

CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN ASIA TODAY

*A Periodical Concerned with Christian Ministry
and Mission in Asia Today*

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EDITORIAL

During the Advent season the Church celebrates the miraculous message that the Divine took on human form and flesh to participate in the human world. Christian identity and faith have been built around bearing witness to this miracle giving content and substance to Christian mission and discipleship. While it may be stating the obvious to say that our human world is complex and varied, but it bears repeating, as this basic complexity and variety in its peoples, cultures, languages, histories, ideologies and so on have profound repercussions for how the Christian mission is to present itself, negotiate its way and yet keep troth to the high calling of proclaiming the Advent.

The four articles in this December issue explore the theological and practical implications for the Church in fleshing out the Divine amidst human realities.

As both theologian and mission practitioner, Andrew Kirk provides a broad historical survey in his comparison of the twenty-first century church with the first century community. He analyses the shifting currents of influence that have affected the way the two churches interpret its mission in its given context. Kirk's reflections are a useful tool for reviewing the life and ministry of the engagement of the Christian community in today's society.

Martin Sinaga and Lenita Tiong provide the all-important Asian insights into the thorny issue of contextualizing the Christian message in Indonesia and Cambodia respectively. While there are many recent developments that make up the complexities of Indonesian society, nonetheless the Indonesian Church is compelled to craft its identity within a colonial legacy. Sinaga stretches our theological boundaries as he shares some instances of how the Indonesian Church, despite its heritage, is on a journey to interpret itself within Indonesia's multi-faith context.

Finding its identity is a process of healing for the Cambodian Church that is emerging from the profound trauma of its history of genocide of just over thirty years ago. Tiong rightly reminds readers that Cambodia's past must inform any mission partnerships built with brothers and sisters in Cambodia for the sake of tomorrow's church. The basis and the nature of these partnerships are sensitive and gnawing questions for theological reflection and debate for leaders in foreign missions to consider.

In her contribution to this issue, Eileen Poh discusses the role of women from a biblical perspective and from a survey of their role in Singapore society in modern times. This is a useful starting point for exploring women's work in the mission of the Church in Singapore society. Readers will be familiar with the role that women missionaries have played in the history of the Church of this region in education and evangelism among vernacular-speaking women communities. From a global standpoint, this question is beginning to feature more prominently on the agenda of mission scholarship because of the female majority in world Christianity and the impact of gender on conversion narratives.¹ Poh shares the sentiment of these mission scholars in her conclusion that the work of Christian women 'has not even been acknowledged, much less valued'.

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¹ Interested readers may refer to at least two sources; Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Dana Robert, "World Christianity as a Women's Movement" in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol 30, No 4 October 2006, 180-8.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rev Dr J Andrew Kirk has been involved in theological training for more than three decades in Latin America initially and in his country of origin, the United Kingdom. Of late, he travels more widely after relinquishing his position as the Dean and Head of the School of Mission and World Christianity at Selly Oaks Colleges in Birmingham, UK. Some of his more recently published works are, *What is Missions?: Theological Explorations* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2000) and *Mission Under Scrutiny: Confronting Contemporary Challenges* (Fortress Press, September 2006).

Dr Martin L Sinaga is a lecturer in Religion and Society at *Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Jakarta* (Jakarta Theological Seminary) in Indonesia. He is also a member of an inter-faith movement in Indonesia. Dr Sinaga was on a brief study leave in July at Trinity Theological College when he participated in the life and work of CSCA. His contribution was a presentation made at a roundtable discussion on the Christian mission in Indonesia.

Rev Lenita Tiong is an ordained elder of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference but has since 2001 been attached to the Cambodian Methodist Bible School (CMBS) in Phnom Penh. As both teacher and the Dean of Studies at CMBS, she lectures in Church History, guides the spiritual formation of her students and also makes pastoral visits to them when they are scattered for ministry in different parts of the country on field education.

Dr Eileen Poh teaches biblical studies at the Discipleship Training Centre (DTC) in Singapore. She trained as a lawyer and had practised in the profession for several years before pursuing theological training. She began her theological education at DTC and Trinity Theological College before going on to the University of London to complete her doctoral work in biblical studies.