

ASIAN CHURCH, MISSION, AND A JOURNAL

There are an abundance of issues we face today, as churches in Asia are responding to the great call of the Lord to be active witnesses of Christ. A strong conviction is stirring within the Evangelical seminary community concerning the need to properly equip the churches in Asia in order that they may produce a missionary force that can lead us into the challenge of the coming century. The urgency has suddenly brought us to realize that Asian churches *have become* missionary minded in the past decades, sending missionaries to other nations of Asia and beyond. It is happening right before our eyes.

There is the proliferation of missions-related programs. Missionary training programs are everywhere. More formal and academic pursuits are seen among seminaries in the Philippines. They are offering graduate degree programs in missions. Similarly, Asia Graduate School of Theology-Philippines, a consortium of eight Evangelical seminaries in the country, began offering the Doctor of Missiology program two years ago. Everywhere in Asia, churches are talking about, and in fact doing, missions.

At the same time, missionary successes, enthusiasm and dedication is often overshadowed by critical problems arising from a diversity of oversights and shortsightedness. For instance, high incidences of missionary attrition among Asian missionaries are alarming, not only due to their number but more significantly in their causes. They are difficulties in interpersonal relationships for Korean missionaries and the lack of adequate financial support for Filipino missionaries, to name just a few. As we may read from the assessment of a Korean missionary (Andrew Kim), issues of concern are found in the areas of recruitment, training, support, missionary care and more.

This brings us to two fundamental questions: What can we do, as an academic community, to properly prepare Asian churches? What can we learn from past mistakes so that they are not repeated in the

future? Asian Christianity needs to see itself not only joining the worldwide missionary movement, but also challenge itself to make serious contributions to the *improvement* of the missionary movement begun by the West centuries ago.

As Andrew Walls has forcefully argued, it is a high time to look at the missionary works in Asia from an Asian, or receptor's, viewpoint. What creative ways can be developed which will enable gospel to be presented through a medium that is culturally familiar and acceptable to the hearers, and yet, without compromise? This task, popularly called contextualization, is a task for insiders, and outsiders can not and should not do theologizing task on behalf of us. This will be like asking or expecting someone to eat lunch on our behalf. Three reflections by a Korean (Soon-hwan Kim), Indonesian (Gani Wiyono) and a Filipino theologian (Joseph Suico) exemplify this concern. They are insiders.

In light of these issues, does this mean that outsiders have no role to play in the advancement of God's kingdom in Asia? The age-old indigenous principle will say, "No, the outsiders must dig their grave. Their goal is to make themselves useless as quickly as possible." Is this what the future of missionary work holds? This is not just a matter of east and west. What about Asian missionaries in neighboring Asian nations? Are they not "outsiders" as much, or at least to some degree, as are the westerners? In this inaugural issues, we have several Asian outsiders (including Yeo Choo Lak, a Singaporeans in the Philippines, and Joseph Shao, a Chinese Filipino) as well as a western neighbor (Larry Caldwell) contributing their reflections on this common endeavor: the advancement of God's kingdom in the lives of Asian billions.

The *Journal of Asian Mission* wishes to be a chat room (in the high tech world) or *sarang-bang* (in the old Korean tradition) where everyone is welcomed and no one is a stranger. Diverse members of a believing community who share the common goal of reaching Asia for Jesus shape the future and character of this *Journal*. Hop in and let's talk about God's mission in Asia.

Wonsuk Ma
Editor