

Has the Baton Been Passed to the Asian Church?

Last week in Singapore I saw the future of Christianity—and it has a definite Chinese flavor.

Last week during a trip to Singapore I enjoyed all the tastes and smells of China—chili crab, salted milk crab, prawns, *ban mian* (flat noodles), *bak chang* (rice dumplings), lychee fruits, chicken feet (not my favorite!) and several varieties of fish. But the flavor I savored most was found in the worship times at Cornerstone Community Church.

“Missionary strategists have already predicted that by 2035 China will be a Christian nation. Then nations of Asia, including Singapore, are positioned to be 21st century Antiochs.”

I got choked up while watching the young people at Cornerstone last Sunday. Hundreds of young people—mostly Chinese, many first-generation converts to Christianity—jammed to the front of the auditorium at the close of their youth service. Many were on their knees. Some were sobbing. They were all singing:

*Set this generation apart for You
Let me be a part of what You're doing
I want to stand in purity and righteousness
Set this generation on fire
Lord I will burn, I will burn for You.*

This was not shallow emotionalism. These kids were dead

serious about following God. I preached in seven services at Cornerstone last week, and every meeting was filled with high school and college students as well as young adults. A majority of the young people who attend the 3,000-member church are involved in weekly cell groups that offer discipleship training. At a leaders' meeting held on Saturday morning, more than half of the church's leaders were in their 20s or younger.

The church's youth pastor, Paul Liu Jiancong, a thin guy whose English has a dignified British accent, knows that something unusual is stirring among the youth in his country of 5 million people. "Let's press in for revival!" he exhorted the crowd. "Let's consecrate our hearts!"

The founding pastor of Cornerstone, Yang Tuck Yoong, 52, knows that revival is much more than altar calls and emotional displays. It is measured by a growing number of solid converts. Here in Singapore, where the government enforces a policy of tolerance toward all religions, the number of evangelical Christians has been steadily rising in recent years. Many new Christians come from Buddhist backgrounds.

Anglicans and other mainline churches were hit with charismatic renewal in the 1970s and '80s, sparking a wave of church growth. Today Singapore is home to numerous charismatic megachurches. One veteran

charismatic Anglican

leader told me that the percentage of Christians in Singapore has now risen to

18 percent, up from 14 percent just a few years ago.

Yang and his wife, Daphne, started Cornerstone in 1990 when they were

still Anglicans; they broke from that denomination in 1995, and Cornerstone

became an independent Pentecostal congregation. The church now meets in a

massive facility that was once a nightclub.

What I saw in Singapore last week filled me with

hope for the future of the global church, for three key reasons:

1. They are taking world evangelism seriously. Last year Cornerstone

Church sent out 52 short-term mission teams to various nations, including

Uganda. Because Singapore enjoys financial prosperity (some analysts say

Singapore has already passed the United States in per capita wages), many of

its churches invest millions of dollars in mission work.

Singapore already has

one of the highest percentages of commissioned missionaries, per capita, in the

world.

2. They understand the importance of the Holy

Spirit's power. Growing churches in Singapore have abandoned formalism to embrace

Pentecostal doctrines. However, many of them also pursue biblical balance and

stress the need for discipleship. At Trinity Christian Center, for example, a

fast-growing Assemblies of God congregation pastored by Dominic Yeo, its 7,000 members are trained in weekly care cells.

3. They are investing in the next generation. One young man from

Cornerstone named Nathaniel told me that he came to Christ from a Taoist background. "Many Taoists are coming to Jesus today," he said. "As they become educated they are turning to Christianity.

They are leaving the old superstitious religion behind." These young

people—many of them bright professionals—are now being trained to take their

faith into the marketplace, or on the mission field beyond Singapore.

What does this mean for us? I believe it's obvious we've entered a new season in which the Asian church will set the pace. The

baton has been passed. Missionary strategists have already predicted that by

2035 China will be a Christian nation. The nations of Asia, including

Singapore, are positioned to be 21st century Antiochs. I hope we

will be humble enough to learn from them. And I pray they will stay humble

enough to avoid the mistakes we've made in the West.

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