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Lead Essay

Red Flower Theologies



Everybody, these days, has a theology. In his introduction to Australian theologies, Goosen describes an extensive list of theologies including the standard contemporary ones, such as black theology, feminist theology, liberation theology, and Asian theology. Some of the more specific and exotic theologies he lists include: Coconut Theology, Dalit Theology, Minjung Theology, Pakeha Theology, Waterbuffalo Theology, Boomerang Theology, Gumnut Theology, and Rainbow Spirit Theology (Gideon Goosen, *Australian Theologies Themes and Methodologies into the Third Millennium* (Strathfield, New South Wales: St. Paul's Publications, 200), 19-46.). These new theologies frequently ignore or even reject traditional theological categories; and they are increasingly enamored with local wisdom and pluralistic insights. Global, unified theologies that claim to speak for a tradition, denomination, or nation are out. Asian theology, thus, no longer can be said to exist in a singular sense, a fact symbolized by the subtitle title of the new Asian theological journal, *JCTA*, which is "*The Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia*." All very plural.

So, in this world of ever more local, ever more plural theologies, why not "Red Flower Theologies"? One of the on-going stories that *HeRB* tells is the story of the Suwanduangrit Church, located in the community of Ban Dok Daeng, some 20 kilometers due east of Chiang Mai. "Ban Dok Daeng" translates as "Red Flower Village." The Suwanduangrit Church has a total baptized membership of just over 120 souls and was founded on Christmas Day, 1880, making it Thailand's seventh oldest Protestant Church. Previous *HeRB*s tell the tale of a significant series of events that have taken place in Ban Dok Daeng since 1996, which events have led to a progressive interfaith reconciliation between Buddhist and Christian members of the community (see "[Dancing to the Temple, Dancing in the Church](#), *HeRB* 3 and "[Ban Dok Daeng Update](#)," *HeRB* 4).

For the Christians of Ban Dok Daeng, an emerging set of Red Flower theologies lies at the heart of this process of reconciliation. Historically, the church had long stood off in its own corner of the community, persistently and stoutly uninvolved as a congregation in the life of its neighbors. It did not even think of the Buddhists in the community as being neighbors, seeing them as nothing more than "*khon nok*" ("outsiders"). The church's members have experienced the progressive theological redefinition of the community's Buddhists from *khon nok* to neighbors, therefore, as a theological journey. The question put to Jesus in Luke 10:29, "Who is my neighbor?" has become the question facing the Suwanduangrit Church; and the biblical injunction to love God fully and one's neighbors as one's self (Luke 10:27) has thus become the unofficial theme passage of the congregation. That passage is now mentioned regularly from the church's pulpit and during congregational meetings. Given the village's long history of sectarian division, the theological discovery that the temple faithful are also the church's neighbors has been little short of startling and liberating.

Christians in Ban Dok Daeng, as a key element in the process of reconciliation, now take friendly part at an unprecedented level in the religious life of their Buddhist neighbors, where prior to 1996 most of the members refrained from any involvement at all. Attendance at a range of Buddhist rituals and ceremonies has confronted the church with theological questions regarding the nature and the limits of Christian participation in those events. The inherited wisdom of the church is that participation at all but the most superficial level is wrong because it condones and takes part in idolatrous practices. Buddhism, the inherited wisdom teaches, is a religion founded on idolatry and the futile attempts of its faithful to win salvation for themselves through merit-making. It was this wisdom, which led the church to keep to itself. It was this wisdom that also led the church to hold unfriendly, sometimes arrogant attitudes towards its Buddhist neighbors.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 has stood at the center of the church's implicit decision to reject its received wisdom. Jesus himself, in this passage, redefines the meaning of neighbor and enjoins attitudes and actions that flew in the face of the common wisdom of his own religion and times. The love of neighbor he describes in the parable is an active, involved love that is clearly experienced as loving. Christian neighborliness is effective, that is, only when our neighbors know that they are loved. If one is going to love one's Buddhist neighbors in ways that they perceive as loving, then-in Ban Dok Daeng, at least-one is going to have to take meaningful part in their religious life. Our neighbors have made it clear repeatedly that they are offended by the Christian reluctance to join them in their religious festivities. When we stay away from the temple and fail to dance through the streets of our community with our neighbors, we are communicating a lack of love and respect. It does no good whatsoever to say that certain Old Testament commandments prevent us from taking part; such protestations are simply taken as further confirmation that Christians are bad neighbors.

The situation faced by Christians in Ban Dok Daeng is similar to the one discussed by Paul in I Corinthians 10 where he struggles with the question of whether or not Christians in Corinth could eat meat dedicated to the gods and/or take part in festivities where such food was served. In I Corinthians 10:31-33, Paul comes to the following conclusions. First, do whatever you do to glorify God. Second, don't cause trouble for Jews, Gentiles, or the church. Third, please everyone so that they might be saved. Glorify God. Behave peaceably. Communicate the faith savingly. It is the new wisdom of the Red Flower theologians that Paul's arguments provide them with further warrant for peace-making participation in the religious life of their neighbors-as friends, not as judges.

As I was writing this essay in March 2003, the Suwanduangrit Church was preparing to participate yet again in a temple fund-raising activity, which was to include (and did include) a procession through the community. This occasion marked the fourth time since 1996 that Christians have joined in such a procession, dancing through the streets of Ban Dok Daeng with their neighbors. It is important to note that the temple faithful take part in these processions as extended families and that the Christians themselves participate as if they were one such larger family. The members of the church march together as part of the Christian extended family, not as members of particular families; and our Buddhist neighbors accept our participation in this unusual manner as such. They explicitly accept Christian participation as being Christian. The

church's members share that same consciousness. What they do, they do in the name of the church and, ultimately (theologically) in the name of God. For God's glory. To behave peaceably. To communicate, by their actions, the reconciling Good News of Jesus. It is of such actions as this that Christians in Ban Dok Daeng construct their Red Flower theologies, which theologies recall Jesus' teachings in Luke 10 and Paul's injunctions in I Corinthians 10.

Red Flower Theology will never be as famous as Minjung theology or as influential as the grand theological systems of the German masters; it will never even attain the stature of its predecessor and close kin, Water Buffalo Theology. Still, in its own place and time, I would argue that it has as much integrity and is as biblical and contemporary as any of the greater strands of Christian theology. Its beauty is that the Red Flower theologians are just average people tucked away in a small, not very important corner of Asia who are progressively articulating their own fresh understanding of the Christian faith. They are able to apply the Gospel in a way that eschews the common wisdom they received from the past while reconfiguring biblical and cultural values in a theological mix that is at once neighborly and faithful. Perfect? No, I suppose not. But, then, it is not a simple matter in a northern Thai context to work out how to love neighbor while loving God in ways that effectively communicate love to the neighbor. It is important, however, to take the risk of loving one's neighbor however imperfectly. The alternative is to sit on the sidelines of the community afraid to take any risk and fail to communicate the reconciling, peaceful, and compassionate love of God in Christ to our neighbors. That alternative is unacceptable.

Herb Swanson
Ban Dok Daeng
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Articles

Research & the Local Church: Why? Where? And Who?

Herb Swanson

Introduction



"Research" is not a word many Christians associate with their local churches.

Researchers, they might observe, work in labs and libraries, not in churches. Their research delves into arcane subjects distant from the life of a local congregation. Given the global situation in which churches find themselves today, however, such attitudes about research and local churches require rethinking.

Three aspects of the global landscape, in fact, indicate the importance of rethinking the relationship of research to local churches. First, the Christian faith is currently undergoing a dramatic demographic shift from West to East, from North to South. Christianity is no longer a European religion writ large but a truly global faith centered on Africa, Asia, and South America rather than Europe and North America. This global shift confronts local churches throughout the

world with difficult issues and challenges having to do with the rapid growth of the church in some nations and regions and the parallel decline of the church in other nations and regions.

Second, at the same time, the place of religion in social life is apparently changing in much of the world, especially in the West. The church, in nations such as Australia and Britain for example, no longer stands at the center of community life even as mass communications and the Internet are changing the very nature of community itself. Church membership and attendance at worship are declining. Young people are opting out at an alarming rate, even though there are clear indications in Australia and elsewhere that the younger generation retains a high interest in religion as such. It seems that more and more Westerners are taking a "buffet" approach to religion, selecting a variety of values, beliefs, forms, and meaningful texts from several different religious traditions and then assembling these into a meaningful personal faith. Changes in communal life and in the place of religion in that life, again, confront local churches with serious problems and challenges.

Third, the entire planet has now entered the Information Age. Knowledge is power and wealth. Research, in a multitude of guises and forms, is the key to knowledge. Medical research regularly captures headlines and has led to a steady lengthening of human life. Agricultural research has played an important role in coping with population growth. Scientific research in an amazing variety of fields reshapes our lives every few years. Marketing research influences the foods we eat, the clothes we purchase, and the style of cars we drive. Professional sports thrive on research into the mass of statistics kept on each team and player. Environmental research is unfolding the magnitude of the global warming crisis now facing the globe. Politicians invest grand sums of money and worry in public opinion polls. Knowledge drives success in all of these and many other fields.

At the nexus of these three global trends is an insight waiting to be discovered and pounced upon, namely that local churches and their denominations have a pressing need to conduct their own research into their current situation and possible futures-whether they be churches in Asia and Africa or in Victoria, Sussex, and Massachusetts. The purpose of this essay is to reflect upon three fundamental questions regarding church based research: Why is it needed? Where should it be done? Who should do it?

Why?

Research, if well done, provides information and insights that offer the prospect of solutions to those challenges now confronting local churches throughout the world. The process is not magical, of course, and researchers do not wield magic wands with which they can wave away every demon. What they do offer is a variety of problem-solving methodologies to address real-life problems in concrete local situations. As is the case with other contemporary social institutions, research offers the church a key way for achieving its ends and strengthening its internal life. The church needs research. It needs researchers to carry out that research.

In actual fact, churches and church agencies already conduct a great deal of research, whether they consider it as such or not. Many churches have, for example, an amateur historian who collects material on the church's past. Most churches and all organized denominations keep

membership records, and not a few churches keep track of attendance statistics. A small but growing number of pastors are conducting local church research projects related to D.Min. studies or other academic programs. In many denominations, churches calling a new pastor must go through a search process that requires self-study on the part of the congregation. Even where local congregations and their pastors engage in research, however, individual research activities are not integrated into a larger, ongoing process. Churches lack intentionality and perseverance in their conduct of research projects, and in many cases do not even realize that they are carrying out research.

Why should local churches throughout the world become more intentional in developing research skills and using those skills for the life of the church? The answer to this question will vary according to local needs and resources, but in general the most basic goal of congregational research is self-understanding leading to a deeper congregational life and more effective congregational ministries. Evaluation. Planning. Action. Reevaluation. The goal is a healthy church, one that is just, loving, and walks in humble companionship with God. A careful study of a congregation's past or the judicious use of a questionnaire gathering member's opinions and attitudes can provide knowledge that contributes to resolving congregational issues and strengthening congregational life.

For example, over the last ten years members of a church in northern Thailand have been seriously split over whether or not to build a new church building. One faction wanted to tear down the old building and put up a new one. The other faction wanted to repair and preserve the current structure. The pastor was not willing to have the matter discussed openly as he feared a damaging split would inevitably take place. Finally, he decided to distribute a questionnaire on the matter. In this way, he reasoned, he could raise the issue and seek to resolve it while avoiding a public confrontation. Working with a committee composed of both factions, he produced a questionnaire, distributed it, and collated the results. It became clear that opposition to tearing down the church did not prohibit a major renovation of the current building, a renovation that would mollify those who wanted to build a new building. This pastor and church used a rather simple research process, thus, to resolve a difficult, potentially divisive real-life issue facing the congregation.

The lay moderator of another northern Thai church addressed low worship attendance in his congregation by collecting statistics on worship attendance, tracking over a period of months those who attended and did not attend worship. He shared the results of his research with the church council, which decided that it would visit every low attending member to see why they weren't attending worship. The result was increased attendance and giving.

Church-based research, in sum, offers one means for strengthening local church life and ministry.

Where?

On first blush, it seems unnecessary to discuss the locus of church research. It appears obvious that the locus of church research is "the church." Further reflection, however, suggests that this obvious answer is also the wrong answer and that church based research must begin, in fact, by

dispensing with the very concept of "the church" as being an abstraction that exists only in our thinking. What exists in reality is vast number of local worshipping communities plus the infrastructure of agencies and polities these communities maintain to serve various local ends and needs. It is not "the church," which faces the issues and challenges of the early 21 century world but, rather, this multitude of individual churches in their particular settings.

The individuality of each Christian congregation throughout the world must be emphasized. The author, in the 1970s, pastored a small Presbyterian church in a quiet little community in central Pennsylvania, USA. A Lutheran church stood next door, the properties of the two churches separated only by an old cemetery. In spite of this close geographical proximity in a single community, the two congregations are very different in terms of resources, strengths and weaknesses, styles of worship and ministry, and constituency. They each face a distinct, though at points similar, set of challenges and problems. The author, today, is a member of a small rural congregation in northern Thailand, which belongs to the First District of the Church of Christ in Thailand. Less than two kilometers away is another church belonging to the same district of the same denomination. The two churches were one congregation from 1880 until 1948. Yet, one is large, the other small. One is situated in an entirely Christian village while the other finds itself in a mixed Buddhist and Christian community. One has several theologically trained members but no pastor. The other has a pastor but no other members with theological training. These two churches face the world with different needs and resources. They live in quite distinct contexts in spite of their geographical and denominational proximity.

It is not "the church," then, that faces a variety of challenges and problems, and it is not "the church" that needs research and researchers. The locus of church research is the hundreds of thousands of churches scattered across the world each located in its unique local context. If correct, the claim that the locus of church research is the churches has far-reaching implications for every aspect of the research process, including the topics researched and the methods used. As we will see below, it has a specific impact on what constitutes effective research and who does such research.

Churches, on the other hand, also share similar situations and contexts. The Anglican Church in Britain is dwindling in numbers, a matter of serious concern to the whole denomination because the majority of its local congregations are, in fact, smaller and more aged than they were decades ago. Research, at the same time, also indicates that a minority of Anglican congregations are growing and have unusually active youth programs. Anglican Church research in Britain, then, must address a problem experienced by many but not all Anglican churches in the UK. Indeed, there are some geographical areas in Britain where most Anglican churches are growing rather than dwindling, so that even the general picture is a complicated one. Groups of churches share certain traits and needs, but, at the end of the day, each church is a unique entity.

It helps to think of each congregation as the center point of a set of concentric circles located in space and time. Each center point stands as its own unique locus. Beyond the individual congregational center, however, lay a number of concentric circles, which overlap with the concentric circles of other churches and, perhaps, local synagogues, mosques, and temples. Take the case of the Wangaratta Baptist Church, Wangaratta, Victoria. It is a unique congregation.

Yet, it is also one of several churches located in Wangaratta. It is a member of the Baptist Union of Victoria. It is an Australian church. It is a Baptist church. It is a lower middle class congregation. Each of these "localities" represents one of the congregation's outer rings, which overlap with those of other churches in Wangaratta, other Baptist churches in Victoria, and other lower middle class congregations in Australia.

The Wangaratta Baptist Church, then, requires research at the levels of its outer concentric rings and at its local, particular level, what we might call "global" and "local" research for convenience. The focus remains on the local church, so that the effectiveness of global church research in the outer rings is measured by the degree to which it is relevant to particular local churches. The Church of Scotland may conduct research into the changing nature of the local parish in contemporary Scotland, for example, but the parish at Nethy Bridge must still decide how immediately the conclusions of that research apply to its particular situation. A Swedish Lutheran bishop who reads the final report of this Church of Scotland project, in fact, may find some enlightening points of similarity with the Swedish Lutheran Church while a Baptist pastor from Edinburgh does not even bother to look at it. An American Presbyterian of Scottish descent will find the whole issue of the research irrelevant to her ecclesiastical experience.

The final test of relevant research into the life of "the church" then is its relevancy to individual congregations. The global must address the local. One can argue that even in such apparently locally remote fields of study as biblical research effective research must address in one way or another the needs of local churches. Eventually, the word studies and detailed form and content analyses of particular passages must be distilled into an understanding of Scripture that provides insights and meaning for pastors, Christian educators, and church members. A Barclay or a Bruggeman must stand at the point of interface between the "global" research of the academics and the needs of local people in their particular situations, mediating the meaning of biblical research to the local churches and individual Christians. In earlier days, Presbyterian denominations throughout the world consciously trained their pastors to be the bridge between academic fields of study and the local church. The pastor's place was in the study, preparing carefully researched sermons for Sunday morning and Wednesday evening.

Ultimately, then, what needs to take place is a great deal of research conducted at the local congregational level and augmented by "global" research located in a variety of the outer concentric circles of local churches.

Who?

The argument that the locus of church based research is the local church raises yet another serious issue regarding who conducts the research. It is clear from the preceding arguments that the goal of church based research is not simply to produce knowledge for the sake of having knowledge. A central motivation, indeed the central motivation, for conducting such research is to assist churches in strengthening their inner lives and their ability to serve God in the world. Effective church based research, then, must be relevant to the actual situations of local churches. Equally to the point, local congregations must also see the relevance of that research to their own situations. This last point needs to be emphasized with particular force. Churches will use

research findings to strengthen their inner life and outer witness only as they themselves perceive the usefulness of those findings.

Over the last forty years or so, social scientists have become increasingly aware of the irrelevance of much of their research to the people they research. There almost invariably exists a substantial gap between the researcher and the researched, which frustrates attempts to use social research to solve social problems. This has been the author's own experience as a church based historian who wants to use the study of the churches' pasts to help churches understand and address contemporary problems. The Office of History, Church of Christ in Thailand (founded in 1988) has conducted research into the histories of dozens of local congregations, sometimes devoting as much as three years' to the study of one church. It has produced an extensive literature on local church history in Thailand, led numerous seminars on the subject, and regularly taught courses on Thai church history in two seminaries. All of this activity has not led to direct, effective change in local church life, the reason being that members of the congregations themselves have not participated in the total research process. They did not gain the insights and understanding offered by the study of their own church's history first hand. The Office of History, in short, has failed to translate the considerable knowledge generated by its research into local wisdom.

Social researchers have produced a large literature documenting both this failure to translate social and other forms of research into useable local knowledge and the many attempts to build a bridge between social research and local wisdom. In the course of things, they have invented a new form of social (and historical) research called "participatory action research," or PAR for short. Although described in a variety of ways by different authors, the basic goal of all PAR is to involve local people in the research process to the end that their communities may experience needed changes. A great deal of attention has been given to the use of PAR among minorities and socially disadvantaged groups or communities.

The lesson for church based research from both the academic literature on PAR and the particular experience of the Office of History is that effective church based research cannot simply be focused on local churches. Local people, rather, must have a role in the actual conduct of the research, the rule of thumb (generally but not always applicable) being that the greater the level of participation the more effective the research is likely to be. The ideal situation is one in which a congregation conducts its own research from start to finish. It frames a project based on perceived problems or needs. It prepares the project proposal, decides on the research method(s) to be used, implements the project, interprets the resulting data, and uses the data to address particular needs and problems.

It is worth noting, furthermore, that a segment of the PAR literature gives considerable question to the issue of research and power. When professional researchers conduct their studies in local settings, they exercise power over local people-in the choice of topic, methodology, and use of data. PAR seeks to transfer research power to the local people, to give them "ownership" of the research process so that it will be relevant to them and, to make the point again, seen by them as being relevant to them.

In the context of local church life, the question of the exercise of power plays out in at least two different ways. First, churches are human societies and, like all human societies, political in nature. The questions of the relationship between research and power are just as real in the church as elsewhere. Involving local church members as fully as possible in their own research enhances their ability to take effective control of and responsibility for their own congregational life. Second, ecclesiastical power also has to do with servanthood, what is theologically known as "equipping the saints" for ministry. The research process can be seen, that is, as a process for empowering local church members for ministry.

The transfer of the research process into the hands of local church members does not mean that professional researchers no longer have a role to play; indeed, that transfer expands and, to an extent, redefines their role. Each church is not an isolated point in space and time. Its outer rings overlap with other churches, as we saw above. Therefore, there continues to be a need for broader, "global" studies and a body of research literature available to local churches relevant to their denominations, nations, and cultures. If local congregations in any numbers, furthermore, do seek to conduct their own research based on local issues and resources, there will be an increased need for professional support in terms of training workshops, manuals, and newsletters or websites.

How?

Let us suppose that the district or presbytery, synod, or diocese of a particular denomination decides that it wants to encourage its churches to conduct their own research into local church issues and challenges. How should it proceed? While the answer to this question depends on a variety of particular factors, an ideal situation might be something like the following scenario:

The synod (to choose one ecclesiastical body) should consider how it can both encourage local projects and provide support for those projects. It would consult with professional researchers regarding methods and skills. It would conduct specific pilot projects in selected churches. It would begin to conduct its own synod-level projects to provide data for local churches, an example for the churches, and experience for its own staff. The synod would want to work with pastors on research methods and the need for research. Pastors, however, should not be encouraged to carry out local projects on their own but, rather, should be taught how to support and encourage congregational research committees. If the synod has its own seminary, it would want to involve seminarians in real-life local projects and teach them relevant research skills. It would also want to conduct workshops, seminars, and consultations on research training, methods, and topics. Ultimately, the synod might want to develop a newsletter or website containing articles and news about research in the various churches. It would want to encourage an exchange of research experiences and data between congregations. The ultimate goal of the synod would be to encourage each church in the synod to create a local research committee and provide the necessary training for those committees.

While this scenario sounds like "pie in the sky bye and bye," the experience of the Office of History suggests that it is not. As this essay is being written in January 2003, the Office is conducting two local church research projects and about to embark on a third, all of which are aimed at transferring the research process and research skills to local churches. In the two

churches where research is underway, the individual projects have taken quite different turns because of local concerns.

The Mae Wae Church, one of the three congregations, is a Karen hill tribe church belonging to District Nineteen of the Church of Christ in Thailand and located in an entirely Christian village, Ban Mae Wae. A congregational research committee, composed of nine members (6 women, 3 men), is carrying out a three-stage study of its own congregational health. In the first stage, the committee conducts research into what constitutes a healthy church in its own context. In the second stage, it studies the actual health of the church in light of stage one. In the final stage, the committee and church governing body jointly select and lead the church in addressing one issue arising from the research. A Karen member of the Office staff is living, off and on, in the community and devoting her time to supporting the committee's research and teaching it the skills it needs to carry out its work. By the end of the first stage, the Mae Wae Church research committee proved itself to be quite competent and even adept in carrying out this process despite the fact that only one committee member has completed a high school education. Committee members are also enthusiastic about the research they are doing and deeply committed to it. The hope is that they will continue to work on relevant projects after the Office of History staff person moves on.

Another member of the Office of History staff, meanwhile, teaches research methods to M.Div. students in one seminary, putting those methods into the context of studying local church ministries-this at the request of the seminary. The Office also conducts annual hot season projects (February to April) utilizing teams of seminary and Bible school students from several institutions to do intensive studies of local church history and local congregational health. The seminaries and Bible schools strongly support these projects, and most of the students show a serious level of commitment to them. They enjoy the freedom of being their own knowledge producers.

Meanwhile, the Pastoral Care Unit of the C.C.T. approached the Office some three years ago to do a pilot project with pastors on using basic research methods as a tool for pastoral ministry. The Office carried out that project during 2001 and 2002, involving over 30 pastors in a series of training sessions and consultations. The results were mixed but concluded with a long list of suggestions from the pastors themselves on how to better approach such training. It also ended with strong support for conducting more research training workshops for pastors. Meanwhile, the Office of History has been "commissioned" by other C.C.T. agencies to carry out a number of particular research projects including, most recently (2002-2003), a study of the effectiveness of leadership training programs from an historical perspective.

When viewed together, these various research-training activities reveal the potential for a research system operating at the denominational as well as local level. They also reveal something of the commitment of various agencies of the C.C.T. to conduct research focused on local church life and reinforce the idea, stated above, that effective local church research requires more than simply research at the local level, as important as that research is in and of itself. Local research will be most effective when conducted within a larger system of research agencies and approaches.

It should be noted, in closing, that no one research methodology stands as "the best" or the "right" method for conducting church based research. Evaluation research of the type suggested here may well use historical studies, questionnaires, surveys, statistical surveys, small group encounters, and other forms of research-and may well use these forms in various combinations.

Conclusion

Global trends and local realities foster a serious need for local church research. That research will be most effective when it is done by local church members and supported by denominational bodies and professional church based researchers. While not a cure all, church based research offers local churches an invaluable tool for addressing local issues and strengthening congregational life.

The Finnish Free Foreign Mission and the Origins of Pentecostalism in Thailand, 1946-1960

Herb Swanson

Introduction

 In 1997, I undertook a study of mission groups and churches outside of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), which research soon fell by the wayside before the onslaught of more immediately pressing duties. My notes contain sufficient material on the founding and early years of the Finnish Free Foreign Mission (FFFM) in Thailand, however, to present a summary of and some reflections on the early years the FFFM, which was the earliest of the Pentecostal missions in Thailand. Its early history is virtually the opening chapter of the history of the founding of Thai Pentecostalism. The purpose of this essay, then, is to describe and reflect on FFFM history from 1946 to 1960 in a somewhat preliminary way, drawing on three of the resources I used in 1997: Jouko Ruohoämki master's thesis on the history of the FFFM (1988), Robert Nishimoto's history of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Thailand (1996), and an interview I had with the Rev. Wirachai Kowae in August 1997. To these I've added a small amount of additional research from two other sources, namely, Jaakko Mäkelä's doctoral dissertation (2000) and a paper by Edwin Zehner (1987). See the [bibliography](#) at the end of the essay for complete citations.

Ruohomäki divides the history of the FFFM into three stages. He holds that the mission's pioneer era lasted for its first ten years, 1946-1956, and was followed by the "parent stage," during which time the FFFM related to its churches as a parent does to a child. This second stage lasted until sometime in the 1970s, although in some churches it was still evident when he wrote in 1988. The third and final stage in FFFM history was the stage of "partnership," being the period when the FFFM churches began to show more independence from the mission. (Ruohomäki, 143-145). To these stages, I would add a preliminary stage, which goes as far back as 1925. In the

roughly twenty years before 1946, churches related to the Presbyterian and Baptist missions, which churches became part of the CCT in 1934, went through several stages of revival that prepared the ground for Pentecostalism. This earlier stage receives no attention from either Ruohomäki or Nishimoto, but in what follows it will become clear that Pentecostalism in Thailand first emerged as something of a CCT reform movement. (see *Headwaters of Thai Revivalism & Pentecostalism in HeRB* 3).

The Pioneer Era

The FFFM began on 17 November 1946 when Verner and Hanna Raassina, its first missionary couple, arrived in Bangkok just fifteen months after the end of World War II. The Raassinas had something of a difficult start. They only chose to stay on in Thailand after their visa application for Burma was turned down, and when they first arrived the missionary and local Christian community gave them an uncertain welcome at best. No one quite knew what to do with them, either as Finns or as Pentecostals. (Nishimoto, 52-53; Ruohomäki, 25). By the standards of 1946, the Raassinas were certainly different from most other Protestant missionaries serving in Thailand. They came with a small budget that prevented them from engaging in the educational and medical work frequently found in other missions. They also arrived with the express intention to start fellowships of believers on the pattern of the New Testament church. Ruohomäki claims that this goal encouraged the Raassinas and those who later joined them to emphasize the preaching of the Christian message on the basis of Romans 1:16 {"For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." [NRSV]} (Ruohomäki, 27). It did not, apparently, encourage them to start church-related medical and educational institutions.

The Raassinas and their eventual colleagues in this pioneer era faced unusual problems even in that most common of missionary enterprises, language study. Ruohomäki writes of FFFM missionaries generally,

Thai language studies were the first obligation in Thailand. But language study was expensive for Finnish missionaries. They could not use the services provided by language schools, but had to hire a private teacher. There were excellent language schools specially tailored for missionaries in Bangkok, but several of the Finnish missionaries even later have not been able to attend. This was a problem even in the nineteen eighties for some new Finnish missionaries. (Ruohomäki, 72-73)

Using private tutors was not an innovation, however; it marked, rather, a reversion to the original form of language acquisition long practiced by Protestant missionaries in Thailand. Starting a mission with a single couple with limited resources also reflected the way the older missions often started, witness the McGilvarys' founding the Presbyterian Laos Mission in 1867. The FFFM in its early years, that is, was different from some of the other missions in Thailand not because it was innovative so much as because it marked a reversion to older missionary patterns. The FFFM more or less reinvented the missionary wheel, and we will see that the

Raassinas' experiences in the 1940s replicated the McGilvarys' experience in northern Siam in the 1860s and 1870s in a number of ways.

Reinforcements for the Raassinas arrived in 1948 when Eukka and Maria Rokkas landed in Bangkok. The Rokkas evidently spent their first year in language study. Both Ruohomäki and Nishimoto, in any event, pass over 1948 quickly and quietly, indicating that the FFFM missionaries did not seriously initiate their work in Thailand until 1949 when two (unnamed) single women also joined the mission. (Nishimoto, 54-55). In 1949, the FFFM moved in two different directions at once. While the Rokkas started a preaching station in Thon Buri, across the river from Bangkok, the Raassinas moved in May to the town of Lom Sak in Petchabun Province to start rural ministry work.

Both Nishimoto and Ruohomäki emphasize that during this earliest phase the FFFM missionaries experienced many "signs and wonders," including the healing of hopelessly ill people, visions of future events, speaking in tongues, and moments where the missionaries felt that God spoke to them personally and immediately. FFFM missionaries believed that evil spirits attacked them a number of times, usually by seizing them by the throat. In all, both Ruohomäki and Nishimoto suggest that the FFFM felt itself involved in desperate spiritual warfare with evil powers. (Nishimoto, 54-57, Ruohomäki, 31).

The Raassinas' experiences in Petchabun Province, again, closely paralleled the experience of the McGilvarys in Chiang Mai in the late 1860s. In both cases, the mission families were the only farang living in the province, and people came from many miles around to visit them, never having seen a Caucasian face before. The Raassinas' missionary tactics, as well, followed very closely on the model of the McGilvarys. They engaged in daily evangelism, walking long distances to visit rural Petchabun villages, passing out tracts, and discussing Christianity with people. They used Western musical instruments, a guitar and a mandolin, to attract crowds. They sold tracts in the markets and also held house meetings, which were well received. (Ruohomäki, 34-36). Ruohomäki writes of those meetings that,

After the meetings long discussions were held with the Buddhist audience. Sometimes discussions turned to debates and especially school teachers were eager to present their opinions, because the teachers knew the basic principles of Buddhism and how they clashed with new teachings of Christianity." (Ruohomäki, 37)

The McGilvarys and other nineteenth-century Presbyterian missionaries in northern Thailand also debated religion with the local intelligentsia, in those years being mostly Buddhist monks; and they also presented a Christianity that was essentially at odds with the traditional local faith. In both Petchabun and Chiang Mai, those debates reinforced the sense of the missionaries being engaged in a form of religious or spiritual warfare.

It appears that when the Raassinas moved to Lom Sak in 1949 they relied on a "communication strategy" that mixed a contextual life style with an anti-contextual message. On the one hand, they intentionally lived as close to the people as possible, residing in a dilapidated old grass-

thatched house that they rented for 60 baht a month. They consciously chose to live like the people of Lom Sak in order to build close relationships with individual people in the community that, as Nishimoto puts it, would "win the hearts" (chana chai) of the people for Jesus Christ. One point, however, at which they refused to contextualize their behavior was when their daughter died. They insisted that she be buried rather than cremated. (Nishimoto, 55-56). Nor did they extend contextualization to include the actual message they sought to communicate, which remained quite Western. They preached a miraculous, biblical Christ in public meetings, using long familiar missionary picture scrolls to tell the story. Eventually, FFFM missionaries and their Thai pastors also began to issue "altar calls" in FFFM churches, a practice still current in the late 1980s. (Ruohomäki, 40).

However their message was packaged, it did touch a responsive cord in the village of Ban Huey Swing, located some twenty kilometers, a day long trip, from Lom Sak. Raassina had heard that there was a Christian living in Huey Swing, and on 1 July 1949, he visited the village and met the person, Pho Thao (Old Father) Plaw, who related how he had received a Bible portion thirty years earlier and long waited for someone to come and explain it to him. Raassina found great interest in Christianity among other members of the Huey Swing community, and after three days some 22 men converted; a second trip, in August 1949, saw another twenty men and women convert. They founded a congregation, built a simple church building, and evangelists working with Raassina began to visit them regularly. (Ruohomäki, 41). My understanding is that the Huey Swing Church was the first Pentecostal church in Thailand.

By 1950, then, the FFFM work in both Thon Buri and Petchabun was beginning to gain a number of converts. Prominent among them in Petchabun was a monk named Phramaha Maliduangchan, generally referred to by Ruohomäki as Maha Mali. After conversion he became a "diligent Bible student" and studied privately with Raassina for some time. He also eventually experienced a great deal of persecution and had to leave Petchabun for a period of time. (Ruohomäki, 38-39) Other converts in Petchabun included two young men who later became important leaders in FFFM churches, Ach. Sombat Supkasaetrin and Ach. Nirut Chankorn. Ach Nirut later paired up with another FFFM missionary, Elis Pehkonen, to establish a total of twelve churches in twelve years in Petchabun Province. (Nishimoto, 57).

While the FFFM seems to have had generally little contact with non-Pentecostal churches and groups in Thailand during its early years, it did develop a close relationship with the Rev. Boonmark Kittisarn, the former General Secretary of the CCT. Ach. Boonmark left the CCT in 1948 when it joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) and founded his own independent church, the Bangkok (Thai) Church. He first met the Raassinans in 1946, not long after they arrived and before he left the CCT, and invited them to stay for a time at a school owned by his family. Mäkelä notes that Boonmark became very close to the Raassinans and the other FFFM missionaries, who came to consider him, informally, as something of a co-worker. (Mäkelä, 70-71).

Boonmark is one of the more fascinating figures in Thai Protestant church history and a person who from the 1930s through the 1950s had a great deal to do with shaping the future course of that history. (see Zehner, 44-65). His name is associated with that of Dr. John Sung, the famous

Chinese evangelist who held a landmark series of revivals in Thailand in 1938 and 1939. The Sung revivals designated the apex of the Presbyterian-Baptist-CCT inter-War revivalistic movement, mentioned above, and Boonmark was instrumental in seeing that Sung returned to Thailand in 1939. From that point on, Boonmark was a reformer and even a revolutionary in terms of his relationship with the CCT and with the Presbyterian Mission, which as noted eventually led to his withdrawing from the CCT entirely. In terms of the FFFM, Boonmark provided a point of contact with the Protestant past in Thailand and an early indication that Pentecostalism actually squared quite well with certain themes from Presbyterian and Baptist church and missionary history in Thailand. Zehner points out, however, that such links were not apparent in the FFFM's early years. (Zehner, 58). It was only in the late 1950s that the Pentecostal movement, still represented only by the Finns, suddenly became an ecumenical issue-and obstacle.

The Osborn Crusade of 1956 and Its Aftermath

The Osborn Crusade, which took place in 1956, is one of the most important events in post-War Thai Protestant history and also one of the least studied and understood. In a number of ways, it presents a striking parallel to the Sung Revivals of the late 1930s. Nishimoto provides some of the details of the Osborn Crusade (see Nishimoto, 172-177; and also Mäkelä, 71), which was held in Bangkok for fifteen days beginning, probably, on 5 March 1956. (Nishimoto is confusing regarding the dates of the Osborn Revivals. In one place, he states that the revivals began on 5 March 1956 and lasted for fifteen days. (page 173). In another place, he states that the revivals took place in April 1956. (page 59). The earlier date looks to be the more correct one.) Although originally scheduled to be held at Sanam Luang, a large field in the center of Bangkok, the government suddenly withdrew permission and the evening preaching and evangelistic meetings were held at the Kittikhunwittaya School, which was owned by Kru Muan Kittisarn, Boonmark's wife. A second series of revival meetings were held in the CCT church in Trang, southern Thailand, later in March 1956.

T. L. Osborn was a young American Pentecostal preacher and evangelist of 33, born in 1923, who had a dynamic preaching style and was invited to come to Thailand by Verner Raassina. He was accompanied by his wife, Daisy, and by Don and Anna Jean Price. He drew crowds that are supposed to have numbered into the thousands, and several hundred people are said to have converted during the fifteen days of his campaign. An undetermined number of Christians also experienced a religious rebirth. The Thai Pentecostal movement generally marks its birth as an increasingly dynamic force in Thai Protestantism from these revivals. The Prices stayed on in Thailand for a time and evidently played an important role in sustaining Osborn's initial impact.

There was an immediate impact on the FFFM's work, one that presaged the explosive potential of the Pentecostal movement in Thailand. In Ban Huey Swing, the FFFM had continued to work with the congregation that was founded there in 1949. Missionaries and/or Thai evangelists are reported to have visited the congregation on a monthly basis for some years. In May 1956, Osborn's colleague, Don Price preached at the dedication of a new church building; when people in Bangkok learned that Price would preach in Huey Swing quite a number of them traveled there to take part. Price preached on the subject of baptism by the Holy Spirit, and during the

dedication service people began to speak in tongues. There was "an outpouring of the spirit," and membership in the church quickly rose to over 100. The FFFM put Maha Mali in charge of the church. Ruohomäki reports that the Huey Swing revival manifested itself in a strong anti-Buddhist stand, which soon provoked a reaction against and persecution of the church. This "time of testing" led, not long afterwards, to congregation's demise. Ruohomäki claims that most of the local Christians moved away from Huey Swing for economic reasons, but he leaves the strong impression that persecution was also a factor. He also reports that Maha Mali soon went over to the Churches of Christ mission and eventually became a Catholic, ostensibly for financial reasons. He concludes, "The end of the Hueswing church can be described as sad. Its good start as [an] indigenous people's movement was over." (Ruohomäki, 41-44)

The results of the Osborn Crusade were much more long lasting among the churches of the CCT's Second District, Chiang Rai Province, located in the far north of Thailand. It began with the visits of two young men, Samaan Vannakiat [] & Chaiyong Watanachantin, [], who experienced a profound conversion during the Osborn services and were also members of CCT churches. They felt called to carry word of what they had experienced to other CCT churches, including those in Chiang Rai Province. In that same year, 1956, they toured the churches of the Second District, witnessing to the work of the Holy Spirit and holding meetings that stirred up some interest. They also stirred up controversy. As small groups of Pentecostals began to form, tension arose in various Chiang Rai churches between the Pentecostals and those who remained committed to the older form of faith of the CCT churches. The result was that the Pentecostal groups left their former churches to found Pentecostal congregations. (Ruohomäki, 73, 75; Nishimoto, 68-69).

Subsequently, FFFM missionaries, along with Ach. Boonmark Kittisarn, began to visit the Chiang Rai churches. In 1958, Verner Raassina and Reino Vatanen visited the five groups that had formed independent churches up to that time. In three of them they found about 100 believers each, while in the other two there were about 30 to 40 members. Most or all of these members were evidently former members of CCT congregations. The following year, 1959, the Tynkkynens, new FFFM missionaries visited Chiang Rai and decided to make it their home. (Ruohomäki, 75-77)

Ruohomäki is somewhat defensive about charges of sheep stealing levelled against the FFFM by the CCT. He writes,

In the beginning of the work most of the converts came from a Presbyterian [i.e. CCT] background. Many of them were just nominal Christians without personal experience of regeneration. Also the Christian conduct of many of them was of low standard, use of tobacco and alcohol was accepted. Many of the nominal Christians who attended the meetings became convicted of their sins, repented and asked for water baptism.

He puts the CCT churches in the wrong, suggesting that they excommunicated those who were re-baptized as Pentecostals. He states that these "revived" Christians brought new life to the churches and became active witnesses in the larger community, which "irritated people who considered themselves as good Christians." (Ruohomäki, 75). In any event, he notes that the

FFFM was not involved in Chiang Rai when the Pentecostal churches in that province broke away from the CCT. The mission never offered anyone any money or otherwise attempted to entice CCT members away from their churches. (Ruohomäki, 80-82). Ach. Wirachai, it should be noted, also criticizes the leadership of the CCT's Second District, Chiang Rai for requiring anyone who became a Pentecostal to leave its churches. He says that the Pentecostals were left with no choice but to form their own congregations.

Yet, a close reading of Ruohomäki suggests that blame for the antagonism that emerged between Pentecostals and their former churches ran in both directions. He, at least, betrays a clear sense that the Pentecostals felt that they had found a better way, a more biblical way. CCT Christians, accordingly, were not very moral and their churches not alive. The FFFM, once it became involved in Chiang Rai, also rejected the CCT's centralized system of church government as not being biblical. (Ruohomäki, 79-82). Acharn Wirachai, in his interview, noted that he too was converted to Pentecostalism by a visit by Samaan and Chaiyong to Nakhon Pathom, where he lived. In his home CCT church, also, the members did not accept the Pentecostals, who tended to be young, enthusiastic, and inexperienced. He admits that the Pentecostal group "overdid things" because they lacked wise, mature leadership. The Chiang Rai Pentecostals, according to Ruohomäki, also tended to overdo things; at least, he notes that the FFFM missionaries had to correct a number of misunderstandings and theological misinterpretations. The Chiang Rai group, for example, believed in faith healing and its members severely criticized FFFM missionaries for using medicines and visiting doctors. (Ruohomäki, 74).

Nishimoto lends further credence to the sense that the Chiang Rai Pentecostal churches went through a period of intense, impatient enthusiasm by his observation that they felt as if John Sung had returned to Thailand again, recalling the overwhelming enthusiasm engendered by the Chinese evangelist some 17 years earlier. Miraculous healings were reported. People felt that God had sent the original team of Samaan and Chaiyong. (Nishimoto, 60). It is likely, in sum, that the Pentecostal converts confronted the CCT traditionalists with an almost explosive, impatient intensity of faith, which the traditionalists combated with a stubborn, impatient intransigence. In the end, however we view the matter, the FFFM by 1960 had established a strong cluster of local churches in Chiang Rai Province, a cluster that soon spread to areas where there had been no Christians previously.

Beyond 1956

It can be argued, then, that Thai Pentecostalism actually began in 1956, its moment of birth being the Osborn Crusade services of March or April of that year. The FFFM, as the only Pentecostal mission in Thailand at the time, was the most immediate beneficiary of the Osborn Crusade. Its work received new impetus, and it began to have a growing number of churches. In 1957, the team of Samaan and Chaiyong visited Nakhon Pathom and held meetings for young people at the CCT's Bamrung Wittiya School. A number of young people joined the Pentecostal cause, including as noted already Ach. Wirachai Kowae, who eventually broke with the FFFM and was instrumental in founding the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG). Samaan and Chaiyong, in any event, continued to visit other established churches as well as conducting evangelism among non-Christians. Raassina sometimes accompanied them on their evangelistic trips.

(Nishimoto, 64-65). In 1957, Boonmark Kittisarn also founded the "Bangkok Church," which was consciously intended to become the home of people who converted during the Osborn Crusade. While this church was not under the FFFM, it was an allied independent church.

The following year, 1958, saw further advances. According to Nishimoto, the FFFM founded the Thon Buri Full Gospel Church during 1958. It initially had six members and considered itself a Chinese church. For a time it met in the Raassinas' home until it could rent a larger house of its own in 1959. The congregation did not build its own church building until 1964, and Nishimoto notes, perhaps somewhat critically, that the FFFM did not devote itself to developing this church into a strong congregation. Part of the problem was that the FFFM missionaries themselves found Thon Buri too expensive to live in. Most FFFM missionaries, furthermore, preferred working in rural areas where they met with a greater response. (Nishimoto, 64). In more recent years, the Pentecostal movement and its mega-churches ("mega" by Thailand's more modest standards) have met with its greatest success in urban centers. The Osborn Crusade might be taken as the birth of urban Pentecostalism as well, but it is important to remember that the FFFM itself focused on rural areas. The rural work in Petchabun Province, meanwhile, also saw some growth during 1958. In November of that year, the FFFM established the Lom Sak Church with 14 baptized members. At the beginning, the congregation did not have its own church building as the FFFM was not able to provide funds for one. Eventually the Pehkonens, the resident missionary family, and Don Price made personal donations so that a building could be erected, which was completed and dedicated in 1964. (Ruohomäki, 49-50).

By 1960, then, the FFFM had an increasingly strong ecclesiastical base in three locations, Thon Buri, Petchabun, and Chiang Rai. Nishimoto indicates that the mission then began to feel the need for a Bible school to supplement the personal training of workers done by individual missionaries. In September 1960, the FFFM thus founded the Full Gospel Bible School in Bangkok, which initially held three-month training sessions during the rainy season (May-October) for rural church leaders. (Nishimoto, 65). This school was more commonly known as the Muban Sethakit Bible School, and was established because of a split among the Pentecostals, described below, that forced the FFFM to set up its own school. (see Ruohomäki, 111-114).

In the meantime, the financial situation of the FFFM missionaries was also improving. As we have noted earlier, during the first ten years or more of the mission's history members of the FFFM tended to be quite poor by missionary standards. Although Ruohomäki is not very clear on the matter, evidently the Bank of Finland gave Finnish missionaries working overseas special exchange rates or otherwise provided some form of financial benefits to those missionaries, which meant that the FFFM in Thailand had more money to hire evangelists and church workers and to build church buildings. The mission also began to receive more support from Pentecostal churches in the United States and Finland. (Ruohomäki, 51-52).

Only three years after the seminal Osborn Crusade, however, the FFFM had to face a major crisis, which was caused by Ach. Boonmark. In 1959, Boonmark had an opportunity to visit Finland and the United States (The exact dates of Boonmark's visit to the United States and of subsequent events in Thailand are not clear. Ruohomäki states that he visited the U.S. in 1959. (page 104). Nishimoto reports that his break with the FFFM took place in 1960. (pages 65-66).

While he was in the U.S. he came into contact with the United Pentecostal Church. The UPC, preaching the doctrine of "Jesus Only," rejected baptism according to the triune formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and taught that only those who are baptized in the singular name of Jesus can be saved. Boonmark accepted the UPC's approach and was accordingly re-baptized. After he returned to Thailand, he began to preach the Jesus Only doctrine and, evidently in 1960, he led the Bangkok Church out of its association with the FFFM, established formal ties with the American UPC, and created a new, independent denomination. In the meantime, he also visited the FFFM's Chiang Rai churches, and in an almost bizarre replay of the visits he had made earlier with Samaan and Chaoyong, he went around to the churches preaching against the FFFM as he had just three years earlier preached against the CCT. The FFFM missionary in Chiang Rai, Aleks Tynkkynen, tried to counter Boonmark's Jesus Only message, but when he left to go on furlough in 1961 many of the Chiang Rai members left the FFFM to form United Pentecostal Church congregations associated with Boonmark. (Ruohomäki, 105-106). Evidently, in both Bangkok and Chiang Rai a number of the rising stars in the Thai Pentecostal movement joined Boonmark, whose name carried immense weight in that movement.

The split in Chiang Rai exposed what some critics of the FFFM in Pentecostal circles consider to be one of its central weaknesses, namely its unwillingness to establish a denominational structure for its churches. According to Wirachai, the FFFM wanted the church in Thailand to be a movement rather than an organization, and its members resisted strongly the idea of setting up a church organization. They also found no warrant for denominational structures in the New Testament. The result, Wirachai argues, was that the FFFM churches lacked unity, while the FFFM itself still worked an organizational way while refusing to admit that it did so. One practical consequence of the FFFM stand against denominational organizations was that it had no legal body that could hold title to church properties. All of those properties were in the names of private individuals, usually local church leaders. Nishimoto notes that there was at least one case where an FFFM local leader followed Boonmark and, since he held title to the church building, forced the FFFM congregation out of their own building. The real impact of this event was that it led other FFFM churches to begin to distrust the members who legally owned their churches, and some even began to call for the establishment of a legal foundation (muniti) for FFFM churches, something the FFFM itself refused to entertain. (Nishimoto, 79).

By 1960, the FFFM had been in Thailand for fourteen years, but its work had only just begun to grow in the previous three or four years. Some of its achievements seemed to be quite solid, and it is clear that many of its members gave themselves in a sacrificial way to the work. We have not included those personal stories of sacrifice and struggle--including the loss of several family members--here, but they are a real part of the early history of the FFM. Still, the FFFM horizon in 1960 was perhaps less bright than might have been expected, primarily because of the tensions between Pentecostals themselves. Those tensions, in the years after 1960, would result in an increasingly large number, almost bewildering array of independent Pentecostal missions and groups. Clearly regretting the situation that evolved, Ruohomäki asks,

Unfortunately Western Pentecostal divisions were established in Thailand. We may ask if this was really necessary. Were there any possibilities to avoid this? In which areas had a compromise been necessary? Were the

Biblical principles the most difficult obstacles or was it a question about power? Who should have given in and in what areas? (Ruohomäki, 124)

These were questions that were not yet being asked in 1960, but the conditions that led to the Pentecostal divisions were already emerging, and the FFFM had already begun to lose members to another Pentecostal group.

Conclusion

It is difficult to estimate the significance of the FFFM's role in the history of Protestantism in Thailand. An important part of that significance, surely, has to do with its relationship with Ach. Boonmark Kittisarn. The FFFM, evidently, provided Boonmark with an alternative home to the CCT, one to which he moved within two years of the Raassina's arrival in 1946. If the FFFM had never been established in Thailand, he probably would have found a home with some other of the several evangelical missions that were appearing in Thailand in the late 1940s and early 1950s ; so, it cannot be said the FFFM's relationship with Boonmark changed the course of Thai Protestant history. Yet, it did change the course of Boonmark's thinking, and without his prestige and dynamic leadership, it is not likely that Pentecostalism could have grown as rapidly as it did. It is also possible that the Pentecostal movement in Thailand might not have fragmented so quickly, if Boonmark had not taken up with Jesus Only Pentecostalism and drawn off FFFM members to his new denomination. However things might have worked out otherwise, in any event, the Boonmark-FFFM partnership of the late 1940s and the 1950s was an important one for Thai Protestantism. It opened the door for the widely influential Pentecostal movement and provided something of a "third way" for Thai Protestants, an alternative which stood apart from the ecumenical, mainline CCT and the evangelical missions, such as the Southern Baptists, World Evangelism Crusade (WEC), and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) among many others. Along this same line, the FFFM made a major contribution to the development of Thai Pentecostalism when it invited T. L. Osborn to hold his crusade in Bangkok in 1956. If the Osborn Crusade did not have the decisive impact of the Sung Revivals of 1938 and 1939, it is only because Thai Protestantism had become a much more complex and divided phenomenon by 1956. In a real sense, furthermore, Osborn was working over ground already plowed by Sung and other revivalist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Osborn was not a new story for Thailand, and Pentecostals found in Thailand groups of Christians who were already sympathetic to their approach to the Christian faith.

In a larger sense, then, it may be claimed that the FFFM did not represent as significant a change in Thai Protestant history as it might seem. Certainly, in terms of missionary methods and attitudes about people of other faiths, the FFFM's members followed in the footsteps of the older missions. At the same time, they were but one of a number of new missions that appeared in Thailand after World War II, many of which refused to work under the umbrella of the CCT and were even antagonistic towards the CCT. Like the old-time Presbyterians and Baptists and the new-time post-War missions, the FFFM came with what it felt to be a unique vision for the Gospel in Thailand. It went through a period of "orientation," and eventually established a number of churches that contained a few thousand communicant members. It quickly became, that is, one piece of the intricate, still largely uncharted puzzle of Protestant history in Thailand.

When one reads the FFFM story as told by Ruohomäki and Nishimoto, one cannot help but be struck again by the way events bend and warp the best of Christian intentions, leading dedicated and faithful people off down blind alleys and dead end streets as well as providing moments for celebration.

A Statistical Postscript

The sources used for this essay, provide various statistics for the FFFM. Ruohomäki states that as of 1983 the FFFM had ten churches in Petchabun Province totaling 482 communicant members. He says that the Thon Buri Church had 320 members in 1981. In Chiang Rai Province, in 1983, the FFFM had 15 churches with a total membership of 1,062. (Ruohomäki, 63, 71, 78). These figures suggest a total of 26 churches with something between 1,900 and 2,000 total members in 1983. Smiths claims that the FFFM had 3,600 members in 57 churches in 1978, but that revised memberships statistics showed a total membership for early 1982 of "just over 2,800." (Smith, Siamese Gold, 251). Writing more recently, Nishimoto records that as of 1996 the Full Gospel Churches in Thailand (FGC), the denominational organization of the FFFM churches, had 77 churches and 4,200 members. (Nishimoto, 103). The 2003 Thailand Christian Directory lists a total of 103 churches for the FGC.

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Short Items

Turning the Tables

Protestant missionaries and other Christians in Thailand sometimes accuse Buddhism of teaching people to be selfish. Merit-making, this line of reasoning argues, is an inherently self-seeking act that denies the spiritual and theological "fact" that only God saves. Recently, I heard a similar criticism of Christianity made by a Buddhist in Ban Dok Daeng. He puts his criticism in the form of a series of questions. He asks, "Why are Christian always asking for things? Why are they always praying to God to get things? Why does Christianity teach people to be so selfish?"

Implicit in these questions is a response to Christians who criticize Buddhism for teaching people to be selfish. Two, that is, can play the criticism game and with equal cause. If one listens to many a sermon and reads a smattering of Christian literature, it is not difficult to arrive at the conclusion that Christians do, in fact, believe that the chief end of God is to answer greedy Christian prayers. It is a conclusion that is unfair and focuses on the worst, rather than the best in the Christian faith, to be sure; but, then, so too is the Christian criticism of Buddhism nothing more than a decision to see our neighbors of another faith at their worst, rather than choosing to see them at their best.

Religion & the Latest Ideas

Question: What did twelfth-century Buddhist, seventeenth-century Catholic, and nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries have in common? Answer: all three facilitated the spread of modern learning in the Siam of their day.

Working backwards, it has long been known that the nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries engaged in active, sometimes aggressive Westernization as apart of their evangelistic strategy. As for the Catholics, Van der Crysse, in his book *Siam & the West 1500-1700*, argues that Catholic missionaries performed much the same function in the seventeenth century. They, like the Protestants two hundred years later, even went so far to as to use Western scientific thought as a medium for their religious message. (See the book review *Siam & The West 1500 - 1700* in [HeRB 4](#)). It would appear, then, that there is a pattern in Thai history whereby Christian missionaries have engaged in Westernization as a part of their program of evangelization.

The pattern is there, but it does not stop with Christian missions. Writing about twelfth-century trade routes in what is now Thailand, Wyatt notes that, "Chief among the commodities moving along these and other trails in the twelfth century was Buddhism. It would be a mistake, however, to think of this simply as the transfer of religious ideas. In addition to religion, Buddhism also brought with it the 'latest' ideas of science, law, medicine, the letters, and so forth; and these moved as quickly as they did because they were coming into an area where Indic

ideas were long established." [Wyatt, *Siam in Mind* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 10-11.]

International missions, that is, has been one important mechanism for keeping Siam/Thailand in touch with the world of learning beyond its borders. Globalization, furthermore, is nothing new to Southeast Asia. It has been going on for at least nine hundred years.

Archipelagic Isolation

In his description of the history of "Champa" in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Keith Taylor argues for a new understanding of "Cham history." Champa, located along the central coast of modern day Vietnam has generally been viewed as an early Southeast Asian political state; but Taylor argues that it actually "was comprised of small island-like enclaves defined by the sea and the mountains." It was not a unified state. He writes, "It was the closest that a continental terrain could approximate the morphology of an archipelago." (page 153, emphasis added). Taylor does not explain in any detail what he means by the phrase, "morphology of an archipelago," except to note that it involved isolated enclaves ruled over by strong local rulers.

The phrase itself, however, is striking in light of the historical experience of the old-time Presbyterian missionaries in Siam. After the fashion of the Cham, they established a series of "small island-like enclaves" stretching from Nakhon Si Thammarat in the south to Chiang Rai in the north. These enclaves were Christian rather than Buddhist (or Muslim) and American rather than Siamese; the foods eaten, clothes worn, architecture of the buildings, holidays celebrated, and activities pursued in these Presbyterian islands were often strikingly different from those of the surrounding Buddhist Siamese sociocultural ocean. The missionaries themselves keenly felt their archipelagic isolation, furthermore, especially when only one or two families staffed a station. A future social history of Presbyterian missions in Siam, in sum, could very easily be woven around this phrase, "the morphology of an archipelago."

Source: Keith W. Taylor, "The Early Kingdoms," in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, ed. Nicholas Tarling, 137-182 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Railroad Research & Communist Contextualization

Last March, while on the train to Bangkok, I had a long, fascinating chat with a woman who was a student at Thammasat University in October 1976, at the time of the student unrest that was brutally suppressed by the government. She subsequently spent three years of her life "in the forest" along Thailand's western border with Burma as a member of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). She told me a number of fascinating stories about her life as a revolutionary. She went into the forest because of her dream for a better Thailand, and she made it clear that she feels sad and depressed about the fact that Thailand today is, in her opinion, no further down the road towards a just, happy society than it was in the 1970s.

I asked her why the CPT revolution failed? She said that the primary reason for that failure was internal dissension within the CPT itself between the old-time revolutionary leadership and the young students who fled Bangkok to join the revolution. The point of disagreement, which ultimately sent the students back to their former lives, was the hard line Maoist ideology of the CPT leadership. The students believed that the revolution had to be adapted to Thai society, while the leadership sought a pure, Chinese-like revolution. In the end, the students could not accept the fatal failure of the CPT to conduct a Thai revolution rather than a foreign one. Their point: only a Thai revolution could achieve a just Thai society. This is not, I should add, merely her opinion alone. Historians of that era have reached the same conclusion.

The church, if I may beat this horse yet again, persists in conducting a foreign revolution; and Thailand, particularly lowland Thailand, persists in ignoring the revolution. One hears rumors of foreign missionaries, who in their arrogance and ignorance are still telling local Christians they can't do this, that, and the other thing as those Christians seek to rethink their faith in terms of their own lives. Those who don't learn from the past pay the price of their ignorance (and arrogance).

S.E. Asia Historiography: A One Paragraph Summary

Taylor summarizes his article on the early kingdoms of Southeast Asia (see citation in Short Note #3, above) by stating, "The diverse narratives we have constructed remind us that the attempt to schematize early Southeast Asia history is bound to be unrewarding. The peoples of Southeast Asia experience a remarkable range of options in organizing their societies and polities. The choices they exercised upon these options reveal a region that continues to resist any convincing simplification. Southeast Asia's imperviousness to all-encompassing historiographical agendas that endeavor to construct a total regional vision of the past may be an indication of what is less perceptible under the heavy layers of scholarship in which our knowledge of other parts of the globe is embedded, or it may reflect distinctive regional conditions. Historians of Southeast Asia benefit from the lack of a coercive interpretative tradition. My intention in writing this essay has been to strengthen resistance to any such tradition." (pages 180-181).

Without debating the wisdom of his conclusions, one does sense that Taylor is, to an extent, sewing a pig's ear over into a silk purse. Historians of Southeast Asia generally labor under the serious twin handicaps of a lack of good historical sources and a dearth of colleagues engaged in the study of those sources. If we had more sources and more historians, I suspect we would also have more of "a coercive interpretative tradition."

Recommending Wyatt

The same article by Taylor (see citation in Short Note #3, above) contains a bibliographic essay of sources for the study of the various polities of early Southeast Asia. For most of those polities, the essay gives a fairly substantial paragraph's worth of citations. For Lan Na, Ayutthaya, and the other Tai kingdoms, Taylor simply writes, "For the early Tai kingdoms, one

cannot do better than to consult D. K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, New Haven, 1984." (page 182). Now, that is a recommendation.

Calvin Against Contemplation

McGrath, in his widely respected biography of John Calvin, states, "Calvin thus treats the notion of the 'contemplative life' with a certain degree of cynicism, insisting that Christian meditation and prayer must take place in the midst of, rather than detached from, the cares and concerns of everyday mundane life. The believer is not called to leave the world and enter a monastery, but to enter fully into the life of the world, and thus to transform it." (p. 232).

Somewhere in this paragraph lies an insight into one of the central differences between Western Protestant Christianity and Southeast Asian Buddhism. It is a difference in the way each locates itself in the everyday world.

Source: Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 232.

News & Notes

Another Ban Dok Daeng Update

As mentioned in the [Lead Essay](#), "Red Flower Theologies," the Suwanduangrit Church, Ban Dok Dang (District One, CCT), has been engaged in a process of reconciliation with its Buddhist neighbors for some seven years now. Sunday evening, 16 March 2003, marked another small step forward in that process, a step that suggests that the process itself has become a normal, accepted part of the life of the church and community, rather than something innovative and unusual. At about 7:30 pm on that evening, roughly 30 members of the church joined in a procession with its Buddhist neighbors, who were carrying traditional money trees to the local temple to make merit to support the temple's buying a new piece of property. This is the second time the church has participated in a community-wide Buddhist procession, the first time being in March 1996. On two other occasions, in addition, the church has participated in "mini-processions," once to the temple and once into the church compound.

On this occasion, as in 1996, the church found itself at the end of a long procession that slowly wound its way through the narrow streets of Ban Dok Daeng to the sounds of drums, gongs, and flutes and the shouts and laughter of the participants. The church has its own money tree, and made a substantial contribution to the temple's fund raising campaign. The procession ended in the temple's phra viharn (main ceremonial hall), where there was a brief blessing ceremony led by the abbot. In the course of things, he twice thanked the church for its participation.

Christians processing with Buddhists has become an increasingly unremarkable event in Ban Dok Daeng, and this time it was generally greeted with a marked absence of fanfare. That is good-and a little sad. Because such things have become thoroughly accepted in the church, members treated this event with less enthusiasm than previously. Most of the congregation stayed home or otherwise did whatever else they were doing. The community, in the meantime, paid scant attention to Christian participation, the Christians being so small a presence in the crowd. Interfaith reconciliation in Ban Dok Daeng, that is, implies a normalization of community relations that had been "abnormal" since its first citizens converted to Christianity in the late 1870s through the mid-1990s. Normalization, in turn, means that what was startling and unheard of in 1996 has become, by 2003, commonplace.

Introducing www.thaicov.org

[Note: as 18 October 2011, the link to the TCC website takes one to an "Account Suspended" notice.]

Although not a new site, the Thailand Covenant Church's website, at www.thaicov.org, only recently came to my attention; and its contents make it worth the attention of those who are interested in resources related to the contextualization of the Christian faith in Thailand. In addition to featuring the ongoing work of the Evangelical Covenant Church of America mission in Thailand and the Thailand Covenant Church, this website contains a selection of articles on the history and underlying philosophy of the Covenant mission and church, which goes back to the 1970s. Covenant work in Thailand was initiated by the Rev. Jim Gustafson and became well known in evangelical and international missions circles for its innovative approach to contextualizing the Christian message in northeast Thailand.

The articles on this site include substantial contributions by the Rev. Tongpan Prometta on the theme "Jesus must be Reborn," and by Paul DeNeui, entitled, "Voices from Asia: Communicating Contextualization Through Story." Of particular further note is the section, "Historical & Reference Documents," which lists the following articles (quoting directly from the website):

"The Making of a Sodality in Northeastern Thailand --A paper written by Gretchen DeNeui in 1991 which traces the history of the Thailand Covenant Church (then known as the Center for Church Planting and Church Growth) and its related organizations from their beginnings until that time.

"Integration of Development and Evangelism --A paper presented in Bangkok in 1990, revised and updated in 1997, arguing for a needed link between world evangelism and development, with illustrations from the integrated holistic ministry in N.E. Thailand.

"Agrarian and Environmental Change and Increasing Poverty in Northeast Thailand - 1950s-1990s --A paper written by Jim Gustafson in 1995 which presents the environmental and agricultural factors which have contributed to the pervasive poverty in Issaan.

"Northeast Thailand: The Underdevelopment of a Marginalized Periphery --A technical paper written by Jim Gustafson in 1994 which analyzes the historical, geographical, and cultural background for the lack of development in NE Thailand.

"Issaan Development Foundation - A Rural Development Approach --A paper written by Jim Gustafson in 1989 which details the origin, objectives, methods, and operations (at that time) of the IDF, including the social and economic conditions in Issaan (N.E. Thailand) which influenced its creation.

"Integrated Holistic Development & the World Mission of the Church --A paper from 1985 that explains the theory and application of integrated holistic development as practiced by the IDF and the CCPCG (predecessor to the ISD and TCC) and how they fit into the overall mission of the church."

"Values of Thai Society --A list of 25 commonly held elements of the Thai value system that have an impact on efforts to reach Thai people with the Gospel, which has its own, often contradictory, value system.

"... To Serve the World --An article written by Jim Gustafson for the book "Bound to be Free", published in connection with the 90th Anniversary of the Evangelical Covenant Church in 1975. This is an old article, but it contains his comments on the characteristics of the Covenant and its work, as well as outlining the early experiences and thoughts that influenced the nature of his work among the Issaan people."

An Autobiography

Earlier this year, David Filbeck stopped by the Office of History with copies of his recently published autobiographical sketch of the work he and his wife, Deloris, have carried out in northern Thailand since the early 1960s as Christian Church missionaries. The book, entitled *Called! To Preach Where Christ was not Known*, is privately published and dated 2002. It is not intended to be a critical or scholarly work but, rather, a personal celebration of and a book of stories about the Filbeck's life and ministry. A copy has been deposited at the Payap University Archives.

Prasit's Doctoral Studies

We learned last March, just after [HeRB 5](#) "went to press" that Ach. Prasit Pongudom, Office of History staff researcher, has been accepted into the doctoral program in Thai history at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. Of the seven applicants this year, he was one of only two accepted. We are both pleased and proud of Prasit's accomplishment-and of the fact that he has chosen to pursue his doctoral studies in Thailand, rather than overseas. After one academic year of class work in Bangkok, he will return to Chiang Mai and carry out his doctoral research and

write his dissertation as a part (a huge part!) of his regular duties.

Thailand Christian Directory

This news item comes somewhat late in the year, but a copy of the *Thailand Christian Directory 2003* didn't come into my hands until after the last *HeRB* went on line. The TCD is an annual publication that is full of information on how to communicate with a huge number of Protestant churches, organizations, agencies, and institutions in Thailand. It even contains a yellow pages section for Protestant businesses. This year's edition runs to over 450 pages and attempts to list every Protestant congregation in the country by both geographical location and denomination. For those doing research on subjects related to Protestantism in Thailand, this is an indispensable reference tool. Although most of the listings are in Thai, the section on missionaries and other overseas personnel is in English.

For those who are interested in obtaining a copy, the publishers may be contacted through the Udomkarn Church, 1618 Chun Rd, Soi 31, Sathorn, Bangkok 10120. Telephone: 02-674-8455 and -8456; Fax: 02-267-7837; email address: tcd92@hotmail.com.

Quest: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Asian Christian Scholars

The first issue of *Quest: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Asian Christian Scholars* has come to hand recently. This new journal is published by the Association of Christian Universities and Colleges in Asia (ACUCA) and the United Board of Christian Higher Education in Asia. The mission of the journal "is to help create and develop a university-based community of Christian scholars through interdisciplinary dialogue and reflection on areas such as Asian religious and socio-political issues, Asian theological discourse, Asian Christian higher education and intellectual life."

Quest is published through the Chinese University Press, and first bi-annual issue came out in November 2002. The Chief Editor is David K. S. SUH and the managing editor is Wendy CHAN. You may contact *Quest* at: wendy@hkbu.edu.hk

Book Review

Presbyterian Church USA, *Annual Reports of the Board of Foreign Missions, 1850-1920*



Until last summer (2002), I had always assumed that the history of American Presbyterian missions in Siam was a book waiting to be written, and in one sense I was not wrong on that score. But, in another sense the assumption, based on a long familiarity with the subject, was incorrect-and happily so! While enjoying the luxury of several weeks of research at Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, I took the opportunity to inspect more closely the

chapters on the Siam and Laos Missions contained in the annual reports of the Board of Foreign Missions (BFM) of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PCUSA). I had long assumed that those chapters were nothing more than a reprint of the two missions' annual reports, microfilm copies of which are located at the Payap University Archives. It turns out that they are something quite different and far more useful, namely original chapters describing and commenting on the events of the year for each mission based on various reports and personal correspondence received from the field. When photocopied and brought together, these chapters constitute a massive chronicle, running to many hundreds of pages for the years 1850 to 1921—from, that is, the first Board annual reports containing material on the Siam Mission until the two missions were merged in 1920-1921. They are an invaluable source of information on each year in each station of the two missions, and while they do not comprise a history of the missions, in a technical sense, they certainly are a fulsome chronicle charting the events of each year in considerable detail.

It should be stated from the beginning that these annual chapters from 1850 to 1921 are by no means a perfect record of the two missions. It is particularly difficult to determine precise dates. The slowness of communication, especially in earlier years means that "last year" in the chapter for 1850, for example, probably refers to 1848 rather than 1849. By the same token, the mission year never followed the calendar year, and it was adjusted at least once over the years, so that one is not always sure if the phrase "early in the year" refers to the present calendar or mission year. Where possible, that is, dates will have to be checked against other records for the missions. Because these chapters were compiled by people who were not immediately familiar with the missions and the peoples and cultures of Siam, furthermore, there are inaccuracies, misspellings, and misinterpretations that would not appear (one hopes) in a professional history. The authors of these chapters also leave out the names of places and peoples, probably to save space and on the assumption that most readers would not know the places and people involved.

Possibly the most significant problem regarding this chapters, however, is their relative inaccessibility [**See Note below**]. One has to locate a set of PCUSA annual board reports, which is a massive multi-volume set of huge books filling considerable library shelf space. One assumes that these volumes are available at most or all of the Presbyterian seminaries and may be available in some Presbyterian colleges and universities as well. In spite of this being the age of interlibrary loan (ILL), this is a case where the reader will have to go to the books; the books simply cannot physically come to the reader. Also, working through volume after volume to locate the chapters on Siam is, in and of itself, a laborious process—especially if one intends to photocopy it all!

These problems do not detract, however, from the value of the chapters themselves. To begin with, each chapter (usually a single chapter divided into two sections, one each for the Siam and Laos Missions, respectively) contains basic factual material concerning the missionary members of each station, including arrivals and departures for the year and the names of those on furlough. Deaths and serious illnesses are invariably noted. Statistics are usually given for the amounts of books and tracts printed and distributed by the mission presses, and beginning in 1862 statistical summaries for Siam and Laos (north Siam) churches are available in the statistical reports for PCUSA churches (separate from the chapters). The chapters generally report on the work according to station and mission institution. For most years, a good map of

Siam, locating Presbyterian mission stations, is included. Some of the chapters are illustrated with excellent photographs that are not elsewhere available.

It needs to be emphasized, again, that while these annual reports contain frequent quotations of and references to missionary reports and correspondence, they are original pieces of work. They reveal, that is, something of the thinking of the Board itself including not only what it saw to be important in the work but also an often heavy overlay of theological (ideological) interpretation that came from the home offices rather than the field. They provide, thus, a somewhat different perspective on the work in Siam. As one very important example, they describe the work of each of the two missions, the Siam and the Laos Missions, in parallel with each other and, at times, actually draw comparisons between the two missions. This perspective is very different from that of the missionaries, who generally did not know what was going on in the "the other" mission. The Board perspective was also concerned about political and economic developments, which influenced the work of the missions.

Once located, the individual chapters are not difficult to use. For earlier years, they amount to only two or three pages, while by 1910 the average chapter runs to 20 to 30 pages. The 1910 report, for example, is 31 pages long. The categories under which material is presented tend to remain the same from year to year, so that it is not difficult to trace particular histories, such as that of a station or an institution, for example. Those who want to track the movements of one missionary will also find these chapters useful, although in all cases the sheer physical bulk of the volumes involved is as already mentioned, a problem. In Speer Library, the volumes are located in a far corner of the basement stacks in a narrow aisle; one either sits on the floor there, or carts the volumes upstairs to find a place to sit more comfortably. The only other set I've seen is at the Presbyterian Historical Society, where they are much more conveniently located in the reading room; several of the volumes, unfortunately, are in such poor physical condition as to be virtually unusable. One can only hope that someday all of this material will either be microfilmed or put on line.

[Note: As of October 2011, many of the BFM's annual reports are available online at either the [Internet Archive](#) or [Google Books](#) by searching, "Board of Foreign Missions Annual Reports." Neither site contains a complete set of volumes.]

For those who can locate these volumes, however, the material they contain on the Siam and Laos Missions is important and useful-if it is remembered that they constitute a chronicle of events rather than a history of those events.

Louis Menand. *The Metaphysical Club*. London: Flamingo, 2002.



The nineteenth-century American Protestant missionaries to Siam lived in a much larger world than we often realize, a world as complex and multi-faceted as our own. Menand's *The Metaphysical Club* offers a reminder of that fact and helps us to better understand "where the missionaries were coming from," especially in the years after the American Civil War (1861-1865). The book itself won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize in history, and while one might quibble with

certain aspects of his presentation-such as long digressions that seem off the subject-Menand offers an excellent description the American intellectual climate after 1865. He renders philosophical jargon comprehensible and captures something of the fundamental shifts in thinking that were taking place in the United States in the later nineteenth century. Although he focuses on the intellectual lives of just four men (Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., William James, Charles Pierce, John Dewey), Menand manages to weave the thought of many more individuals into the story of how the American intellectual climate changed in the wake of the Civil War.

Those changes, according to Menand, included a significant shift in attitudes concerning belief, knowledge, and truth. He does not describe the Antebellum intellectual scene, but it is apparent from he does write that the Civil War shattered the trust of a numerous influential thinkers in the trustworthiness of strongly held beliefs. They believed that strongly held beliefs lead to violence, oppression, and injustice and that "true" believers, such as the militantly anti-slavery abolitionists, created the conditions that led to war. These thinkers, thus, rejected the idea that beliefs are divinely inspired truths and insisted that we humans create our own beliefs, which are nothing more than guesses about the nature of things. Holding on to a set of beliefs too strongly is dangerous.

More largely, the new intellectual climate promoted the idea that we create knowledge and truth itself socially with the purpose of making the world over into what we want it to be. Knowledge and truth are not static. Facts are not fixed. Truth is nothing more than what we agree it to be. Many educated people thus embraced Darwinism with its emphasis on chance and variation. Science was no longer considered a matter of discovering fixed laws that govern a stable, unchanging universe. The world was no longer certain, but rather a matter of averages, statistics, and shifting patterns that depended on the person of knower as much as the nature of the know n.

Menand's commentary on nineteenth and early twentieth-century American thought makes it clear that various individuals thought various pieces of this pie in their own various ways. Some rejected organized religion, for example, while others embraced it. Some experienced the trauma of war directly and deeply, others felt the war as only a superficial impact, if that. The American intellect, nonetheless, increasingly cast off the settled, stable, and immutable Antebellum world and embraced a less fixed, more uncertain one in its place.

The Metaphysical Club is important to the study of Protestant church history in Thailand because it helps us to understand the ways in which the two American Presbyterian missions in Siam, the Siam and Laos Missions, "located" themselves in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Siam. The members of those two missions largely ignored the changes described by Menand. Their members continued to live for the most part in the older world that existed before the Civil War, a world that believed that facts are solid and unchangeable and that humans can know reality for what it really is. They continued to believe, that is, in their beliefs and took those beliefs to be a true description of unchanging divine and human realities.

Menand, thus, helps us to see that the Presbyterian missionaries in Siam from the 1860s onwards actually operated in three contexts, two of which they largely ignored. Their own intellectual context was primarily the pre-Civil War era, the one in which many of them were born and raised (Daniel McGilvary, for example, was born in 1828). While the Civil War was an important

experience to these missionaries, it did not have the same impact on their thinking that it had on the protagonists of Menand's narrative. They remained committed believers, and they largely rejected the new, second intellectual context that emerged after 1865. Or, perhaps, it is better to say that they only gradually came to inhabit the post-Civil War world and even then not completely or particularly comfortably. It is important to understand that prior to the Civil War, these missionaries thought in ways that fit very well with their national cultural and intellectual context. They reflected the best, most forward-looking, and deepest thought of the time. After the Civil War, however, they swam against the currents of contemporary thought and thus quietly, progressively de-contextualized themselves in terms of the main stream of American thought.

Conservative American Presbyterians, generally, felt constrained to reject the new thinking that emerged after 1865 because that thinking seemed to them to deny that humans can have a saving, true knowledge of God. It refused the idea that scientific facts are eternal and unchanging and that humans can achieve a true, unquestionable knowledge of reality. The post-Civil War world was a doubting world exemplified by Darwinian thought, and conservative Presbyterians, including nearly all of the missionaries who served in Siam, could not accept such a world. Hence, they clung to their earlier context and spurned their contemporary one.

The Presbyterian missionaries' resistance to the changing intellectual climate in the United States had a direct bearing on the way in which they situated themselves in their third context, Siam. They could no more accept the Thai context as a viable intellectual and religious one than they could accept the changes in thinking taking place in their homeland. If there was a difference between their contemporary American and the Siamese intellectual and religious contexts, it would have been that the American context still included a great deal that was familiar to them and large numbers of their compatriots also rejected the changes that were taking place. There was nothing familiar about Siam, other than a pervasive "heathenism" such as they thought was described in the Bible. Everyone around them, meanwhile, accepted this heathen context as natural and good.

Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*, in sum, helps us to place the Presbyterian missionaries who worked in Siam in their own intellectual and religious time. It provides important insights, if negatively, into the mentality and methods the missionaries brought with them. It reminds us that conservative Presbyterians in the United States felt a degree of alienation from their intellectual and religious context at home much as the missionaries felt that same alienation in their expatriate context in Siam-if not to the same degree. I would argue that we cannot fathom the unfolding of Protestant history in Siam/Thailand apart from an understanding of that dual alienation.