innocence, fear-power, and purity-pollution, are not just concepts to be drawn upon but are dimensions of human culture that shape the way we view the world. Flanders and Mischke remind us there is no such thing as a culturally neutral gospel or version of our faith. Thus, the recovery of the honor-shame worldview of the Bible, particularly for those embedded in individualist, consumer, guilt-innocence cultures will help us see the

Gospel in new ways and influence our hermeneutics, missiological and theological work.

The book is structured in two parts with the first seven essays looking at honor-shame in general contexts and the second set of eight essays doing the same in very specific mission contexts. The general context essays broadly make the points that honor-shame is central to the biblical worldview and is prominent in history of theology (chapter 2); we can better grasp the grand narrative of Scripture when we discern the interplay of cultural value systems like honor-shame along with others (chapter 3, particularly 44-50); and we understand the gospel (chapter 1) and the work of Jesus on the cross (chapter 6) better when we take into consideration honor and shame dynamics. The final eight essays look at the contributions of an honor-shame perspective in specific contexts that include Asian culture, Muslim societies, oral learners, urban pluralistic contexts, Syrian refugees displaced by war, victims of sexual abuse in the Congo, and racial reconciliation.

Whether a person is new to this topic or has kept up on the growing list of publications in this emerging field, this book is a treasure trove of interesting insights, thought provoking ideas and concrete examples that elucidate the dynamics of honor-shame and show how it is implicated in the life of God's people as they live and serve in societies that prioritize this cultural value. For myself it is the kind of volume that I mark up, annotate and then keep on hand as a ready reference for definitions, insight into Scripture passages, methods for understanding the Bible, and suggestions for drawing upon honor-shame dynamics in ministry settings. For readers who like to work through a book in detail there are valuable nuggets scattered throughout the essays. The endnotes to the chapters provide an excellent introduction to some of the foundational literature on this area of missiological study and tucked away in chapters are history trails about the rise of honor-shame research (45-46), perspectives from the Church Fathers (22-23, 92-93, 103-105), patron-client dynamics (161-162, 166-168) and a chart covering the whole of the Bible on peacemaking through showing honor (181). The topical and Scripture indexes are an added bonus for tracking down specific themes and texts and the annotated descriptions of the 15 essays make it easy to find articles of interest. All of this increases its value as a reference tool when working with issues of honor and shame.

Those who do take their time with the book are going to run into a few things that may puzzle them or raise questions. In part this stems from some of the limitations of any book composed of a wide variety of essays from multiple authors. For instance, on the first page of the introduction the editors say that the compendium is made up of sixteen articles from the 2017 conference participants, but there are only fifteen chapters. The bulk of the introduction features a “top ten statements” list about honor, shame and the gospel without any indication where those statements came from, making one wonder if this is material from the missing paper. While these statements are interesting, my feeling as a reader is that a substantive introductory essay that lays out the diversity of views and definitions of honor and shame would have better prepared readers for the fifteen essays that are the core of the book. In addition to definitional work, such an essay could have provided an overview of the other related cultural value polarities followed by an argument that expands upon the importance of honor-shame for understanding the biblical worldview and many societies of the contemporary world. It also would have allowed them to expand on why understanding honor-shame is important to hermeneutics, biblical studies, theology, and missiology. A more robust introductory chapter would have allowed them to streamline some of the repetition in the papers that revisit honor and shame definitions and eliminate or at least explain some of the disagreement found between the authors. The essays could then have been edited to move more directly into their subject matter without feeling the need to define and explain their terms.

A minor structural point is that it seems that two or three of the essays are in the wrong section. Steve Tracy’s article “Abuse and Shame” is in section 1 with general contexts and yet it is set in post-war Congo and has excellent practical ministry suggestions for people working in situations where there is sexual abuse. Conversely, Nolan Sharp’s essay on the book of Samuel as a tool for reconciliation is found in section 2 with specific contexts and would have matched up much better with the other biblical material in the general contexts part of the book. For me personally, Jackson Wu’s article on cultivating honor and shame in a collectivist church fits better in the specific contexts section because its focus is on helping people in strong individualist cultures to regain a collectivist sense of the church. That would have left articles in the

general contexts section that deal explicitly with Bible and theology in some way while the specific contexts section would look at applications for particular places.

Again, due to the diversity of the material, in my view a final essay by the editors to highlight how the conceptual side developed in the introduction impacts us in our theology and practice and summarizing/clustering some of the larger practical applications would help readers sort out the large amount of excellent information found in the essays.

Different readers are going to have different favorite essays. For me the biblical material standouts were Steven Hawthorne's essay on the honor and glory of Jesus, Nolan Sharp's work on the book of Samuel and Tom Steffen's Clothesline Theology providing tools to discern the grand narrative of Scripture that frames the gospel. Steve Tracy's work on the role of the cross in transforming shame and his practical applications with survivors of sexual abuse opened my eyes to using both the objective and subjective aspects of the atonement and how important the latter is to those who have experienced deep shame. As a person raised in an individualist culture but who has spent adult life in a collective culture, Jackson Wu's essay "Saving Us from Me" challenged me and made me think hard about these two dimensions. He left me wanting to find ways to hear the challenge of the gospel to each of these arenas.

Honor, Shame and the Gospel succeeds in its stated goals by giving practitioners conceptual food for thought and examples that help them in the ministry practice and providing energy to the ongoing study of honor and shame. I look forward to further exploration on this topic, particularly where the church exists in societies that prioritize honor and shame but live out their faith using very foreign forms that often do not fit well with the honor-shame dimensions of their own culture.

Alan R. Johnson
Assemblies of God World Missions, Thailand

(Continued from front inside cover)

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