

**Asian Pentecostalism: A Journey of Lived Experience
in Theology and Praxis**
(Editorial)

At what Pentecostal theologian Russell Spittler described as the dawning of the global family of Pentecostal traditions, a group of Pentecostal scholars from around the world met in Costa Rica, Central America, in 1996 and produced a number of seminal papers that were later edited by Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen and published under the title, *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, in 1999.¹ Both the title and the scope of the book reflect the blend of global Pentecostalism as a blend of orthodoxy and orthopraxy on a global scale among both classical Pentecostals and the Charismatic Movements. Third Wave Pentecostalism, then in its infancy, was not yet a significant force in the broader movement. Also, the number of Majority World Pentecostal scholars, mostly from the Classical Pentecostal Tradition, was only beginning to burgeon.

Since that time, global Pentecostalism has continued to travel, grow, and diversify exponentially, in most cases maintaining its strong, balanced, emphasis on lived theology and praxis. This edition of the *AJPS*, along with our APTS Press publications (see www.aptspress.com), though not comprehensively, is part of our contribution to that journey in Asia.

Monte Lee Rice, a veteran missionary to Africa and Singapore, opens this edition by positing Pentecostal spiritual identity within the social-geographical situation here in Southeast Asia. He notes that social scientists have been recently focusing on this part of the world as a region rather than the individual nation-state paradigm. He then proceeds to explore implications of this for Pentecostal theology and

¹Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen, eds., *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1999), 1.

spirituality, both as a theoretical and lived experience, making it an excellent opening contribution to this edition.

Febriani writes concerning the Toraja people of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, that “although approximately 80 percent of the Torajan population now identifies as Christian, elements of their traditional animistic system remain influential, shaping family relationships and community rituals,” reflecting the historical reality that traditional religious practices die slowly. She then talks about how Pentecostals, both in doctrine and praxis, can engage with the Toraja, bringing them into liberty in Christ, thus demonstrating the inherent flexibility in Pentecostal spirituality that focuses on a lived-out theology and practice in the daily lives of people.

Joan Milo deals with a similar situation among the Igorot tribes in the Cordilleran mountains in the northern Philippines. Like the Toraja in Febriani’s article, both Christianity, including Catholicism, and traditional religious practices are strong among the Igorots. In this case, since Catholicism came with and was occasionally enforced by the colonial Spanish government (1565-1898), which Milo claims was focused on gold and taxes, Christianity made slow progress at first as the Igorots made no distinction between the Cross and the Crown. In the American colonial era (1898-1946), Christianity became a more attractive option to them because Americans demonstrated friendship and respect for the local culture and, reflected America’s strong tradition of a separation between church and state. While Pentecostalism came before World War II, it received a significant boost with the arrival of American Assemblies of God missionary Elva Vanderbout, a middle-aged widow with no formal theological training. Vanderbout’s focus on the ministry of the Word with signs and wonders following, as well as ministries of social concern, well demonstrated Pentecostalism’s focus on a lived experience through doctrine and practice, which has continued to be a hallmark of Pentecostalism in the Cordilleras ever since. This blend has proven to be a strong response to the traditional religions that continue to be a challenge, while, at the same time, showing respect for the Igorot cultures. Among other things, she planted a church in Tuding, Benguet, on the outskirts of Baguio City and not far from where our campus is now located and earned the well-deserved reputation of being the mother church of the Assemblies of God in the Northern Philippines.

In a similar Northern Philippines context, in this case, Mankayan, Benguet, Ryan Hortizuela, deals with one specific Assemblies of God church, that has an unusual rehabilitation center for people who are coming out of demon-possessed lifestyles and are not yet ready to be integrated back into society. Located in a relatively small community,

the church is known throughout the Northern Philippines as the “Church of the Crazy People,” given that so many of them were demon possessed, socially ostracized because of dysfunctional social behavior, just like the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20) and, in similar manner, have been delivered from demons, restored to their right minds, reconciled to God, and are in the process of being reconciled with their families and communities.

Khup Sian Sang then reflects on Pentecostals and other Christians engaging the Rohingya people, one of the marginalized tribes in his native Myanmar, many of whom also live as refugees across the border in Bangladesh due to persecution. While most of the people in Myanmar practice Buddhism or traditional religions, with most practicing a mixture of the two, the Rohingya are Sunni Muslims, who also mix Sufi mysticism and their traditional religions. For Khup, evangelism must involve faithfulness to the Scriptures and thorough knowledge of and sensitivity to the Rohingya culture. This calls for seeing issues like sin within an honor/shame paradigm, moving in signs and wonders, as well as the proclamation of the Word. In other words, he is calling for a sound combination of Pentecostal doctrine and praxis.

Filipino Pentecostal missionary Jay Angeles, a missionary to Indonesia, demonstrates Pentecostalism’s focus on lived theology and praxis through Filipino Christians, working as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who may live in the restricted access countries in places like West Asia. Here, he contends that “despite constraints, Pentecostal practices among OFW Christians transcend geographical boundaries, serving as a vital component of their spiritual and cultural identity” and incorporate Pentecostalism’s strong focus on cross-cultural missions along the way. He goes on to encapsulate well the theme of this edition:

Pentecostalism offers a beacon of hope and resilience for many OFWs, providing them an emotional sustenance and a sense of community in a culturally different environment. The spiritual identity rooted in Pentecostal beliefs not only helps nurture their faith and allows them to live a victorious life but also empowers them to share the Gospel with both locals and fellow expatriates, particularly those from unreached people groups. Central to this identity is a distinct spirituality that emphasizes the figure of Christ as Savior, Baptizer of the Spirit, and Healer, which is expressed through their oral liturgy and communal practices.

Flint Hicks then gives us a Pentecostal perspective on the biblical

concept of blessing in his native Fiji. The Fijian concept was that blessing was originally developed long before missionaries came and was deeply embedded in their polytheism. Here, Hicks demonstrates that the context of blessing, which has a fairly wide semantic range, can include things such as *shalom*, the biblical concept of peace and the eschatological position that God will eventually restore things to a pristine state. Thus, the same term can be reinterpreted, this time applying to the God of the Bible, who alone is the source of all blessings.

Finally, our Pentecostal journey of a lived experience in theology and praxis broadens in what, for many of us, is a somewhat new part of the journey not yet fully accepted by many Pentecostals: dialogue with other Christian traditions. Here we present the press releases of four Pentecostal-Roman Catholic dialogues submitted by Cecil M. Robeck, one of the Pentecostal co-chairs of these dialogues. Robeck has been a leading voice in healing the divisions in the Body of Christ, especially among Catholics, the Reformed tradition, and the Lutherans worldwide for over forty years. We join him and others like him in a call to live out the desire of Christ expressed in John 17:21 that his body be one. In his lectures on our campus a number of years ago, he made the comment that no one had ever asked him to apologize for or in any way retract his Pentecostal spirituality. In my opinion, the eclectic nature of today's global Pentecostalism, including the Charismatic Movement that has impacted every other Christian tradition, more than justify this being included in our journey.

Meanwhile, the journey goes on as global Pentecostalism continues to grow, expand, and diversify, with all of its potential and challenges, in a lived experience of both theology and practice. But the journey is a whole lot more enriching and fun in the company of the international Pentecostal community. We'd love to have you join us. I, for one, am thoroughly enjoying this enriching and challenging journey.

Warmly,

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