

Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies



Volume 5, Number 1 (January 2002)

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON
NON-WESTERN PENTECOSTALISM¹

Mathew Clark

On May 28, 2001 Pentecostal history was made at Bethesda Christian University in Anaheim, California, USA. Pentecostal scholars from Asia, Latin America, and Africa met to discuss issues that are relevant to Pentecostalism and Pentecostal theology in these non-western parts of the world. This was the first time that non-western Pentecostal scholars have met for the express purpose of discussing non-western issues that pertain specifically to the rapidly growing Pentecostal movement in the so-called Two-Thirds World.

The notion for this meeting and for its timing grew from the conference arranged by Asian scholars in 1998 to coincide with the Pentecostal World Conference (PWC) held in Seoul, Korea that year. This conference was held the day before the PWC began, and was hosted by the International Theological Institute of the Yoido Full Gospel Church, with Drs. Young-hoon Lee and Wonsuk Ma as organizers, while Lee also served as the host. The success of this conference led not only to the formation of the Asian Pentecostal Society, but also to the notion of a follow-up. The obvious enthusiasm of the Asian scholars in organizing and presenting their own conference affected the international visitors, and

¹ This is an informal report circulated after the Conference, and the editors (including the guest editor) deemed it fitting to serve as the editorial introduction. The formal title of the meeting was "Theological Symposium on Non-western Pentecostalism." The editors would like to express their gratitude to the participants for graciously agreeing to (substantially, in several cases) revise and have their studies published in this and next volumes of the *Journal*. For different reasons, however, several presentations are not included in this publication. The organizers, through these pages, would like to express their indebtedness to the regional organizers and particularly the staff of Bethesda Christian University for generous hosting the conference. Dr. Young-hoon Lee, then president, deserves a special recognition.

in 2000 the idea was mooted by Drs. Miguel Alvarez and Mathew Clark along with Lee and Ma of doing the same at Los Angeles PWC, but broadening the field of interest to include Africa and Latin America. Providentially Lee later became president of Bethesda Christian University in Anaheim near Los Angeles, and the ideal host and venue was thus provided.

A final spur to making the conference happen was the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS) annual conference in 2000. This prestigious meeting has generally been the annual showcase for developing Pentecostal theology, but over the years has tended more and more to reflect purely North American interests. Even where international interests have figured, the presenters have usually been North American or European. In 2000, with international missions as theme, the SPS meeting fielded scarcely a single non-North American speaker. At the same time, the weight of Pentecostal growth and membership has swung from the North Atlantic region to Asia, Africa and Latin America. (For instance, of the thirty-seven million members of the Assemblies of God church, less than four million are North American.) And these non-North Atlantic regions are currently producing articulate Pentecostal scholars who wish above all to be of service to the movement in their own regions. For this reason it became increasingly urgent to create a forum for the discussion of those issues which were relevant to their regions, and not “imposed” upon them from the more developed North Atlantic world.

At the Asian Pentecostal Society annual meeting in Manila in August 2000 coordinators for each region were chosen, and preparations for the conference went ahead. Paulson Pulikottil, president of Asian Pentecostal Society, coordinated the Asian contributions, Miguel Alvarez the Latin American contingent, and Mathew Clark the African presence. Lee and Ma served as members-at-large of this organizing body.

The following synopsis of the themes of the papers presented gives an indication of the scope and interest of the Conference:

From Asia:

Paulson Pulikottil, “As East and West Met in God’s Own Country”

Paul Tsuchido Shew, “A Forgotten History: Correcting the Historical Record of the Roots of Pentecostalism in Japan”

Reuben Louse Gabriel, “Issues for Pentecostal Theology from the Indian Context”

Chin Khua Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar”

John Yesunatha Das, "A Reflection on St Thomas Pentecostals with a Special Reference to the Aboriginal Pentecostals in Kerala, India"

From Africa:

Mathew Clark, "Questioning Every Consensus: A Plea to Return to the Radical Roots of Pentecostalism"

P. J. Grabe, "The Concept of God's Power and Its Reception within the Pentecostal Tradition, with Special Reference to African Context"

Opoku Onyinah, "Deliverance as a Way of Confronting Witchcraft in Modern Africa: Ghana as a Case."

Emmanuel K. Larbi, "The Nature of Continuity and Discontinuity of Ghanaian Pentecostal Concept of Salvation in African Cosmology"

Ayuk A. Ayuk, "The Pentecostal Transformation of Nigeria Church Life"

From Latin America:

Miguel Alvarez, "The South and the Latin American Paradigm"

M. A. Chvan de Matviuk, "Latin American Pentecostal Growth: Culture, Orality and Power of testimonies"

Sergio Matviuk, "Pentecostal Leadership Development and Church Growth in Latin America"

Virginia Trevino Nolivos, "A Pentecostal Paradigm for the Latin American Family: An Instrument of Transformation"

It was decided that this was the last time the organizers wished to organize such a "specialized" conference, and that the follow-up conference at the next PWC should be truly global in its extent. This will be held in South Africa in 2004, and will be hosted at the Apostolic Faith Mission Theological Seminary now operating as Auckland Park Theological Seminary in Johannesburg. There is still time to refine the details, but at present it appears that the format could be as follows:

A conference spanning two full days, to accommodate more presenters, and to allow more interaction. Contributions from all five continents, although these could perhaps be regionalized, e.g., Latin America, North America, Europe and Middle East, Asia-Pacific, and Sub-Saharan Africa. At least six contributors per region, all of them will be asked to focus on issues pertinent to their own regions but nevertheless in awareness of the global nature of Pentecostalism.

The Anaheim conference may be an indication that international pentecostal scholarship is coming of age, and that at last pentecostal scholars from the various regions of the world can meet each other in a truly meaningful interaction, on equal footing, and with a common aim—to facilitate the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.