

## **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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 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](http://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](http://www.aptspress.org).

Warmly in Christ,

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Managing Editor