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Lead Essay

God-Man or Man-God?



Some months ago in a private conversation, one of the students at the Lahu Bible Institute (LBI) asked me the following question. "Is it true," he wanted to know, "if Westerners (farang) really don't believe in spirits (phi)?" When I answered that most don't although some do, he then asked, "Don't they believe in the Bible?" This last question is an obvious one, at least in Thailand, and it is also a crucial one that opens up a wide range of issues central to the Christian faith.

My response was to ask the student if he believed that Jesus was a human being. He answered, "yes," without hesitation, to which I asked in reply, "As a human being, was Jesus' limited in his knowledge of the world?" In the long conversation that ensued, I argued that Jesus did not and could not know more than the most advanced state of knowledge available to him personally in his own time. The same was true of the biblical writers. If, that is, the state of knowledge known to Jesus and the biblical writers personally affirmed the reality of evil spirits, Jesus and the New Testament authors would have "naturally" accepted that reality as well. Jesus even as a human, of course, could have idiosyncratically rejected belief in evil spirits, but there is no reason to expect such an unusual act of him. The only other logical possibility is that Jesus, as God, was/is omniscient, which means that he wasn't "really" a human, part of the biblical definition of "human" being that humans are not created all-knowing (as shown in the Genesis account of Creation).

It is one of the central tenets of the Christian faith that Jesus was 100% God and 100% human, but the doctrine of the Incarnation is so paradoxical that individual Christians have to choose which 100% they think is more fundamental to the person of Jesus. The nineteenth-century German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, for example, began with Christ's humanity and wrestled with the question of how an individual man could also be God (see *The Christian Faith*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928, pp. 380ff). The nineteenth-century American Presbyterian theologian, Charles Hodge, on the other hand, began with the fact of Christ's divine nature and so emphasized that divinity that contemporaries accused him of obscuring Jesus' humanity.¹ Hodge, we should add, represented a theological perspective widely shared among Presbyterian missionaries in Siam/Thailand up to World War I and beyond. Urban makes it clear that the division between those who emphasize the divinity of Christ at the expense of his humanity and those who emphasize the humanity of Jesus at the expense of his divinity has existed since the earliest days of the church.²

In one sense, then, all Christians are heretics. None of us can truly walk and talk the line of Jesus being fully divine, fully human (or fully human, fully divine) because the very notion is inherently paradoxical. It transcends our ability to make sense out of it. The fact of the matter is that the great majority of Christians instinctively emphasizes Christ's divinity and, like Charles Hodge, shows a strong tendency to obscure his humanity. We apply the Gospel of John's

description of the Universal Creator Christ (John 1) to the person of Jesus, while quietly ignoring the Jesus of the Gospel of Mark, who is neither all knowing nor all-powerful.

There are consequences in our failure to hold the Man-God, God-Man paradox in balance and in the widespread failure to take Jesus' humanity with ultimate seriousness. The doctrine of the Incarnation is not just a doctrine. It comprises a central element of our Christian worldview. It influences, in particular, the manner in which we relate our faith to the world around us including the extent to which we are willing to contextualize the Christian faith. If Christ is GOD, who temporarily took on the inconvenient form of a man and played the "human game" for a brief moment but remained all knowing, all-powerful even then, the Incarnation did not actually take place. God did not become a man but only took on the human form, remaining essentially divine. This is a version of the heresy of Docetism, which is found throughout the church today.

Docetic Christianity stresses the universality and uniqueness of the Christian faith and sets it apart from other religious faiths. It stresses the grandeur and holiness of God, and while Jesus is experienced in highly personal ways, he is the Jesus of Power and Majesty who is Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and Omniscient. He transcends rather than lives within human contexts, an anti-incarnational divine figure that is also anti-contextual. The link between Incarnation and contextualization needs to be stressed. The biblical portrait of God in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament emphasizes God's intimate involvement in particular, mundane human contexts. Jesus, in particular, was a specific, actual person who spoke a language, ate a particular cuisine, lived in a family, in a place-in a context. If Christ is our model, we will celebrate the fact that our own faith is rooted in a place and time. It is our mundane faith, wrested from a particular context and beholding to that context, rather than a universal, timeless faith. The Docetic model of Christ, in effect, denies all of this. It denies contextual Christianity and accentuates the distance between a supposedly universal Christian faith and the particular contexts within which that faith is found. It was the vision of the Docetic Christ that the old-time missionaries brought with them to Siam, and it is that same vision that makes it so difficult for Jesus of Nazareth to return to Asia or to find a meaningful place in the multitude of Thai contexts.

The Lahu student eventually responded with his belief that if Christ is/was God he had/has to know everything. How could he be divine otherwise? The point is well taken, and all I can say is that perhaps the divinity of Christ was not epistemological. It didn't have to do with the breadth of Christ's knowledge but, rather, with the depth of his compassion and the peace that he introduced into the world. I realize that this response does not redress the paradox of Christ as 100% human and 100% God, since humans can no more love without fault than they can know without mistake. Seeing Jesus as all-loving, however, seems to me to be more consistent with the doctrine of the Incarnation. Maybe the problem is in the word, "perfect." Could Jesus be both divinely perfect and humanly im-perfect? Many will reject that possibility out of hand. The very idea seems nonsensical, somehow. All I know is that the Incarnation loses all meaning if we cannot affirm the real-life humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. If he was not one of us, Christianity is nothing but word games, and wrestling with the meaning of the "Good News," so-called, in Thai contexts is a waste of time.

¹ See E. Brooks Holifield, "Mercersburg, Princeton, and the South: The Sacramental Controversy in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54, 2 (Summer 1976): 238-58.

² Linwood Urban, *A short History of Christian Thought*, New York: Oxford, 1986, 75-77.

Articles

Introduction to Three Articles

Herb Swanson



The three brief articles that follow in this issue of *HeRB* are based on two letter books belonging to the Rev. Charles R. Callender (1867-1952), which are now housed in the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. Callender was a missionary in northern Thailand and, briefly, in Kengtung, Burma, from 1896 to 1907 and from 1909 to 1919, after which he was assigned to the Presbyterian mission in Yunnan Province, China. Although I have long been aware of the potential value of these two letter books, it was only this past summer (2002) that I had a chance to do research on them, and as I had expected they proved to be an invaluable source of information on the history of the church in northern Thailand.

The two letter books contain carbon copies of Callender's correspondence to other members of the Laos Mission as well as letters to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in New York and friends back in the United States. The bulk of the correspondence, however, is addressed to his colleagues in the mission, and in that regard these two volumes provide a unique perspective on the history of the Laos Mission. Historians of the northern Thai church have to depend largely upon the official correspondence of the missionaries to the Board as well as articles and edited versions of their letters reproduced in the Presbyterian press. The historical record also includes a few collections of letters written to relatives in the United States and, of course, a number of books written by the missionaries themselves over the years. There are obvious limitations to each of these sources, particularly in that the recipients are generally not knowledgeable about the people and churches on the mission field. The missionaries, thus, leave out names and other insider information and details. They also show a strong tendency to withhold distasteful or potentially embarrassing information from the Board as well as the Presbyterian public and private correspondents. Callender's correspondence to his colleagues, in contrast, is often written to individuals who are familiar with the churches, institutions, and people he is writing about. Callender, thus, names names, refers to places, and alludes to events frequently missing from other types of correspondence. Within his circle of trusted friends, he also discusses other

missionaries and mission issues more freely and more critically than he would ever think of doing in correspondence with the Board.

Callender was a veteran missionary who seems to have been well respected by most of his colleagues in the Laos Mission. The letter books cover the years 1907 through 1913 and include Callender's work in three stations, Phrae, Lampang, and the Kengtung Station in the Shan States of Burma. For a period of time during these years, Callender was on the mission Executive Committee as well, so that the letter books provide insights into the inner workings and politics of the mission from that perspective as well. They are, in all, a rich, valuable source for the study of the Laos Mission, especially for the period 1910-1913.

The letter books themselves, unfortunately, are not in good physical condition and are also made somewhat difficult to use by the manner in which Callender pasted carbon copies of his correspondence into them, generally but not always in chronological order. He used a thin paper for those copies, and while the typewritten copies are generally legible, if often faint, his handwritten items are sometimes impossible to read. The two volumes themselves are slowly falling apart and in need of conservation. The Presbyterian Historical Society, for these reasons, refuses to make photocopies of material in them.

The contents of these two letter books, in any event, provide us with a wealth of detailed information and insights into the Presbyterian missionary and church work in northern Siam, some of which does not appear elsewhere in the historical record of the Laos Mission. That information includes gossip. It includes feelings about people and events. It includes missionary attitudes, commitments, prejudices, strengths, and weaknesses. The letter books, that is, more clearly reveal the humanity of the missionaries than do most other sources, a revelation of great importance to understanding the history of Presbyterian missions in northern Siam and the formation and early history of the northern Thai church.

Although I've retained the term "article," each of the following articles are actually informal historiographical essays rather than formal academic articles. They represent a personal response to the contents of Callender's letter books, which I trust will be of some value to those interested in the life and history of the northern Thai church.

The Presbyterian Bishop of Chiang Mai

Introduction



If one were to choose the one individual, who has exercised the most influence over the course of northern Thai church history, that one person would have to be the Rev. Daniel McGilvary. Although the vision for a northern mission originated with others, notably his father-in-law, Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, McGilvary pursued that vision with a determination that eventually brought it into being in 1867. He took the exploratory trips that charted its expansion. He pushed for the founding of schools and hospitals, as key agents for evangelizing the North.

When he died in 1911, the city of Chiang Mai is supposed to have shut down in mourning over this beloved elderly man, who had lived and worked in Chiang Mai for 44 years.

All of the foregone facts are true, and they tell an important part of the story of the founding and development of northern Thai Christianity in its first decades. They do not, however, tell the whole story. By the 1920s, indeed, Daniel McGilvary had already become an almost legendary figure, beyond criticism and question. He was truly what the northern Thai called him, *phokru luang* (literally, Highest Father Teacher). What has all but disappeared from the historical record is another fact, namely that at the time of his death an important faction in the Laos Mission resented his influence and his opinions regarding certain fundamental principles of mission policy. Among themselves, they sarcastically referred to him as "the Bishop of Chiang Mai," not a kindly thing to say among Presbyterians.

The primary resources previously available, notably at the Payap University Archives, carry no such references and contain only vague hints of anything amiss between McGilvary and some of his colleagues in the mission. Among the things revealed by Callender in the field correspondence contained in the two letter books now housed at the Presbyterian Historical Society is the fact that he was a leading member of the anti-McGilvary faction in the Laos Mission. Apart from these two letter books there are only obscure hints in the rest of the records of the mission suggesting that such a faction might exist. Politically, Dr. McGilvary dominated the councils of the mission from its inception in 1867 until roughly 1890 when the number of missionaries, stations, and mission institutions expanded to the point where no one person could dominate it, especially given the communication and travel difficulties of the day. McGilvary himself had also begun to take long annual evangelistic trips that took him away from the mission for several months a year. It also seems that McGilvary did not attempt to dominate the mission, at least not consciously. He remained, however, a powerful figure in a highly politicized mission that included any number of other "strong" personalities, and he took stands on issues in mission politics, which proved unpopular among many of the other members of the mission. The story goes like this.

The Story

In a letter dated 23 December 1909 to Dr. William A. Briggs of the Chiang Rai Station, Callender gives us a first glimpse of his less than flattering view of Dr. McGilvary. He is discussing the decision just taken by the Laos Mission in its annual meeting to transfer the Palmer family from Chiang Mai Station to the Nan Station. Callender calls it a surprising move, and although he does not explain why it was surprising it is likely that the Palmers had been making a good contribution in Chiang Mai and were needed there. Why, then, did the mission send them to Nan? Callender writes, "I surmise that the Palmers were not wanted in Chiengmai by the Harris-McGilvary element. Otherwise I do not think the good old man would be so anxious to assist Nan to the detriment of Chiengmai." The powerful McGilvary clan, led by McGilvary himself and his son-in-law, the Rev. William Harris, that is, disliked the Palmers for some unspecified reason and used its power to have the family removed to the distant Nan Station, the Siberia of the Laos Mission. Callender was also suggesting that the Palmers' move to Nan was forced on them, although he notes in the same letter that he talked with the Palmers

personally, and they were willing to go to Nan. The tone of Callender's letter implies that this move was not in the best interests of the mission; the McGilvary faction, in short, put personal preferences ahead of the good of the work. The reference to McGilvary as "the good old man" may or may not have been sarcastic, but it is less reverential than we might expect for a founder (along with his wife, Sophia) of the mission and a senior missionary then 81 years' old with 42 years' service in the Laos Mission behind him. Finally, the quotation suggests something of a small station against large station feeling. Chiang Mai dominated the Laos Mission in numbers of missionaries, size of institutions, and numbers of churches; and in the years after 1910 there were clear tensions between Chiang Mai and the smaller stations of the mission. Callender was definitely a "small station man."

The Palmers were not the only ones, according to Callender, to suffer from the political intrigues of the McGilvary "element." Those machinations also victimized the Rev. William C. Dodd (1857-1919), a man who was emerging as a major voice in the Laos Mission. Dodd and Callender were close friends who had worked together in the aborted Kengtung Station. Dodd, it appears, had gotten himself on the wrong side of Dr. McGilvary, and in a letter to Dodd dated 24 December 1910 Callender states that, "Of course, you know that you are not wanted in Chiang Mai by the McGilvary-Harris element." He speculates in this letter that the McGilvary faction planned to have the Rev. Roderick Gillies, another McGilvary son-in-law, reassigned to Chiang Mai—partly to forestall the possibility of Dodd's being located in Chiang Mai to start a theological training school and partly for "sentimental reasons." Callender was given to understand that if Dr. McGilvary "should be called to his reward" his wife, Sophia, wanted to live with the Gillies. "That's fine for her," Callender observed, "but," he asked, "should such weighty matters be determined by sentimentality? Dr. Mason says that when the Dr. goes Mrs. McGilvary will soon follow him, so the sentimental reason scarcely obtains anyway."

Callender once again accused McGilvary and his party of influencing the placement of missionaries on the basis of personal feelings and needs. The McGilvary-Harris "element" supposedly did not like Dodd and so did not want him in Chiang Mai, whatever the need or his abilities to meet that need. The McGilvarys, furthermore, had selfish reasons for wanting the Gillies in Chiang Mai, which yet again had nothing to do with the good of the mission. Given the limitations we face in the documentary record, it is not possible to judge whether or not the McGilvary party had such deep feelings against Dodd. If so, we can sympathize with Callender's sense of scandal that it would allow those feelings to interfere with the placement of a key missionary in an important position. On the other hand, his attitude about Sophia McGilvary wanting to spend her last years with the Gillies seems to be callous, unkind, and otherwise somewhat uncharacteristic of Callender, who had a kind-hearted streak in him. Given Sophia's long service to and important place in the life of the Laos Mission, one would think that the mission would want to honor her desire (if she did in fact so desire) to live with the Gillies, if at all possible. Callender's speculations about how long Sophia would survive her husband may not have been intended to be hard-hearted, but the tone of his remarks does seem unfeeling and suggests little sense of respect for either of the mission's senior most missionaries. As it turned out, he and Dr. Mason were wrong anyway. McGilvary died in 1911, and Sophia lived on until 1923.

It seems evident from another letter that Callender sent to Briggs, this one dated 30 June 1911, that Callender's feelings about the "McGilvary-Harris element" had a political context, which may have been more important than personal and sentimental issues. Since the early 1890s, the majority of the members of the Laos Mission had been pressing the Board of Foreign Missions in New York City for permission to expand their work into the Shan States of Burma and beyond. They argued that there were millions of Tai-speakers-ethnic cousins of the northern Thai-throughout a huge area encompassing Eastern Burma, French Indo-China, and southern China who had not been evangelized and who could be best reached by the Laos Mission. Callender, Briggs, and Dodd were key leaders of the expansion party, which as noted above succeeded in briefly opening a station in the city of Kengtung in the Shan States in 1904, a city that remained the strategic center of their desire to expand into the Shan States even after the Presbyterian Kengtung Station was closed in 1907. The expansionists faced, however, three difficulties obstructing their wishes. First, the Presbyterian Church USA had only limited resources for such an expansion. Second, Baptist missionaries working in the Shan States of Burma where Kengtung was located objected adamantly to the idea that the Presbyterians should be allowed into "their" territory. Third, Dr. McGilvary disagreed with the drive to expand Presbyterian work in Kengtung State.

The Kengtung enthusiasts found all three obstacles frustrating. They tried to override the first by a public relations campaign aimed at convincing the Board of Foreign Missions and the Presbyterian Church generally that the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. had a "special calling and obligation" to reach the Tai peoples of inland Asia. No one else, they contended, could perform this task. They dealt with the second problem, the Baptists, primarily by carrying out extensive fact-finding missions aimed at proving that the Shan peoples of Burma are really kissing cousins of the northern Thai, and, therefore, the Laos Mission was the best missionary agency for bringing them to Christ. The Baptists denied the Presbyterians' arguments, and the two sides conducted a decades-long debate, which eventually proved more wearisome than helpful to the Presbyterian leadership in New York City. The most immediate and most manageable obstacle facing Callender and his expansionist colleagues was "the good old man," McGilvary. They could deal with him politically.

McGilvary over the course of the years had written a number of letters to the Board of Foreign Missions voicing his doubts about the wisdom of the Laos Mission expanding into Kengtung. Central to his worries was the observation that it did not seem to be the best use of missionary forces for two missions to occupy the same territory. This was an unnecessary and potentially troublesome duplication of efforts.¹ His objections to Kengtung seem reasonable, and they were shared, at times, by other members of the mission. The Kengtung expansionists, however, felt that McGilvary's opposition flew in the face of God's clear call to expansion; and in that light they had trouble seeing that there could be an honest difference of opinion concerning Kengtung. They also feared his influence with the Board.

Matters came to a head in mid-1911 as the Kengtung party pushed for a mission resolution supporting immediate expansion, which it planned to send to the Board. The smaller stations were all in favor of the resolution, but Chiang Mai Station seemed to be split between those siding with McGilvary and those supporting expansion. Callender, thus, wrote to Briggs his 30

June 1911 letter, cited above, in which he complained about the Chiang Mai Station's opposition to Kengtung. He asked Briggs what was the matter with that station's members that they could oppose opening a station in Kengtung. "Why," he inquired with some bitterness, "do some of the Chiengmai brethren allow [the] sentiment of a dear old man 83 years old to blind their sense of right?"

His question is a revealing one. It betrays the depths of his personal desire to see the old Kengtung Station reopened and his personal resentment against McGilvary for opposing that desire. McGilvary was no longer a wise missionary veteran in Callender's eyes. He was an old man whose opinions amounted only to "sentiment" that was not grounded in factual reality. The number 83 emphasized how truly old, truly sentimental "dear" Dr. McGilvary actually was. These old man's sentiments, furthermore, blinded some members of the mission from seeing what was right. The key word in the sentence is "right," and we need to keep in mind the moral and theological weight that the word carried in this context. To be right was to be doing God's will. The expansion party frequently cited the biblical image of Paul's vision of the Macedonian Call (Acts 16:9) to explain their desire for Kengtung and the region beyond. Callender, in sum, accused McGilvary of thwarting God's will, which he took to be a result of the senility of this "dear old man."

Callender's correspondence from late 1910 through mid-1911, then, accused the McGilvary-Harris faction of manipulating the placement of missionaries in Chiang Mai for personal reasons and obstructing the clear call of God to the Laos Mission to expand into Kengtung State. Among the specifics of the first charge was the supposition that the McGilvarys wanted their son-in-law appointed to Chiang Mai instead of Dodd, against whom they were supposed to have a prejudice. Even Callender soon had to admit things were not quite what he supposed them to be. In a letter to Dodd written 6 July 1911, Callender reported that the Chiang Mai Station had unanimously passed a resolution supporting reopening the Kengtung Station. The resolution had not been passed easily, however, and he claimed that it had been successful only as the result of a deal that would bring Gillies to Chiang Mai instead of Dodd. Callender admitted he was wrong, that is, about McGilvary trying to frustrate mission plans for a station in Kengtung, but he was still sure that McGilvary was trying to keep Dodd out of Chiang Mai. Then, in a subsequent letter to Dodd, dated 16 August 1911, Callender had to admit that he also had been wrong about there being a "deal" to use Gillies to keep Dodd out of Chiang Mai, demonstrated by the fact that the mission had decided to appoint the Gillies family to the Phrae Station. He now went so far as to tell Dodd that he felt that if Dodd wanted to work in Chiang Mai no one would object.

Callender, however, continued to express resentment against Dr. McGilvary. Between the above two letters to Dodd, the first in July and the second in August, Callender had gained more information about the Chiang Mai resolution. It turned out to be a watered-down, general resolution supporting the opening of new work "in the North." It did not specifically mention Kengtung. In the 16 August 1911 letter to Dodd, Callender wrote, "The action of Chiengmai Station, as reported by Mason, still leaves a wee hole for the 'bishop' of Chiengmai to oppose Kengtung as the exact location of the station in the north." Fearing that McGilvary would continue to use his influence with the Board on the question of Kengtung, Callender went on to

ask, rhetorically, "Is it not time for the Board to understand that this Mission has no bishop and that two or three dissenting members should not carry the judgment of the Mission?"

These last comments provide an important measure of Callender's resentment of McGilvary. In spite of the fact that all of his speculations about keeping Dodd out of Chiang Mai, putting Gillies there in his place, and McGilvary's opposition to northward expansion had proven wrong, he still sarcastically referred to McGilvary as the "bishop of Chiang Mai." He still could not accept McGilvary's opposition to re-starting the work in Kengtung as representing an honest and understandable difference of opinion. He still suspected that McGilvary might go behind the mission's back to influence the Board directly. He need not have worried; so far as we can tell from the missionary correspondence with the Board, McGilvary did not write them on the matter, and on 22 August 1911 he died, thus bringing to an end Callender's string of letters lamenting the supposed influence of the "McGilvary-Harris element" over the Laos Mission.

A letter from Callender to the Rev. D. G. Collins written nearly two years after Dr. McGilvary's death, dated 29 May 1913, suggests that the McGilvary-Harris element remained in place and, in Callender's eyes, a problem for the rest of the mission. Collins had, evidently, written to Callender telling him that a rumor was being bandied about in the Chiang Mai station blaming Collins for the Rev. Evander McGilvary's resignation from the mission twenty years' earlier. That rumor was being used as an excuse to obstruct the appointment of Collins' daughter as a member of the mission. Evander McGilvary, it should be noted, was the son of Daniel and Sophia McGilvary and had joined the Laos Mission in 1890 with the express intent of translating the Bible into northern Thai. Evander, however, took what in the 1890s was seen as an "advanced" view of the Bible, specifically rejecting the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. The Presbyterian Church's General Assembly of 1893 ruled such views heretical, and soon thereafter Evander McGilvary resigned from the mission. It should be noted that it seems clear from the extant record of the Laos Mission that there were some efforts to retain him in the mission in spite of his theological views, and that Evander himself refused to remain.

In the letter of 29 May 1913, Callender disclaims any personal knowledge of the cause of Evander's leaving the Laos Mission since the events just described took place before he joined the mission. However, he had never heard anything that would confirm the rumor blaming Collins and himself, and he understood that Evander McGilvary resigned of his own accord. Callender speculated that the source of the rumor was the jealousy of unnamed members of the Chiang Mai Station against Collins, and he wrote he was sorry for such jealousy, observing, "It seems to me that jealousies and misunderstandings cause more trouble than all else put together." Callender does not name names, but we can only surmise that members of the McGilvary clan were the source of the rumor and the resentment. No one else would have cause to use this particular justification for denying the Collins' daughter an appointment to the mission.

The Chiang Mai Station, that is, probably continued to be divided into McGilvary and anti-McGilvary factions even after the death of Dr. McGilvary. There is cause to suspect that the division lingered on at least until 1920-1921 when an important faction of the Chiang Mai Station attempted to prevent the union of the Laos Mission with its sister mission to the south, the Siam Mission. All of the smaller stations in the Laos Mission favored that union as a way to

end the power of the Chiang Mai Station in the mission; and while there is no mention of the role of the McGilvary clan and allies in the other records of the mission it is possible and even likely that they would have resisted union with the Siam Mission for reasons of both politics and sentiment.

Reflections

When read in the context of his field correspondence, one cannot but be struck by how uncharacteristic Callender's views on McGilvary were. During the years' covered in the letter books, he came into conflict with several individuals, sometimes over personal matters and sometimes over matters of mission policy. He consciously tried to behave according to his understanding of what it means to be a Christian gentleman, and he virtually never indulged in expressions of petty, sarcastic, and resentful feelings towards his protagonists except in the case of "the Bishop of Chiang Mai." Why did he have such bitter feelings against Dr. McGilvary? He never explains, and we can only speculate on the matter.

McGilvary's opposition to the Kengtung Station almost certainly heavily influenced Callender's feelings towards him. Callender's correspondence reveals a deep sense of loss, of grief over the closing of that station in 1907 and an intense longing to go back to Kengtung. He could not possibly understand why McGilvary, one of the premier evangelists of his day, opposed the Presbyterian presence in Kengtung. That opposition must have felt like a personal betrayal to Callender. More generally, as already pointed out above, Callender belonged to a mission faction that felt God's call to expansion into Kengtung State and beyond with a deep intensity. McGilvary's attitudes, again, simply did not make sense to him. They seemed perverse, faithless, and timid. Callender could deal with them only by insinuating that McGilvary must be senile and by turning McGilvary's undoubted stature in the mission against him with the epithet, "bishop." Callender's almost snide attitude toward McGilvary, then, is a gauge of how important the whole matter of establishing a permanent Presbyterian station in Kengtung was to most of the members of the Laos Mission, Callender himself in the forefront.

Callender's comments also help us to better understand McGilvary's role in the life of the Mission in later years. It seems from other sources available to us that, as indicated above, his influence in the mission waned. The Callender correspondence suggests a more complicated picture. On the one hand, a substantial faction of the mission seems to have resented him for his unpopular stand on Kengtung. On the other hand, Callender still considered him to be a powerful figure in the mission, one who could get people he did not like transferred to places like Nan. Callender thus seems to have felt that McGilvary was a man who still had a great deal of influence over the Board and used that influence to frustrate the desires of the majority of the mission. It appears, then, that by 1910 McGilvary no longer was able to take positive leadership in the life of the Laos Mission; his views on Kengtung, plus the inevitable animosities between persons, limited him to the role of a "spoiler," one who could more easily keep things from happening than make things happen. There is no clear evidence that McGilvary actually played the role of spoiler, as Callender's several misguided speculations about what McGilvary and his "element" imply, but apparently those allied with Callender still saw him as a largely negative influence in terms of his leadership role in the Mission.

Finally, it seems to me that Callender's attitude about McGilvary reflects more poorly on Callender than on McGilvary. Whoever was ultimately correct concerning the Kengtung question, McGilvary took a principled stand that put mission comity before the wants of the Laos Mission itself. So far as we can tell now, McGilvary felt that the Presbyterians should not intrude in Kengtung unless the Baptists welcomed their presence, which they did not. It was not as if the Laos Mission lacked for work to do in its own territory. In light of what we know today, my own feeling is that McGilvary was right, the expansionists were wrong. They wasted incredible amounts of time and resources chasing a receding mirage at a time when the Laos Mission only had limited amounts of time and resources.

We can understand that what seems clear on hindsight today was not nearly so clear in 1910 and 1911, but what is striking in Callender's correspondence is the fact that he seems to never have stopped to consider that McGilvary might have had a point. He does not seem to have taken into consideration that, in fact, no one in the history of the mission could match McGilvary's own record regarding expansion. No one had faced nearly the dangers he had faced nor taken the risks he took. He was a man of proven courage and an obviously deeply principled Christian. Why didn't Callender take all of this into account? The answer to this question is surely not simple. It is possible that McGilvary did use his influence from time to time to ship someone out of Chiang Mai that he felt should not be there, for whatever reason. It is possible that McGilvary did not effectively communicate his concerns to his colleagues. It is also certain that Callender, Dodd, Briggs, and other members of the mission simply could not compromise on the matter of Kengtung. They could not treat kindly opposition to what they thought was God's will-not even when that opposition came from a man of McGilvary's quality and experience.

The contents of the Callender letter books, among other things, serve to remind us of the peculiarly evangelistic and theological nature of Laos Mission politics. The members of the mission had their personal visions for what they took to be God's work. They could not compromise those visions, even when individuals of the quality of a Daniel McGilvary disagreed with them. Some of them also, evidently, could not treat those visions with an eye to the practical, mundane, and very tangible restraints imposed on the Laos Mission by the realities of limited funds and personnel. As a consequence, the Laos Mission was at times an intensely politicized arena of contending wills, which fact sometimes had a highly negative impact on personal relationships as well as the institutional health and effectiveness of the mission.. As Hazel Brunner, a young missionary, wrote at roughly the period under discussion here, "The mission field is just like a great big family only without the family love."²

¹ See McGilvary to Brown, 9 November 1905, 18 December 1905, and 25 December 1907, Records of the Board of Foreign Missions.

² Brunner to Home Folks, 18 April 1914, in Claralice Hanna, *Letters From Hazel* (Typescript, 1983), quoted in Herbert R. Swanson, *Khrischak Muang Nua: A Study in Northern Thai Church History* (Bangkok: Chuan Press, 1984), 73.

Gossip with a Point

Introduction



The Laos Mission, as Article One suggests, was an entirely human institution and prey to the vicissitudes of its humanity no less than other organizations. Its members played politics. They argued with each other. On rare occasions, individual missionaries behaved in a way that was scandalous, or nearly so. This essay recounts one of those occasions, an occasion when the mission avoided a public scandal only because the early twentieth-century sense of propriety deemed it best to keep some things secret. In light of the twentieth-century's massively turbulent history, the event itself was incredibly petty and hardly worth notice but for one fact. It is documented in unusual detail in Callender's letter books, making it virtually the only "scandal" for which we have a detailed, if one-sided account. The event reveals another side to mission life and missionary relationships, which both helps us to understand the pressures of that life and serves to correct the hagiographic tendency of many histories of the missionary movement. Our purpose here, then, is to engage in ninety year-old gossip, in order to better understand the less happy side of the missionary enterprise in northern Siam. That "less happy side" created obstacles to the smooth working of the mission itself, which obstacles weakened the Laos Mission's ability to carry out its work effectively.

The Story

So far as the rest of the world knew in July 1910, the small mission force at the Lampang Station of the Laos Mission in northern Siam worked alongside each other generally smoothly and happily. No one knew, that is, that the Rev. Charles Callender had discovered that his colleague, the Rev. William Yates, was engaged in a serious flirtation with his wife, Winella. The first hint in the Callender letter books that there might be something amiss is a letter dated 15 July 1910 that Callender wrote to the Rev. Howard Campbell in Chiang Mai. He writes that he is worried about Yates who was going through a bout of depression, had been ill, and was not doing at all well in his language studies. Callender hopes that Yates can recover from all of this and become a capable missionary, and he writes, "Mr. Yates has the making of a splendid missionary, if he can keep extraneous things out of his mind and become consciously identified with the Laos people." One of the "extraneous things" Yates had on his mind, apparently, was Winella, a woman ten years' his senior. The hint, however, is too subtle to win attention in and of itself, as there is nothing in Callender's correspondence to that date suggesting any problem between his family and Yates.

A missive written by Callender to Yates on that same day, 15 July 1910, however, makes the matter suddenly much clearer. Yates has gone to Chiang Mai, and Callender writes a personal letter to him, a letter virtually unique in the extant records of the Laos Mission and worth quoting in full. Callender writes,

"Dear Mr. Yates: Up to the present time I have treated you as a brother in trouble or as a father would a wayward son. I have talked with you and written to you, admonishing, advising, encouraging.

"You plead for another trial in my home. I said you would be given another chance to reinstate yourself, but not in my home. Circumstances, however, favored you to the extent of granting your desire and request, viz. another chance in my home.

"Your persistence in your unbecoming attitude toward Mrs. Callender (I shall not say failure to make good) forces me to treat you as a formidable foe. Your insult to Mrs. Callender at the dominoes table, as showing in your posture, is not indicative of love or of respectful regard, but of lust. No gentleman would do such a thing even to a lady whose love he might legitimately have a right to win. Your conduct takes the matter out of the category of consul. I am not in a position to advise you further. I cannot regard you as a Christian brother or co-worker. I forbid you to enter my home or to have anything further to do with my family.

"I write this after deliberation and prayer. It was Tuesday evening [12 July 1910] when the insult occurred, it is now Friday morning. I have prayed and thought much as to the wise course to pursue, and feel that I am led by the Spirit.

"Please read 1 Pet 2:19-21, and Ephesians 4:1.

"God gives you another chance; so do I, in that I tell no one of your disgraceful conduct. I have no desire to injure your career, but to assist you. You refuse to be assisted. I am in duty bound to protect my home, my family, as well as to strive to promote God's Kingdom of righteousness upon earth. I shall continue to pray for you. God will reveal to you what course to take-if you pray sincerely and listen for his voices and have a heart bent upon doing his will.

"Very Sincerely yours,

"P.S. "I have written the above after reading Mrs. Callender's letter to you, which she wrote of her own free will, as I have written mine."

Clearly something had been going on for some time, but matters only came to a breaking point on that Tuesday evening when the Callenders and Yates were playing dominoes. Precisely what Yates did is not clear, perhaps there was some physical contact involved or maybe just gestures and eye contact; whatever it was, Callender took those actions as an indication that Yates was (still) making advances towards his wife. He is now warning Yates off in the clearest terms possible.

Yet, another fact stands out as well. Callender wants to keep the matter under wraps, to cover it up. His ostensible reason is to protect Yates' reputation so that he can remain a member of the Laos Mission. In previous correspondence, Callender has expressed a great deal of concern concerning the limited size of the mission force and a particular desire to have the mission recall several experienced former missionaries no longer associated with the mission. Callender is, thus, presenting himself in a selfless light, as one who is concerned to prevent the loss of Yates, a promising young missionary, to the mission-in spite of his attentions towards Winella.

In a letter written the next day, 16 July 1910, to his friend and mission colleague, Dr. Briggs, Callender maintains this pose by noting that Yates had been "down in the dumps" for some time, and the Lampang Station (i.e. the Callenders) had voted him a trip to Chiang Mai, ostensibly to snap him out of the doldrums. Callender expresses his fear that Yates might be lost to the mission and hopes that the presence of several younger missionaries in Chiang Mai might help Yates "pick up." The last hope is yet another subtle hint that something was wrong in Lampang, that is that Yates needed to be around younger, single missionary women where he would not have to flirt with an older, married colleague.

Yates, in Chiang Mai, subsequently wrote to Callender, evidently asking to be allowed to return to Lampang and resume his work there. In two letters to Yates, dated 9 August and 13 August 1910, Callender refused to consider a reconciliation; he warned Yates that if he returned from Chiang Mai Callender would not allow him in their home and the whole matter would soon be exposed to the other missionaries. He also urged Yates to consult about the whole matter with Campbell, a respected senior colleague who could keep a secret.

The matter could not rest there, however. The mission had assigned Yates to Lampang, where he had evidently been doing an acceptable job. Callender did not have the authority on his own to keep Yates from returning to Lampang, and even if Yates did not return explanations would have to be invented to keep the rest of the mission from finding out the real reason. With this problem in mind, Callender wrote to Campbell on 20 August 1910 under the stated assumption that Yates had confided in Campbell (which was not the case) that Yates and the Callenders could not possibly work in the same Station. Callender asked that Yates stay on in Chiang Mai until the annual mission meeting in December when he could be assigned to a new station, anywhere but Lampang.

Callender and Campbell then exchanged a number of letters regarding Yates, Callender's letter to Campbell of 24 September 1910 being especially helpful in explaining a number of points. In this letter, Callender describes what had been going on prior to that fateful Tuesday evening at the dominoes table, writing that over a period of time Yates had persistently acted in a "familiar" manner with Mrs. Callender. Yates knew how to do hypnosis, which Winella Callender was very susceptible to, and Callender told Campbell that this fact probably explained, "the partial success he obtained in his efforts with Mrs. C." Callender goes on to explain that after he noted Yates behavior towards his wife he warned Yates, but Yates persisted. Eventually, Callender had to go out on a trip into the country and put Yates "on his honor." When, after a few days, Callender asked Yates to join him at the rural church he was visiting, Yates tried to refuse and finally went only after a show of great reluctance. While he was with Callender, he wrote a note

to Winella "treating her like a lover," which Callender intercepted and read. Further warnings and trial periods saw no change in Yates' persistent interest in "Mrs. C.," and matters finally came to their dramatic end as already described.

With this communication, Callender's substantive correspondence regarding Yates comes to an end. Subsequent letters indicate that Yates tried to repair his relationship with the Callenders, with little success. We do not know whether or not the actual reason for his subsequent reassignment to the Prince Royal's College, Chiang Mai Station, became public knowledge or not. Yates, in any event, remained on the field only until 1913, when he returned on sick leave to the United States and soon resigned from the Laos Mission. He later became pastor of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Some Thoughts

Callender's last letter to Campbell indicates that the relatively minor affair of Yates' flirtatious attentions to Minella Callender are more complicated than it first seemed. Clearly, Minella in one way or another did not discourage those attentions and, evidently, may have even encouraged them. Callender does not express his feelings that his wife was also flirting with a man ten years her junior, but one can imagine that the whole episode put a serious strain on their marriage as well as adding unwanted, unneeded pressures on their duties as missionaries. It is hard to believe that Callender himself took the hypnosis hypothesis seriously. Callender's desire to hush up the whole affair, thus, was not as selfless as he himself presented it to Yates and Campbell. He had his wife's complicity, however passive and temporary, to keep secret as well.

The Yates-Winella flirtation reminds us of the strangely isolated situations in which the members of the Laos Mission lived, especially those who served in the smaller stations such as Lampang. Missionary correspondence repeatedly alludes to this feeling of isolation. One of Callender's first letters in the Callender letter books, written on 22 December 1909 when his family had just located themselves temporarily in Phrae, describes their feelings of loneliness and isolation at the end of the mission's annual meeting, which had been held in Phrae that year. The rest of the missionaries went back to their respective stations, leaving the Callenders "alone" in Phrae. Leaving them alone, that is, in the middle of a thriving city of thousands of inhabitants. In Lampang, Yates faced a strange dilemma. He was a young, single man with a full set of sexual drives and needs, who should have been on the look out for a prospective bride. The year was 1910, and we have to assume that both he and Winella Callender felt some ambivalence concerning their potentially promiscuous behavior, but Yates "obviously" could not turn his attention to the fair young ladies of Lampang, some of whom would have surely welcomed such attention. The mere thought of one of those young ladies as a prospective wife was unthinkable-as, more generally, was the thought that a missionary could live among the northern Thai but apart from other Westerners without feeling isolated or lonely.

The point is not whether or not such feelings were justified. The point is the reality of those feelings. It was almost as if the missionaries lived on a chain of small tropical (American, Christian) islands in the midst of a huge (northern Thai, Buddhist) ocean. They had to paddle between their islands to keep each other company, finding no social refreshment in that large ocean. This is not a minor point, but rather a central fact of mission life built on missionary

attitudes about themselves as Western Christians and about the people around them who were neither Western or, for the most part, Christian. Even the small Christian communities related to each mission station did not provide social intercourse of a type that prevented even veteran missionaries, such as the Callenders, from feeling lonely.

This sense of social alienation posed an immense burden for the missionaries, the Yates-Winella dalliance being but a minor if telling example. The missionaries lived in what were effectively, if unconsciously, small communes, with all of the attendant problems posed by communal life but not the conscious commitment to communal life necessary to transcend the problems.

It is hard in retrospect to calculate the effects of social isolation on the missionaries, most especially because their sense of propriety and, perhaps, embarrassment did not allow them to admit openly to the Board the extent of the tensions they felt with each other. Tactically, they had budgets and work to protect as well, which might be jeopardized by the Board knowing too much. The cost of social isolation, in any event, must have been very high in terms of health, well-being, and effectiveness. We do know that it was more than some of the missionaries, particularly the wives, could bear; there is some indication that some missionaries were sent home with mental health problems, although the matter was not generally put that way, in justifying to the Board why they had to return home.

This admittedly minor case also reminds us of the importance of propriety to the "old-time" missionaries. Yates' (and, possibly, Winella's) improper behavior aside, we see Callender doing his best to handle the matter in a proper manner. He took pains to treat Yates fairly and gave him repeated chances to change his behavior, which Yates used, according to Callender, only as further opportunities to flirt with Winella. Callender, furthermore, tried self-consciously to act as a proper, responsible missionary by preserving for the Laos Mission a promising young missionary. At the same time, his sense of propriety drove Callender to engage in a cover up of the whole affair, one that would preserve Yates' reputation, the Lampang Station's reputation, and-not least of all-Winella's good name. The point is that throughout this event Callender labored mightily to act in a proper manner, and in the course of things to save his and his wife's face.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, little stories like this one serve to remind us, again, that the missionaries of one hundred years' ago were not any different from us-in spite of latter-day efforts to idealize and even idolize them. They did dumb things, and dumb things happened to them. The good they did in northern Thailand was substantial, but it was always tinged with the limitations and realities of human frailty embodied in unhappy ideologies, personal tensions, unwarranted assumptions, and just plain mistaken actions. We must insist on preserving as clear an understanding of missionary humanity as possible because just as their strengths helped strengthened the northern Thai churches of their day so their weaknesses served to weaken the church. The northern Thai churches of today stand heir to both the strengths and weaknesses. We tend, however, to want to exaggerate the strengths and wish away the weaknesses, which is tantamount to perpetuating that which weakens. We tend, that is, to want to cover up and forget implications of the fact that one of the old-time missionaries once engaged in an extended

flirtation with a colleague's wife, who in her turn did less than she should have to discourage those flirtations.

The Poor Lost Sheep at Phrae Revisited

Introduction



In 1984, I published a preliminary history of the northern Thai church from 1867 to 1920 entitled *Khrischak Muang Nua*, which publication quickly gained a local notoriety in Chiang Mai for its criticism of the way in which the Presbyterian Church's Laos Mission founded and dominated the northern Thai church. Nineteen years later, I remain convinced, on the one hand, that the historical record supports no other conclusion than the fact that the ethnocentric policies and strategies employed by the American Presbyterian missionaries up to 1920 substantially and even systematically weakened the northern churches. On the other hand, missionary ethnocentrism was but one factor in the formation of the northern Thai church, and future histories of the northern Thai church will need to pay more attention to other factors as well. They, that is, will necessarily place the missionary role in larger, more textured contexts, which seek to account more fully for the strengths as well as weaknesses of both the Laos Mission and the northern Thai churches.

The contents of the Callender letter books comprise one important source for the rewriting of northern Thai church history. They provide, as one example, valuable additional information regarding one of the key episodes in the history of missionary and church relations in early twentieth-century northern Thai church history. That episode was the experiment in northern Thai ecclesiastical self-rule conducted by the Rev. Robert Irwin in Phrae beginning in 1903, including subsequent developments after Irwin left Phrae in 1905. In *Khrischak Muang Nua*, I argued that this episode proved that the missionaries impeded the growth of the northern Thai church. In this third historiographical essay, I would like to rethink that argument on the basis of Callender's correspondence in the letter books.

The Original Argument

The "Phrae Case," as described in *Khrischak Muang Nua* (pages 109-113), began when the Laos Mission transferred the Rev. Robert Irwin to the Phrae Station in 1903. Irwin was a missionary with a reputation in the mission for harebrained schemes. Over the years, he repeatedly engaged in experiments that encouraged northern Thai churches to take full leadership responsibility for themselves. None of those experiments proved satisfactory in the long run largely because of the mission's habit of constantly moving its inadequate force around to cover for those going back to the States on furlough or to recover their health. Irwin was a prime victim of this habit and, thus, ended up working in nearly every station in the mission. The mission never allowed him to stay anywhere long enough to bring any of his various attempts at local church rule to fruition, and his successors always immediately scuttled his experiments as unworkable, whether they actually had been or not.

Phrae was Irwin's last stop before resigning from the Laos Mission, and he went there with the intention of preparing the Phrae Church to become a self-governing congregation. The mission no longer had the forces required to keep the Phrae Station open, which fact provided Irwin with one more opportunity to prove his contention that northern Thai Christians did not need missionary supervision. From 1903 through 1905, Irwin labored to prepare the Phrae Church to no longer depend on missionary patronage but to lead itself, support itself, and grow by its own ability. He turned actual authority for the administration of the congregation over to its session (church council) and assumed the role of advisor. When the session came to him and asked that he resume the usual missionary administrative, supervisory role over the church, he refused. He did work with the session to help it carry out its duties, but at points he left the city to conduct country evangelism, leaving important decisions to the session entirely. It should be noted that these efforts were marred by Irwin's poor health, which forced him to return to the United States for some six months during this period. He was, thus, able to devote only a portion of his time to preparing the Phrae Church for self-rule, and even during that time he was not well physically.

Irwin left Phrae permanently in 1905. The mission did not appoint a replacement and put Phrae under the official authority of the distant Lampang Station while empowering the elders of the Phrae Church to run the church's life. It even gave them authority to conduct the sacraments, a highly unusual action for a Presbyterian mission. The records of the Laos Mission for the next few years betray a distinct uneasiness, however, concerning the state of the Phrae Church. Those records contain repeated references by the missionaries to the "poor people in Phrae" who were said to be like "sheep without a shepherd." The missionaries felt that the work and church in Phrae were in danger of dying out entirely. *Khrischak Muang Nua*, drawing on comments by the missionaries themselves, argues that such was not the case and that the self-rule experiment in Phrae was successful in spite of obvious, foreseeable problems and obstacles. Missionary ideology blinded the missionaries to that success and, ultimately, poisoned it when the Laos Mission reopened the Phrae Station in 1912 and terminated without cause the Phrae Church's responsibility for its own life.

The Argument Revisited

The Callender letter books provide a unique opportunity to review the case I made nearly twenty years' ago concerning the meaning and importance of Irwin's experiment in northern Thai ecclesiastical self-rule in Phrae. Although he was not in northern Siam when Irwin initiated that experiment in 1903, Callender developed a close relationship with the Phrae Church, beginning in late 1909, four years after Irwin had returned to the United States. Callender lived in Phrae temporarily from the end of 1909 through April 1910, and after a few years in the Lampang Station, he returned to live in Phrae again in 1913. While located in Lampang, he kept a more or less close eye on developments in Phrae, and his correspondence between 1909 and 1913 provides an excellent source for the study of the Phrae Church in that period and, thus, the results of the Irwin experiment in northern Thai church self-rule.

Three of Callender's letters from Phrae written in January 1910 indicate that Callender shared the general opinion of his missionary colleagues concerning the self-governing church in Phrae. On January 4th, he wrote to Dr. Charles Crooks that, "The Christians are tired of promises from the

Mission to resuscitate the work or reman the station. Their condition is pitiable." Three days later, on the 7th, he added in a letter to the Rev. Roderick Gillies that, "Our hearts ache for these people. They seem like sheep without a shepherd, truly. They seem to doubt our word, almost, when we tell them that the policy of the Mission is to reman the station as soon as possible." Finally, on the 12th of January he wrote to the Rev. Howell Vincent that, "The Pre field makes ones heart sick, so many have gone back for lack of missionary oversight." Callender does not provide much in the way of specifics, but he appears to have focused on two aspects of the situation, which indicated to him the pitiable state of the Phrae Christians. First, he pitied them because the Laos Mission had failed to fulfill their desire for the return of the missionaries. Second, he felt sorry for them because so many former Christians had left the church.

Yet, as we read on in Callender's correspondence of January 1910, we note another theme emerging. In a letter written on the 14th, he informs his old friend, the Rev. William C. Dodd, that many of the Christians who had been disappointed by the failure of the missionaries to return had given up and "gone back" to Buddhism. He observes, furthermore, that the Phrae Church would have been in much better condition had the station not been closed. Then, he goes on to write to Dodd that, "But the wonder is that the church has stood as well as it has. The people are responsive and the work is bound to build up with proper workers." In an undated letter to a former missionary in Phrae, the Rev. J. S. Thomas, also written in January 1910, Callender states again that, "It is a wonder that the Christians have kept together so well as they have without missionary oversight for the past number of years." Callender's correspondence, that is, shares in the almost strange tension and self-contradiction found in other Laos Mission records concerning the church in Phrae. It was poor and pitiable, yet it had also done surprisingly well at maintaining itself. It had survived in better condition than Callender expected it would have.

A letter Callender wrote on 26 February 1910 to the editor of the Pacific Presbyterian for publication sheds important light on his perspective on the situation in Phrae. He notes that the mission's experiment of using the Lampang Station to carry out work in Phrae had proven unsatisfactory, and he writes,

Many went back into heathen practices owing to a lack of proper missionary oversight. The lack of a physician is especially detrimental to the progress of the work, as the Christians are sorely tempted to resort to non-Christian doctors who always connect doctoring and disease with spirits. Without a missionary doctor, it is no wonder that some have resorted to that which the country affords-spirit doctors. The temptation here to return to non-Christian practices is beyond all human conception. It takes first of all a Personal Savior to keep them/then a personality thru which the Holy Spirit works and reveals the Savior.

In analyzing the contents of this missive, it should be noted, first, that Callender transformed Irwin's experiment from being a test of whether or not the Phrae Church could run its own life into a test as to whether or not the missionaries could use Lampang as a base for working in Phrae. The goal of northern Thai ecclesiastical self-rule has been dropped entirely. Second, Callender considers even this more limited and mission-centered experiment as a failure because the Phrae Christians lacked someone who could function as a medium for the Holy Spirit. The

implication of the final sentence in the above quotation is that God required the immediate presence of missionaries in Phrae as that spiritual channel. Third, Callender helpfully identifies one of the central problems facing the Phrae Church, namely the absence of a missionary physician who could provide medical services to the Christian community and thereby prevent their return to "non-Christian practices."

Callender's observations call our attention, once again, to the importance of missionary ideology in the formation of the Thai church. Irwin's idea that the Phrae Church could actually take responsibility for its own life independent of the mission simply does not exist in Callender's thinking, and his thinking was far more representative of the mission than was Irwin's. Callender was working in the distant Kengtung State when Irwin was in Phrae. He possibly did not entirely understand what was going on in Phrae, and it is likely that he more or less "filled in the blanks" by interpreting the closing of the Phrae Station as a tactical redistribution of missionary forces rather than a strategic move to encourage the northern Thai church to take greater responsibility for its own life. It is not that he opposed the idea of greater independence so much as that it simply was not in his thinking. Hence, when he voiced the need for a human, immediate spiritual agent in Phrae, he clearly assumed that the missionaries had to fulfill that role. It never entered his mind that a northern Thai Christian could be the "personality thru which the Holy Spirit works and reveals the Savior." Such is the power of ideology; it blinds us to the basic assumptions by which we live, thus preventing us from testing the viability and appropriateness of those assumptions.

Missionary ideology had a profound impact on the very issue of medical care itself. So far as Callender and virtually all of his colleagues in the Laos Mission were concerned, northern Thai Christians could not avail themselves of indigenous medical care because that care involved animistic practices. They believed that any Christians who did seek "native" treatment had, in effect, "gone back" to Buddhism and animism. Given this assumption, Callender correctly states that, "The temptation here to return to non-Christian practices is beyond all human conception." Missionary ideology interpreted the situation in Phrae in dualistic, white or black terms. The use of Western medicine was Christian. The use of indigenous medicine was heathen, anti-Christian. In these terms, then, the Christians in Phrae faced the difficult situation that when they became ill they did not have anyone who could treat them in the "Christian" way, and they had no effective recourse but to "go back" to indigenous medical practitioners. In Callender's eyes this meant they had stopped being Christians.

In previous issues of *HeRB*, I've discussed the question of the relationship of Western dualism to the Thai church(es). The issue is a burning one, even today, because the peoples of Thailand do not generally divide the world and human action into such rigid categories of right and wrong. They are generally much more adept at thinking in terms of degrees of grayishness than are most Westerners, who want things to be black or white, yes or no, right or wrong (see, for example, the short note below on "Compliance: All or Nothing"). [HeRB 2](#) contains a short note worth recalling here concerning a Karen tribal Christian who raises work elephants. The process of weaning a young elephant from its mother is crucial to the training of a work elephant, and that process invariably must be done by specialists who use certain ostensibly animistic rites as a part of the process. Christian Karen who are such specialists feel compelled to use these rites

because, otherwise, the young elephant cannot be successfully weaned from its mother and is ruined as a work elephant. The economic loss of a ruined young elephant is substantial. In the conversation I had with this elephant owner and a group of other Christian Karen, two perspectives emerged. A theologically trained pastor told the elephant owner he was wrong to engage in animistic practices. He should stop. The owner and some other participants in the conversation, while not challenging the pastor directly, clearly felt that they could remain good Christians and still use certain traditional, animistic practices. They did not feel completely comfortable about the situation of the elephant owner, but they felt it was tolerable. Northern Thai Christians, in similar situations, will frequently assert that the essential point is what a person feels in her heart. If she is sincere, that is what really matters.

Callender and his colleagues in the Laos Mission did not accept this less dualistic, more Asian attitude, hence the rigid, uncompromising distinction between Western and northern Thai medical practices. That is to say that the missionaries' perception of the supposedly pitiable state of the Phrae Church was a consequence of their Western dualistic worldview. A somewhat more tolerant, Thai-like attitude would have resulted in a quite different interpretation of the situation of the convert community in Phrae. At least some of those who "left the church" did not do so because they wanted to but because when forced to choose between remaining in the church and their health, they chose their health.

A letter Callender wrote to the Rev. Howard Campbell, located in Chiang Mai, dated 24 February 1910, further raises the question of the missionary role in Phrae. He writes, "The people are so much in need of constant oversight on the part of the missionary. The people are responsive." He goes on to state, "The field is an intensely needy one, interesting and promising of splendid results if proper attention be given it." Later in the letter, Callender concludes, "The Christians are longing-almost to despair-for missionaries to come permanently, especially a physician." Four facts stand out: first, the Phrae Church needed leadership; second, given that leadership, it had great potential; third, the Christians longed for the return of the missionaries; but, finally, what they really wanted was a missionary doctor located in Phrae. Callender, again, unconsciously assumed that the church's need for leadership meant missionary supervision, and a solution not involving missionaries simply did not enter his thinking. He also, again, unconsciously assumed that only a missionary doctor could solve the medical dilemma facing the Christians in Phrae.

This last letter, however, also suggests that it was not just Callender who shut the door on any solution to the ecclesiastical and medical needs of the Phrae Church that did not involve missionaries. If he is correct, the Christian community itself did not see any way to resolve these problems apart from a return of the missionaries. In another communication, written on 9 April 1910 to Dr. E. C. Cort, Callender reports that one of the elders in Phrae, Elder Nan Chai, claimed that, "if the missionaries would only stay here there would be a great harvest." As if to confirm that observation, Callender went on to note that on a recent trip out into the country he had baptized six adult converts and nine children. He enthused and lamented that, "The field is ripe for the harvest, the reapers are certainly few." In a correspondence with the Rev. William C. Dodd, dated 14 May 1910, Callender brought a number of points together when he wrote about the Christians in Phrae that,

While a number have gone back, the wonder is that so many have remained faithful and so many have taken a stand for Christ. The condition is most unsatisfactory to the natives Christians, no missionary being located there to whom they can refer their many

He states here, again, that the "native Christians" themselves felt uncomfortable with their situation. They wanted somebody to help them solve their problems, which desire recalls the hesitancy on the part of the Phrae Church that Irwin experienced when he initiated his experiment in church self-rule. The elders themselves went to Irwin and asked him to resume his role as head of the church. Irwin refused to comply with their request-a refusal that made him virtually unique in the history of the Laos Mission. Callender, in contrast, never considered any other possibility but that the missionaries must return and take over. The local Christians seem not to have considered any other possibility either, in spite of the fact that they had been running their own church for most of the last seven years. In a letter to the Rev. Hugh Taylor written on 6 July 1910, Callender writes that the Phrae Christians "seemed so discouraged on account of having been left so long without the oversight of missionaries."

Callender moved from Phrae to Lampang in May 1910, and several of his letters indicate how unhappy his was about leaving Phrae and how much he worried about the "poor lost sheep" there. On 30 June 1910, however, he wrote to Thomas that,

I never saw soil better prepared than Pre. The Holy Spirit is certainly at work there now. We were loth to leave the Christians without a missionary to see to their needs. *But it is wonderful what is being done there without the constant oversight of a missionary.* Some have gone back, to be sure, but the wonder is that so many have remained faithful. The majority of those who have come in are children of Christian parents, but several new families have taken a stand. [Emphasis added]

In a letter dated 7 January 1911, written to the Rev. C. W. Mason, Callender notes with some pride that the Phrae Church had decided that it needed to add a boarding department to its school, and he states, "The Christians there certainly have some push." In March 1911, he wrote to missionaries in the Nan Station, which borders Phrae, that the boarding department of the Phrae school was doing well.

Letters Callender wrote to Roderick Gillies on 21 June 1911 and on 16 December 1911, indicate that things continued to go generally well in Phrae during 1911 in spite of the failure of the Laos Mission to reopen the station there. Lampang sent one of its clergymen, Kru (Teacher) Wong, to work in Phrae, and he made substantial progress in rural evangelism. Callender also noted that a Christian doctor, who had quit the Phrae Church, was again doing "a good deal of helpful work in medicine," and the Lampang Station was paying him a modest monthly salary to encourage him in that work. He was also planning to rejoin the church. There was only one problem. The city Christians in Phrae gave Kru Wong a cool reception, and when he tried to call a meeting of the session, they refused to hold that meeting until they had word from Lampang that the

missionaries approved. In his letter of 21 June 1911, Callender speculated that the Phrae Christians were peeved with the Laos Mission for not reopening the Phrae Station and, thus, were in no mode to accept a northern Thai stand in.

Still, as 1911 closed, the actual situation in Phrae according to Callender's own correspondence had improved in spite of his repeated lamentations concerning how the Phrae Christians were "lost sheep" without missionary oversight. The church itself had done well over the years, although there had been problems, and the Lampang Station had successfully supplemented the church's efforts by sending a capable northern Thai clergyman and by employing a northern Thai doctor to work in Phrae. That is to say, the Callender letter books present the same picture concerning developments in Phrae as is found in those sources I used twenty years ago. While the missionaries felt that the situation in Phrae was unstable and uncertain, their own correspondence suggests otherwise. The Phrae Church had successfully taken charge of its own life, and the Lampang Station had taken specific actions to further strengthen the Christian community, which actions did not require the presence of a missionary.

Conclusion

The situation of the Phrae Church at the end of 1911 was not perfect, to be sure, but it was viable. In *Khrischak Muang Nua*, I noted that the actual situation of the church in 1911 was better than it proved to be in later years after the Laos Mission reopened the Phrae Station in 1912. What seems to have happened after the missionaries returned was that their leadership replaced northern Thai leadership in the Phrae Church but then focused most of its attention on activities unrelated to the life of the church. In a pattern found repeatedly in the history of the Laos Mission, the missionaries held onto the reins of power in the churches but devoted precious little of their time to the care of those churches. The Phrae Church, eventually, became known as one of the weakest, most poorly led churches in the North—a situation that developed only after the missionaries returned to Phrae in 1912.

The Callender letter books, however, make it clear that the argument presented in *Khrischak Muang Nua* requires some modification. It fails to give due weight to the evident role the Phrae Church itself played in terminating Irwin's experiment in self-government. The congregation did not welcome the experiment and, if Callender's correspondence is any measure, never did reconcile itself to running its own life. Rather than entering into the experiment with a sense of commitment, that is, the church contributed to the missionaries' impression that they were "poor lost sheep" by their frequently voiced desire for missionary oversight. Forced to run their own church, they proved able to do so; but they never wanted to have to do so.

We can only wonder at the possible results of Irwin's experiment if the Phrae Church had engaged in it faithfully, willingly, and wholeheartedly. We can only speculate as to what might have happened if it had communicated to the Laos Mission a firm resolve to take responsibility for its own life and made it clear that it did not need or want missionary oversight. It is possible that the missionaries would not have been able to divest themselves of their ideological blinders in any event and would have ignored the congregation's wishes to run its own life. Yet, Callender so frequently returned to the fact that the Phrae Christians were upset, discouraged, and felt abandoned by the mission that it is clear that their feelings were a key source of data for

his own impression that they required missionary oversight. It is just as possible, then, that the Laos Mission might have continued Irwin's experiment indefinitely if the Phrae Church had shown a clear desire to do so.

Callender never discusses why the Phrae Church so eagerly desired the return of the missionaries, other than his comments about their desire for a mission doctor. It is, perhaps, too simple to write the matter off as a northern Thai desire for missionary patronage that was motivated by the fundamental patron-client structure of northern Thai society. Why did the church prefer *missionary* patronage, that is, instead of relying on its own local sources of patronage? At an economic level, city Christians in all of the northern Thai urban centers depended on the missionaries for incomes. A typical missionary station would employ tens of Christians in all manner of positions from nanny to nursing assistants to house parents in the boarding schools; the departure of the missionaries must have meant some economic hardship for the Phrae Christian community. At an institutional level, when the missionaries departed the church lost a key model for conducting every aspect of its life. The "church" as created by the missionaries was an idea, which grew out of the American historical experience of the church as a voluntary association independent of the state. There was nothing comparable in northern Thai society, and the only way in which northern Thais could learn how to run the church "properly" was from the missionary example. The Phrae Church had no written constitution it could refer to when questions came up. It only had the "living constitution" of the missionaries. And at the practical level, the fact is that lay people are busy people and only have so much time and energy to devote to the church. Most churches prefer to have trained, professional leadership. In the case of the Phrae Church, missionary leadership would have been made even more preferable by the fact that it was free so far as the church was concerned.

In any event, the problem with *Khrischak Muang Nua* is not that it is wrong in its interpretation of what happened in Phrae so much as it is only partly right. It focuses too much on the missionary role and fails to give sufficient attention to the Phrae Church's complicity in terminating Irwin's experiment in church self-rule in Phrae, an experiment that had achieved some success by December 1911. In that sense, the Callender letter books also serve to remind us of a central problem facing the study of northern Thai church history during the years of the Laos Mission (1867-1921), namely that there are almost no northern Thai records from that era and the living memory of the church today effectively extends back to the 1930s, if even that far. We have to depend on the missionary record for our interpretation of what happened in Phrae, which necessarily warps our perspective. Even when we try to discover the church's own views in those records, we are, at best, seeing through a glass darkly. Still, the point stands that future research into the history of Protestantism in northern Thailand will need, as best it can, to give more weight to the role of the churches themselves in the construction of the northern Thai church.

Short Items

Locating the "Thai" in Thai Theology

In a provocative and cogently argued article published in 1993, David Streckfuss contends that the concepts of the "Thai race" and "Thai-ness" are recent inventions. He claims that in the era around 1900 France was engaged in an aggressive program aimed at incorporating as much of Siam as possible into its colonial sphere. The French argued that Siam was a multi-ethnic state in which the Siamese illegitimately dominated its subject peoples. The "real" Siam extended only as far as the Chao Phraya River valley. Anything else was fair game for the French, who presented themselves as the protectors of these subject peoples. According to Streckfuss, the Siamese government eventually learned to speak this European race-speak and justified its control of its outer provinces by redefining their inhabitants as "Thai." A prime example he cites is the "Lao," by which he apparently means the northern Thai. That is to say, up until around 1900 the Siamese government habitually spoke of the central Thai as "Siamese" and the northern Thai as "Lao" and did not consider the two as being the same race. In the years immediately afterwards, it began to insist that both were actually "Thai" and that the Thai government had every right to rule over all of the people in "Thai" territory.

In the review of Tongchai Winichikul's paper, "Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Post-National Histories in Southeast Asia." in [HeRB 2](#), I questioned the validity of the unitary concept of the "Thai church" in the light of local diversity in Thailand. Streckfuss' article raises similar doubts about the concept of "Thai theology." What implications does his argument that "Thai-ness" is a political, artificial, and relatively recent construct have for Christian theological reflection in Thailand? Is there such a thing as "Thai theology"?

Source: David Streckfuss, "The Mixed Colonial Legacy in Siam: Origins of Thai Racialist Thought, 1890-1910," in *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honor of John R. W. Smail* (Madison, Wisconsin: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, 1993), 123-153.

The World is Not a Happy Place

An international poll conducted last year by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press on global attitudes surveyed opinions on a range of issues in 44 nations. While the article reporting the polls findings in the online edition of the *Washington Post*, 4 December 2002, focused on issues related to the global role of the United States, it concluded with the troubling observation that those surveyed in nearly every country and global region are "unhappy with the state of their nation." The article reports that, "In only three of the 44 countries surveyed did a majority of residents say they were generally satisfied with the state of their country: Canada (56 percent), Uzbekistan, (69 percent) and Vietnam (69 percent). In the United States, barely four in 10--41 percent--expressed satisfaction." The article quotes the Pew report as stating, furthermore, "As 2002 draws to a close, the world is not a happy place. At a time when trade and technology have linked the world more closely together than ever before, almost all national publics view the fortunes of the world as drifting downward. A smaller world, our surveys indicate, is not a happier one."

Madam Yee Hub

The Thai TV equivalent of the American soap opera, airing in the early evening rather than during the day, is generally about as semi-mindless and ridiculous as anything seen on U.S. television. Part of its appeal is the very fact that viewers needn't invest much brainpower in the plot development, such as it is. Still, viewed from another perspective these TV shows provide fascinating insights into current Thai values and offer fuel for theological reflection "in the Thai context." "Madam Yee Hub," a generally popular offering, which ran for several months at the end of 2002, provides a case in point.

The story centered on the promise two men, who are old friends, had once made to each other that their granddaughter and son, respectively, would one day marry. That day has come, the problem of the plot being that the granddaughter is a country girl, smart, mouthy, but unrefined while the son is an up and coming diplomat slated to become the Thai ambassador to London. His mother and younger sister vehemently oppose any liaison with the country hick, whose accent is appalling to them. A jilted ex-girl friend and her scheming mother add zest to the story.

While the hero of the tale is the country girl, it is interesting to note that all of the "bad guys" in the story are loud-mouthed, emotional, narrow-minded, selfish women. The main "good guys" are mostly men, including the two fathers and a gay younger brother of the future ambassador. Yet, the male lead is portrayed as an arrogant and repressed city boy, who only gradually falls in love with the country girl-and even after he falls in love is totally inept at expressing his feelings. Yee Hub, the country girl, ultimately wins the heart of the male lead and his noisy, obnoxious mother and sister by becoming the model daughter-in-law, submissive, kind, and self-denying. A woman who knows her role and plays it well, that is, wins out. The male lead, however, has to learn to be less self-involved and more adept at showing affection.

The values: [1] country is better than city; [2] quiet males are better than mouthy females; [3] "real" Thai (again, country) is preferable to Western (again, city); [4] non-confrontational servanthood is better than aggressive, emotional confrontation; [5] rural wisdom is better than urban sophistication (a refinement of #1 and #3); [6] goodness is the ultimate victor over hate; [7] being gay is funny but OK; [8] truth will out in the end; [9] women can be as brave and resourceful as men; and, [10] romantic love overcomes all jealousies and misunderstandings. Embedded within the nearly mindless plot, finally, was the ongoing search for Thai democracy symbolized by the name of the show and the experience of Yee Hub, the country girl, who became "Madam" Yee Hub, the wife of the Thai ambassador to Britain. She is, at once, a "real Thai" country girl who proves that the country wisdom of the demos is best. The whole show was a Thai celebration of the democratic "fact" that you can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl.

One motivation for constructing Thai theologies is that contemporary Thai values value Thai-ness and the rural, democratic wisdom of local peoples. Christian theologies that fail to share in these values will (continue to) be irrelevant to what moves and shapes contemporary Thai culture(s).

The Counter-Intuitive Life

The Christian life is by definition counter-intuitive.

Compliance: All or Nothing

The *Bangkok Post* edition of 28 January 2003 (page 8) carried the following headline concerning the threatened U.S. invasion of Iraq: "Washington looking for full compliance" and the sub-headline, "If 'answer is partially yes, then [the] answer is no.'" The quotation is from a statement made by a White House spokesman, Ari Fleischer, who is quoted as saying, "The United States will read the Blix report to see one thing, one thing very simple. Is Iraq complying, yes or no?" Iraq, he said, "must comply in all regards. Not in some regards, not in half regards, not in some areas but not other areas. Yes or no, are they or aren't they?"

While this all or nothing view of Iraqi compliance does sound simple, it is also nonsensical. Simply trying to define a term such as "total compliance" in a complicated case such as the arms inspection of Iraq is impossible. The statement leaves no room for honest differences of opinion, mistakes, an occasional local official who refuses to go along with stated Iraqi government wishes, a forgotten pile of something that ostensibly could be possibly used to manufacture a weapon, or even just a locked cabinet for which the key is missing. Fleischer's uncompromising concept of compliance is simply not humanly possible under the best of circumstances. Anyone who stops for even a moment's reflection will realize that such absolutely either-or demands do not reflect the world of shades of gray we all actually live in.

So, why is the demand framed in this way? As one reads the news article itself, it is clear that the U.S. government has already decided the case. Iraq is guilty of a hidden weapons program. The "full compliance" demand is, thus, not so much a statement of policy as it is a public relations' ploy aimed at the American public and, possibly, America's Western allies. As such it cannily uses a dualistic, either-or rhetoric comfortable to the Western mentality since the days of Athens and Rome. Western consciousness is driven by a hard and fast distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, God and Satan. Fleischer, thus, is not appealing to American public reason but rather to subliminal Western dualism—a dualism that is the source of many prejudices and is geared to shutting down rather than facilitating reasoned, real world reflection. In Iraq's case, it would be more helpful and realistic to look for is an honest effort, a clear intention to comply as fully as possible. Such a scaled down expectation, however, does not satisfy the Western ideological attachment to the rhetoric of either-or, which rhetoric far more accurately reflects American public-political consciousness.

News & Notes

Research Report: Youth Attitudes Towards Pre-Marital Sex

During November and December 2002, the Home & Family Office of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) conducted a modest survey of the attitudes of Christian youths, ages 12 to 24, regarding pre-marital sexual relations. The survey, based on 130 questionnaires taken largely from urban churches in northern Thailand found that:

1. a total of 78 respondents (60.0%) stated that pre-marital sex is either "wrong" or "very wrong." Only 10 respondents (7.7%) stated that pre-marital sex is not wrong. However, in answer to a later question, some 31.3% of the respondents agreed in varying degrees with the statement that "it is not important that Christian young people preserve their virginity until marriage."
2. when the respondents were asked to state how important various youth problems are to their friends, 95 (73.1%) stated that **drug addiction** is a "very important" problem, while 79 (60.8%) stated **AIDS** is a "very important" problem, and 63 (48.5%) claimed **pre-marital sex** to be a "very important" problem. At the other end of the scale, only 19 (14.6%) rated **unhappiness with self** as a "very important" problem and only 24 (18.6%) termed **poverty** a "very important" problem.
3. when asked if adults worry too much about pre-marital sex among young people, 62.8% of the respondents agreed.
4. when asked concerning the consequences of pre-marital sex, 72.9% of the respondents claimed that the danger of AIDS is a "most significant problem," while 67.7% felt that loss of an education is a "most significant problem."
5. regarding the role of the church, 63.9% of the respondents stated that the church should take an interest in the problem of pre-marital sex. Interestingly enough, 81.4% of these young people agreed that their churches had already had a role in teaching them that they should not engage in pre-marital sex.
6. still, 82.7% of the respondents agreed in varying degrees to the statement that it is necessary for Christian young people to receive information on pre-marital sex from agencies of the CCT.

Too much weight should not be put on these results. The sample is much too small, and it is not inclusive of rural churches or churches without pastors. Still, they do suggest that Christian young people believe that pre-marital sex is wrong, although a significant minority of them do not think it is all that wrong. They evidently understand the risks and problems involved in pre-marital sex, and they want to be informed by the church about pre-marital sex. At the same time, they think that adults emphasize this issue too much, and they see drugs and AIDS as being more pressing problems-although, of course, AIDS and pre-marital sex are related issues.

A New Doctoral Thesis on Thai Protestantism

This past January (2003), the Payap University Archives received a copy of Patricia McLean's Ph.D. dissertation, entitled, "Thai Protestant Christianity: a Study of Cultural and Theological Interactions between Western Missionaries (the American Presbyterian Mission and the Overseas

Missionary Fellowship) and Indigenous Thai Churches (the Church of Christ in Thailand and the Associated Churches of Thailand-Central)," completed at the University of Edinburgh and dated 2002. This study relies on qualitative data to describe the process of "enculturation" taking place in Thai Protestant churches within their Thai Buddhist contexts. It contains nine chapters divided into three parts, running 410 pages including 344 pages of text.

The abstract states, "Part One (Chapters 1 and 2) provides a historical and theological background to the study, introducing Thai Buddhism and the origins of Protestant Christianity in Thailand. Part Two (Chapters 3 to 6) analyses the post-1945 history of APM and OMF in Thailand, with specific reference to their approaches to evangelism, mission-church relations, and attitudes to Thai Buddhist culture. Part Three (Chapters 7 and 8) examines the engagement of CCT and ACTC Thai Christians with Thai Buddhist culture and concludes with a comparison and contrast between missionary and indigenous approaches. The final chapter (Chapter 9) summarises the research findings and discusses the present state of Thai Christianity's contextualisation in Thai Buddhist culture."

A Quick Look at the 2002 Thai New Testament

Since 1997, a set of committees established under the auspices of the Thailand Bible Society (TBS) has been working on the text of the current standard translation of the Thai-language New Testament, first published in 1971. TBS, as I understand it, did not intend to re-do or even to revise the 1971 translation, but rather to clean it up with as few changes as deemed necessary. It is generally recognized that there is a need for a new translation, but TBS presently does not have the wherewithal to undertake that task. The following brief comments are not intended as a review of the newly edited New Testament and are based only on the translation's introduction plus a comparison of the 1971 and 2002 versions of Mark 1.

That reading and the introduction indicate that the responsible committees have edited the 1971 translation with an eye to making a number of improvements. Most of the changes they have made are minor ones, involving only one or two words. The changes have been made for the sake of clarity, simplicity, correcting mistranslations, ridding the text of Anglicisms, and, in some cases, bringing the sense of the Thai translation closer to the literal sense of the Greek text. Some of the changes do not change the meaning of the translation at all and appear to have been made simply to update the Thai, making it sound more contemporary. In a few cases, it is not clear to a non-specialist why a change was made. The committees have also made changes in the footnotes and the headings in the text.

If the 2002 text of Mark 1 is any measure, the Bible Society is to be commended for the results of its work on the Thai standard version of the New Testament. While some changes do not make much difference, most are helpful. On the whole, the text is more readable and a more accurate translation. The 2002 Thai New Testament is an important contribution to the life of the churches. In a modest way, it brings the churches closer to the Greek text while making the contents of the Christian Scriptures more comprehensible to native language speakers of central Thai.

The Wiang Pa Pao Consultation on Evangelism

As part of its participation in Don Swearer's project (See [HeRB 1](#)) on the study of northern Thai Christian in Buddhist context, the Office of History organized and led a two-day conference on Christian evangelism in northern Thailand. The consultation was held at the CCT's Dong Phra Phorn Camp, Wiang Pa Pao on 21-22 February 2003. The purposes of the consultation were to: 1. provide the participants with an opportunity to learn from each other's experiences; 2. provide a model for group sharing and reflection; and 3. collect data for the research project itself. A total of 33 people took part, most of them being experienced evangelists. Topics discussed included the reasons northern Thais convert, what evangelistic approaches best work with northern Thais, the role of churches in evangelism, and the impact of the Buddhist context on evangelism. The participants evaluated the consultation as being a useful, worthwhile experience, and I hope to present some of the material from the conference in a future *HeRB*.

Book Review

Parichart Suwanbubha. "Grace and Karma: A Case Study of Religio-cultural Encounters in Protestant and Buddhist Communities in Bangkok and Its Relevant Environs, Thailand." Th.D. dissertation, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1994.



The number of theses and dissertations directed to the question of the relationship of Christianity to culture in Thailand has increased almost dramatically since Philip Hughes completed his groundbreaking study on "Christianity and Culture: A Case Study in Northern Thailand" twenty years' ago, in 1983. Ach. Parichart's work is unique among these studies because she writes from a Buddhist perspective, and, not surprisingly, her dissertation is strongest in its description of the Thai religious and cultural contexts within which Thai Christianity lives.

Dr. Parichart's thesis is that "Thai Christians under the CCT [Church of Christ in Thailand] have been influenced by culturally embedded Thai Buddhist notions of *kamma*" and, thus, have demonstrated "some of the same ways of thinking and behavior as Thai Buddhists who have been shaped by the notions of *kamma*." (p. 193) The dissertation describes important elements of the Thai worldview, elements centered on this concept of *kamma* (karma) and situates the reader in the midst of Thai lifeways and perspectives that have heavily influenced the Thai reception of the Christian message. *Kamma* refers to the moral consequences of all intentional human actions, which consequences have an immediate impact on our present lives as well as a more long-term influence on future lives. The author contends that the idea of *kamma* has a wide influence on Thai society, particularly in its commitment to merit-making activities and in its social structure, which is technically described as a hierarchical "patron-client society." So important is the concept that she describes popular Thai Buddhism as being "kammic Buddhism," the search for a happy, prosperous, and peaceful life in the present and in future lives.

One of the points at which the dissertation is most persuasive is in its analysis of certain events in Thai church history, particularly in the Phet Buri Church during the later nineteenth century. Dr. Parichart contributes to a better understanding of those events by showing how Thai converts would necessarily react to missionary patronage. The issue she addresses is one of significance throughout missionary history in Thailand, raising as it does the question of the extent to which individual missionaries should function as patrons, putting themselves, that is, in the position of providing financial and social security to "their" converts. The dissertation demonstrates that the patron and client relationship is an adult-adult relationship, which has to be affirmed and utilized if the church is to grow in Thai contexts. Most Protestant missionaries, historically, have treated the Thai social need for patrons as proof of their backwardness and childishness.

While the author has convincingly demonstrated the importance of using a Thai cultural perspective for understanding the behavior of Thai converts in the nineteenth century, she has failed to use the concept of grace as persuasively. First, it will be noted that in the statement of her thesis, quoted above, the author does not mention the Christian concept of "grace" at all even though it appears in her title and is treated in detail in the text. While the dissertation intends to use the doctrine of grace as a foil to show that Thai Christians think more like Thai Buddhists than like Western Christians, it is not clear throughout the dissertation that using such a foil is helpful or successful. Second, this problem is compounded by the author's decision to rely on Calvin's theology of grace based on the assumption of its relevance to the thought and work of the "Calvinist" Presbyterian missionaries in nineteenth and twentieth-century Siam. The author fails to test this assumption historically, with awkward consequences. While most of the Presbyterian missionaries would have called themselves "Calvinists," their work and thought were heavily influenced by other historical movements-notably the Enlightenment, American evangelicalism, and even Romanticism-to a degree that renders highly suspect any conclusions about their role in Siam based solely on Calvin's theology.

Third, the dissertation's emphasis on the Christian concept of grace is made even more problematic by a failure to deal with the role of grace in the thought of the missionaries themselves. Did they actually emphasize the concept in their evangelism and instruction of the Christian community? In her discussion of missionary thought in Chapter II, the author relies entirely on secondary sources, which sources emphasize missionary dualism and exclusivism. While the link between dualism and grace is assumed and asserted, it is not at all clear to what degree the concept of grace was important to the missionaries themselves.

A second problem in the dissertation is found in its use of data based on two questionnaires, one distributed to 176 Buddhists and another to 170 Christians. The copy of the dissertation used for this review, unfortunately, does not contain the Thai originals of these questionnaires, having only the English translation for the Buddhist questionnaire. The lack of the Thai versions makes it difficult to evaluate the answers given, since the sense and implications of wording can be quite different in English. The English translations betray some basic flaws in the questions themselves, such as one question that actually combines two distinct questions in one. Many questions also fail to provide equal numbers of positive and negative choices.

In spite of these problems, the author presents some potentially important results, which deserve further investigation. As one intriguing example, She reports that 76 (44.7%) of those responding to the Christian questionnaire disagreed with the statement that "human beings are not able to claim God's grace." Exactly the same number, 76, agreed with the statement. That is to say that Dr. Parichart's sample was equally divided on whether or not Christians can lay claim to God's grace by their own behavior. If these results are an accurate reflection of Thai Protestant thinking, one is still left with the difficult question of whether or not this answer proves or disproves the author's thesis that kammic Buddhism has heavily influenced Thai Christian thinking and behavior. It could be argued, in fact, that missionary theology itself betrayed elements of works righteousness, implicit in the very idea that one gains salvation by conversion to Christianity. However, it does seem that this data provides some tentative support of the author's thesis.

Other responses to the questionnaires, however, appear to contradict that thesis. The author found, as one important example, that while 84.1% of the Buddhists agreed that human destiny depends on humans themselves, some 58.2% of Christians agreed with the statement that human destiny depends on God alone. It would appear that a majority of Thai Christians has accepted the concept of Providence with its implicit understanding that humanity is entirely dependent on God's grace. Whether or not this data disproves the author's thesis is, nevertheless, a very complex question. The theological relationship between Providence and human freedom has befuddled generations of Christian theologians, and it is entirely possible for individual Christians to acknowledge God's ultimate sovereignty over our lives and still claim that individuals have a role in choosing their own destiny. Large segments of nineteenth-century American Protestantism consciously rejected the predestinarian assertion that God alone decides the eternal fate of individuals irrespective of human decisions and behavior. It seems entirely possible that 40% of American or European Christians would agree with 40% of Thai Christians that humans have a role in their own eternal destiny, depending on the sample. It would be simplistic in the extreme to claim this latter view as being the exclusive domain of Asian-Buddhist thought.

In the end, this dissertation highlights the difficulties inherent in attempting to come to hard and fast conclusions concerning the origins of contemporary Thai Protestant thinking and behavior. A superficial knowledge of the Thai church apparently betrays elements of its life that are "obviously" Western and others that are "obviously" Thai. When one moves beyond the superficial to a detailed, in depth investigation of the sources of Thai Protestantism, however, it becomes more and more difficult to separate East from West, indigenous from missionary, Buddhist from Christian. In the case of this dissertation, these difficulties are compounded by the author's unavoidable dependence on Western scholars in pursuit of her thesis, which reliance tends to obscure her Thai perspective. The dissertation also points out the importance of resolving methodological questions and the need for scholars to base themselves, generally, in one discipline while drawing on approaches and data from others. It remains unclear down to the last page of this dissertation whether it is a theological, historiographical, or sociological work. This inter-disciplinary confusion is not helpful.

This dissertation, in sum, makes an important but limited contribution to our understanding of Thai Protestant church history by situating earlier generations of converts on their real-life sociocultural world. It provides fuel for thought on important issues related to the beliefs and lifeways of contemporary Protestants in Thailand. While the dissertation's thesis that kammic Buddhism has influenced Thai Protestantism goes almost without saying, the dissertation does not provide clear guidance on the extent of that influence. It leaves the reader holding a mixed bag of impressions and tentative conclusions, which await further resolution.