

Singapore '02 One Participant's Reflections

By Chong H. Kim

A theme verse emerged for the Singapore '02 Consultation, which Greg Parsons shared during the first evening's opening remarks:

"...we received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake" (Romans 1:5)

Consultation participants shared in common the desire to bring about the obedience of faith among "all" the Gentiles, "all" the people groups. Here are my reflections on apostleship and related ideas:

1. "Apostleship" can mean different things. At Singapore '02, we were using the term rather broadly (as in "visionary"). The issue of apostleship as it relates to visionary leadership and decision-making processes deserves a second look. There is a radical difference in perspective and application of apostleship between the Western missions movement and non-Western missions. At the risk of sounding too simplistic, in the West (except in certain Pentecostal traditions) apostleship is often balanced by accountability and a consensus-based decision-making process. While accountability is necessary, too often the process of getting "democratic" agreement stifles the vision and leadership. George Bernard Shaw said, "Some people see things as they are and ask why. And some people see things that never were and ask why not." The history of missions has been shaped

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more often by people who asked the "why not's" than by those who asked the "whys." These are men and women who saw things that others did not see. They would ask, "What is not being done that *can* be done?" or rather, "...that *needs* to be done?"

In contrast, in the non-Western world, apostleship often lacks the qualities of servant leadership. In hierarchical settings apostolic leaders are granted an environment in which their authority is only indirectly challenged and "follow-ship" is expected. However, Hwa Yung, director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in Asia, observes, "We [in Asia] can misuse our position and power as pastors and leaders." Not only is this an issue of ineffectual servant leadership, but also a lack of proper accountability. Yung goes on to say that this is as serious a sin as sexual immorality.

In global gatherings—where both Western and non-Western participants are present—differences in assumptions and expectations regarding apostleship do not always surface clearly. The "general culture" of global meetings gravitates toward the Western mode of apostleship. A question emerges: how do we provide a platform in global settings for apostolic leaders to voice what they see that others don't see?

2. Global missions gatherings in the last century have been rightfully initiated by the West. In the last decade or so, there has been progressively more non-Western participation in the development of these global consultations. However, if there is one reason why global meetings remain dominantly Western, it is money, for almost all the global meetings would not have been possible if it were not for money raised in the West. We talk about the issue of dependency at the field level, but could there also be an issue of dependency when it comes to global-level meetings? It is now widely known that there

are more cross-cultural missionaries from the non-West than the West. Could there soon be a time when "equal partnership" can be achieved in global gatherings? Can there be equal partnership if the source of money remains lopsided?

3. The issue of God's "two structures of redemptive mission" (the sodality and modality structures) is a sensitive one. Local churches around the world (especially the "mega-churches") have become very active in missions work and have often engaged in work without the involvement of mission agencies. Other churches involve agencies but are doing much more than merely sending their money and people to them. Church-agency partnership has drastically shifted in recent years, creating tension but also providing healthier checks and balances. Could the tension be a symptom reflecting different sets of theological assumptions? Is a mission agency a church? Is a mission agency merely a "para"-church? Should a mission agency be viewed as a sub-set of the local church structure? Or are the two independent from one another and fulfilling different functions? And what is a "church"? The dialogue and debate on such issues have, at best, been scattered. Perhaps it is time to revisit these issues more directly and clearly.

