

## **The Mission of the Church in Asia and Beyond**

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In this edition, we will take a broad, up-to-date look at the mission of the Church in Asia and beyond as it relates to worship, care for its members, ministerial training and engagement, and ministry to the world. The complexity of encountering our swiftly changing world with the timeless claims of Jesus Christ is reflected in the fact that Christianity is more global than it has ever been. This then requires engagement with a multitude of other cultures, global and local religions, and a host of other matters, including the rapid, technology-driven changes impacting our Global Village.

Monte Lee Rice leads this edition with a discussion on Pentecostal worship, with a slightly different twist on a theology of one of Pentecostalism's traditionally strong foci, the altar. Noting Pentecostalism's tendency to focus more on doing than reflecting, he notes that little has been done to develop a theology of the altar.

Rice's twist here is to see the altar call as a "foundational liturgical rite," a description that would likely have been frowned upon by early Pentecostals, but Rice makes a good case for his point of view. He posits the altar call in the Azusa Street Revival's salvation theology discourse as not only "effecting charismatic experience, but also fostering social inclusiveness" in responding to God together. He goes on to argue that at the altar, believers offer themselves as a sacrifice to God for use in his Kingdom to bring his hope to a hurting world. In doing so, he contends, "we discharge the priestly work (*leitourgia*) of invoking Holy Spirit outpouring on our offerings of thanksgiving to Christ, who commissions us for God's saving purpose."

Jemon Subang's article brings into focus the mission of the church as a corporate body, seeking to edify and build up its members. The specific issue for Subang is the controversy over whether churches should continue online services in the post-pandemic era. While there are some undeniable advantages to online worship, such as ministering to those who are ill and unable to come or those who have never heard the gospel or for some other reason would not consider attending a church, there are also some significant drawbacks. This is what Subang

deals with here. He “aims to show that (1) vibrant and healthy relationships in the church cannot be established through the use of digital technology, and (2) the deep level of relationships between people, including the dynamics of Christian love and service taught and required in the NT, demand in-person gathering. For these reasons, there is a pressing need to inspire, encourage, and provoke Christian churches to continue their in-person gatherings. The church community is integral to the holistic development of the Christian life. Human relationships are built and sustained through meaningful communication.” In response to these considerations, the church he pastors ceased online services after the pandemic. This article will be a welcome inclusion to the debate.

Joel Tejado adds to the discussion about the mission of the church with his study, funded by the John Templeton Foundation, on two megachurches in Manila, Victory Christian Fellowship and Christ Commission Fellowship. Both are indigenous to the Philippines and fit the definition of Third Wave Pentecostals, although neither of them identifies themselves as such. His focus here is on how these two bodies generate spiritual capital in serving their members and communities.

He asks and answers questions like, “What attracts and predetermines vibrant, healthy, and growing megachurches in the Philippines? While there have been increasing studies on spiritual capital, few studies have been undertaken about the nature of the spiritual capital within mega-churches.” He contends that when we have answered these questions, we can “unlock the enigma of why and how mega-churches have grown in the Global South.”

Then Mark Rodli, an Assemblies of God missionary to Thailand, takes us down the road of the Church’s mission as it relates to training ministers, focusing on the Thailand Assemblies of God Seminary, which provides training programs ranging from a diploma to a master’s degree. Admitting the school’s checkered history of occasional closings, low enrollment, and other issues which have impaired the growth of the school, he suggests that the school’s newest initiative, a “diploma-level Leadership Development Program (LDP), holds promise of helping propel the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) into future growth.” He then sets out to, “(1) examine the current educational approach in Thailand and the cultural factors that drive it, (2) outline a brief history of TAGS’ development, (3) discuss the way(s) that the LDP fits well for the TAG, and (4) spell out its implications for the TAG.” Given the experimental nature of the project, time will tell if the LDP is fruitful.

Finally, Lew Belcourt and Rebekah Bled’s articles deal with the mission of the Church in its relationship to the world. Belcourt, a missionary to Indonesia, adds to the discussion of mission in places where Christians are in the minority and, as is often the case, persecuted.

He begins by looking at how the early Church, founded in the days of the polytheistic Roman Empire and often antagonistic to the church, dealt with persecution. Then, he moves to the Church in present-day Indonesia and explores Indonesian theologians' responses to persecution in its psychological, economic, and physical aspects. He then suggests how Indonesian believers can cope with the persecution in a way pleasing to God and "reach out to their Muslim neighbors with the love of Jesus Christ."

Rebekah Bled concludes this edition with a look at Christ's mandate to the church to go and make disciples of all nations. She begins by looking at the "broad categories of proclamation and social action as a response to this mandate." She then follows through on how this is being worked out on a global scale in what she claims is a unique, contextualized, Spirit-filled fashion, in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Before signing off, I need to announce some changes in our personnel. First, Frank McNelis, after ten years of exemplary service, has retired as our senior editor. Frank has been an incredible blessing to both APTS Press and this Journal and a great friend to me. I will miss him! He has been replaced by Larry Brooks, who is still in training and will increasingly take on a stronger role on our publishing team. Second, Adrian Rosen has stepped down as our book review editor and I am grateful for his service. He greatly enhanced our book review section. He has been replaced by Lora Timenia, a member of the APTS faculty who is currently working on her PhD at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

As always, you are welcome to contact me through our website, [www.aptspress.org](http://www.aptspress.org) or through my personal email, [dave.johnson@apt.edu](mailto:dave.johnson@apt.edu). God bless you richly!

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