

HeRD 1997

Herb's Research Diary

HeRD #311 - Happy New Year

It's hard to predict precisely where we'll be heading in 1997 with HeRD. I don't look for any changes in format, and the schedule of "three months on, one month off" seems to work well for me. Beginning tomorrow, Philip Hughes will provide us with several HeRDs. After that, we'll continue our comparison of the early church's experience with that of the Thai church for some time. I'll soon begin preparation for the two semester course in Thai church history that I'm scheduled to teach at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology in the coming academic year. That should take us past several new "niches" in Thai church history, including the history of Thai Catholicism. The Office of History is starting up two new major research projects, one among the Karen and another with a cluster of churches in Uttaradit Province. By year's end we should be having research results to reflect on from those two projects. I think you'll find more input from the social sciences throughout the year, as we try to mold social science research approaches into our historical approach. Other topics of interest will come up, I'm sure. As always, I welcome and treasure your participation in the form of critical comments, reflections, questions, and suggestions for new directions in thinking. With Best Wishes for '97, Herb.

HeRD #312 - Hughes I: Barriers to Christian Faith in Thailand

Dr. Philip Hughes contributes the next seven HeRDs. Philip is a member of the Christian Research Associates, a church-oriented research group based in Melbourne. He visited Chiang Mai in August-September 1996 and helped me teach two research courses at McGilvary Faculty of Theology. The following HeRDs are based on a small research project he conducted with the students in one of those courses. You'll find them interesting and revealing. My thanks to Philip for his contribution.

What follows are Philip's own HeRDs, but I should mention that they have been edited somewhat.

In September 1996, I took a few sessions with seminary students at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology in research methods. We took, as our focus, the topic of evangelism. The first part of the process was to make some general observations, think about the relevant literature, and then develop some ideas that we might test. From there, the students assisted in developing a questionnaire which was circulated to seminary students asking about their own experiences of becoming Christian and those factors that have been helpful or problematic in being a Christian. Questionnaires were collected from about half the seminary students -- not a good sample, but sufficient for the purpose of learning something about research methods.

One of the questions asked about the various barriers to becoming, or remaining, a Christian in Thailand. We put before the seminary students ten possible barriers and asked them to rate how significant each of one had been for them. The most significant barrier among the students was the fact that Christianity was 'not Thai'. Thirteen percent of the students said that it was the most significant barrier for them. Another 45 percent indicated that it was a very significant barrier. Thus, nearly two-thirds of all the students expressed considerable concern. It is also interesting that although this issue was mentioned by both students who had grown up in Christian families and by those who had grown up in Buddhist families, it was considerably more significant among those who had been Buddhists of whom 100 percent rated it as a significant or very significant barrier to them. The fact that 'Christianity' was Western, or might be seen that

way in Thailand, was not such a problem. Some of the students suggested that this was because the seminary students knew that Christianity was not, in fact, originally Western. It was interesting that problems of opposition from family and friends, or problems with the nature of Christian belief itself were not nearly as significant as barriers as the fact Christianity was 'not Thai'.

If this result is indicative of Thai people generally, it means that one focus for Thai Christian apologetics should be to deal with this issue of the alien nature of Christianity. Indeed, it may be something that every part of the church needs to address: in forms of worship, in patterns of faith, in processes of administration. The incarnational principle is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition: that God comes to us in human form, and within specific cultural contexts. Paul put it this way: we should be all things to all people, in order that we might win some!

HeRD #313 - Hughes II: Another Barrier to Faith

In the last HeRD, I gave account of a small questionnaire filled in by seminary students at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology in Chiang Mai in September 1996. The sample was small, and in terms of looking at the church in northern Thailand, hardly representative. However, some of the results were quite suggestive, and worth investigating further.

The major barrier to belief for the seminary students was the fact that Christianity was seen as not being 'Thai'. However, another significant barrier for many of the students was that they were aware of many people who claimed to be Christian setting bad examples, or not showing Christian love. Forty-five percent of all students said that this was a very significant or the most significant barrier for them. The problem was not quite as great among the students who had grown up in Buddhist families as it was among those from Christian families. Buddhist families would not be so aware, perhaps, of Christians "setting a bad example". However, with a small sample of students from Buddhist families, the differences were not statistically significant.

The problem of bad examples was given a higher rating among younger students than among older ones. Perhaps, older students, with their wider experience of life, were more accepting of people who did not live up to the standards expected of them. This barrier to belief was rated considerably higher than issues of the nature of Christian belief itself, or opposition from family or friends. It is another reminder that in the processes of evangelism, the example of Christians remains a very significant influence.

HeRD #314 - Hughes III: Friendship and Evangelism

The last two HeRDs have been about a questionnaire completed by McGilvary Seminary students in September 1996. One of the questions looked at the barriers to Christian belief in the experience of the students. Another significant barrier, following the fact that Christianity was seen as 'not Thai' and awareness of people who had not been 'good examples', was opposition from friends. This was more important than opposition from family. Two percent of the students said that this had been the most significant barrier, and another 36 percent said it was very significant as a barrier.

Another question asked about the influences on the students in becoming Christian or developing a life of faith. The most widely affirmed influence among the seminary students were personal experiences of God's love. Among the wide range of other experiences to which they pointed were 'friends. Twenty-four per cent of the students said friends were the most significant

influence on them becoming Christian or remaining Christian, and another 68 per cent said friends were very significant. One hundred per cent of those students who had grown up in Buddhist families rated 'friends' as a very important or the most important influence, compared with 66 percent of those who had grown up in Christian families. 'Friends' is a major factor in people becoming Christian in northern Thailand -- both positively and negatively. If people find opposition from their friends to becoming Christian, they are far less likely to do so. On the other hand, friendship can be a very positive influence in bringing people into the Christian faith. One of the students recounted in class her own experience. She had grown up in a Buddhist family. One of her friends had a major part in her becoming a Christian. On the other hand, after conversion she lost many of her former friends.

Effective evangelism is not just a matter of teaching about faith. Forming and developing Christian community in which people can build positive friendships is a very important factor. In Australia, my church developed a student accommodation scheme for rural students studying in the city. We find that most of the students form strong friendships with the other students in the four houses we operate. We work hard to maintain a Christian ethos in the scheme. I have seen many students come into the church through that scheme. It has been the most effective evangelistic program the church has had, certainly within the last twelve years. Providing the opportunity and encouragement for the development of appropriate friendships has been the key.

HeRD #315 - Hughes IV: Other Influences on becoming Christian

In the last HeRD, we saw that in the survey taken among seminary students, 'friendship' was noted as both a positive and a negative influence in people becoming Christians. We also observed that of 15 items suggested to students as influences on being a Christian, the most important was experiences of God's love. Personal experience appeared in several other parts of the survey. For example, 38 per cent of the students said that an experience in which they had been healed had been the most important influence on them becoming or remaining Christians. Another 23 per cent indicated that the experience of seeing someone else healed had been the most important influence on them. Between 75 and 80 per cent of the students said that experiences of healing were either the 'most important' or 'very important' among the influences on them.

Thai people want to see 'evidence' of the power of God. There is a widespread interest in miracles for a similar reason. They expect God to work in ways which will be evident. Thirty-eight percent of the students said they had an experience of something miraculous happening to them, such as being healed in a way they did not expect, several times. Another 25 per cent of students said it had happened to them once. 34 per cent of students said it had not happened to them.

I believe that a similar interest has grown in Australia, and is part of the reason for the success of the Pentecostal churches. The Pentecostal churches expect miracles and point to them. Twenty-five years ago claims of miracles were often considered to be a barrier to faith, or even an embarrassment. Many theologians and Biblical teachers sought to explain away miracles. But the tide has swung. Even outside the church, there is a widespread interest in para-normal phenomena of all types. Miracles are no longer problematic for many younger people. They want to see, and expect to see, God at work. It is indicative of some very substantial changes in the ways in which people view the world.

HeRD #316 - Hughes V: Church Life and Its Evangelistic Impact

In the survey conducted in September 1996 that we've been discussing, seminary students at McGilvary Faculty of Theology indicated that experiences of God's love definitely had the greatest influence on them becoming or remaining Christians. The second most important influence was 'worship', followed by 'Sunday School'. Forty percent of the students said that 'Sunday School' was the most important influence on them, and 36 percent said that 'worship' was. For students who had grown up in a Buddhist background, Sunday School was not so important, although 50 percent of these students still said it was 'the most important' or 'very important' influence on them. Two-thirds of those who had grown up as Buddhists indicated that worship was 'the most important' or 'very important' for them.

It was very interesting that, in comparison, other explicitly evangelistic programs, such as activities in school, or crusades, had little impact. Seventeen percent of students said crusades were the 'most important' influence and 13 percent said 'school' was. Out of a total of 15 influences put before the students in the questionnaire, crusades came in at number 12, and school at number 13 in comparison with other influences. This is despite the fact that school, university, and city-wide crusades are frequently organised by the Thai church. The students were more conscious of the continuing impact of church life, of worship, Sunday School, and Bible studies.

Single events, such as crusades, did not seem to have much importance in their own right. While some denominations place a great deal of emphasis on special 'once in a life-time' conversion experiences, such experiences do not appear to have the same meaning in Thailand. When the students were asked if there had ever been a special time when they had committed their lives to Christ, 68 percent said they had done so several times, 19 percent once, and 13 percent never but had grown gradually in the faith. These results suggest that commitment often is seen as part of the process of deepening one's spiritual life rather than the idea often associated with repentance of 'turning right around'.

Nor is it those events which seek people to 'turn right around' that have the most impact. Rather, greater influence comes from weekly worship, Sunday School and Bible studies, and becoming part of a Christian community. It would be most interesting to know how many people make a commitment at a crusade, but fail to take faith any further. Every person needs on-going support in faith, not least the person who has just made a commitment of faith. The friend who draws another person into the on-going life of the church is probably more successful evangelistically than the large crusade.

HeRD #317 - Hughes VI: The Impact on Faith of Parents and School

In the survey conducted among McGilvary Seminary students in September 1996, one of the most strongly affirmed influences on faith was that of the parents. Seventy percent of the students said that their mothers were the 'most important' influence on their becoming or remaining Christian; and another 17 percent said their mothers were 'very important'. 60 percent claimed that their fathers were 'most important', while another 13 percent said their fathers were 'very important'. The influence of parents was second only to that of the personal experiences of God's love and to the life of the church in worship and Sunday School.

Interestingly, parents were also important among the few students who had grown up as Buddhists and had converted to Christianity. One hundred percent of the students who had been Buddhist said their mothers were very important or the most important influences, and 75 percent of students previously Buddhist said their fathers were most or very important. There are several interpretations we can give to this response. One is that many students became Christian because their parents did so. When they were young, their parents were also Buddhists. The

family converted as a family. Another possibility is that parents were seen as influential, perhaps encouraging the children to explore the Christian faith even while remaining Buddhist themselves. A third possibility is that parents converted to Christianity following their children, and thus became a source of encouragement.

Whatever the interpretation, these results confirm that parents do have a great deal of influence on their children. While, in Western countries, it is common for children to go through a time rebellion and develop values and attitudes which are deliberately opposed to those of their parents, they often return to the values and attitudes of their parents in later years. I have recently examined some data collected from a sample of the Australian population in 1993. I was looking particularly at the influences of having been to a Catholic school - at least, the correlations with attendance at Catholic schools. There was a weak but significant correlation between having had one's education at a Catholic school and church attendance (of about .17). However, there were much higher correlations with the parents' patterns of attendance at school and those of their children. Regression analysis showed that when one controlled for parents' behaviour, the independent influence on church attendance of the Catholic school disappeared altogether.

HeRD #318 - Hughes VII: Catholic Schools

Of all Australian adults 17.2% attended a Catholic primary school, and of those who went to secondary school, 16.7% attended a Catholic secondary school, according to the National Social Science Survey of 1993. About half of all Australian Catholics send their children to Catholic schools, but so also do many non-Catholics. They prize the educational standards, the discipline, and other aspects of Catholic schools, in comparison with many State schools. There are also many non-Catholics who send their children to Catholic schools.

In a simple comparison of the numbers of students who complete year 12 of schooling, the Catholic schools appear to do considerably better than other schools. On average, for the whole population, 42% of students who went to Catholic schools completed year 12 compared with 27% of the population. Even when one takes into account the more intellectual orientation of parents sending their children to Catholic schools, the affects of the schools themselves remain substantial. Controlling for the orientation and background of the parents, still 38% of children attending complete year 12 compared with 27% in the population as a whole.

Catholic schools were established not only to provide a good education in a general sense, but to pass on the Catholic faith to children. The National Social Science Survey allows us to look at this in several ways. We can compare, for example, the church attendance of those who attended Catholic schools to those who did not. We find that those who attended Catholic schools, on average, attend church more frequently than those who did not. While, on average, Australians attend about once or twice a year, those who attended a Catholic school attend more than several times a year. Almost 13% of the variance in church attendance is explained in terms the mother's attendance when the person was growing up. The father's attendance adds a little to the explanation, accounting for a total of 14.6%. The person's own attendance as a child also explains a little of the variation: a total of 15.2%, and attending a Catholic secondary school makes it 15.6%. Having been a student at a Catholic secondary school does have a very small, but statistically significant (at better than .005 level) independent relationship to church attendance as an adult. However, the independent relationship is very small compared with that with the parent's involvement.

The results are similar in relation to belief in God. There is a correlation of .16 between how sure people are in their belief in God and attending a Catholic school. Again, however, most

of that relationship can be explained in terms of the fact that the parents with stronger religious practices, and presumably beliefs, were more likely to send their children to Catholic schools. The school is one of several significant influences on the attitudes and opinions of students about religious matters. Alone, its influence is very limited. Yet, perhaps without it, parents and the parish would also find it more difficult to have a positive influence in the affirmation of Christian faith and practice among their children.

This brings us to the end of Philip's HeRDs, and I'd like to once again express my thanks to him for taking the time to share them with "the HeRD."

HeRD #319 - When Did It All Begin?

There is some question about just when early CHURCH history begins. Some scholars will begin with Jesus himself while others argue that Jesus and his disciples were in no sense the "church" as such. They didn't constitute the organizational embodiment of a separate religion. They were Jews and all understood themselves to be involved in the reformation of Judaism rather than the founding of a new religion. They formed a "Jesus Movement" [see HeRD #139] but they weren't the church. Other scholars propose other starting points, of which Pentecost seems to be the most popular.

At first glance, it would seem that we don't have this problem in Thai church history...or, do we? When did the identifiably "Thai church" begin? The answer is not so obvious as it should be when we consider that the very earliest church in Thailand--founded by the Baptists in 1837--was composed entirely of Chinese immigrants and missionary families. The second congregation--founded by the Presbyterians in 1847--had only missionary families and one Chinese immigrant in it for a number of years. The first ethnic Thai member didn't join until 1860. In Chiang Mai, the "First Presbyterian Church of Cheung Mai" was founded in April 1868 with only two members, Sophia McGilvary and Maria Wilson. The first northern Thai member of the church didn't join until January 1869. So, when then does Thai church history begin? When the missionaries founded formal churches in Thailand? When the first ethnic Thais joined?

In the case of Chiang Mai, there's still another possibility I'd like to propose. The first northern Thai women members of the Chiang Mai church didn't join until 1876. It was only then that the church ceased to be a "native" male and missionary organization and took on a true family and communal life. If we define the church as a "community", First Church only became viable when it included women. Worth a thought.

HeRD #320 - Latent Personal Conviction

Jurgen Becker, in an article published in the book CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS, puzzles over Paul's early life and esp. the impact of his Jewish religious training on his later thinking. Becker believes that Paul's Christian thinking bore the marks of that earlier training. He writes, "...Paul still carries Judaism within him as a LATENT PERSONAL CONVICTION that has been replaced but is still present." (emphasis added). Becker specifies Paul's "uncompromising monotheism" as an example. Like all Jews of his day and background, Paul insisted that the gods of other religions were "demons or nothing at all." Becker goes on to note, however, that Paul also moved in new directions that were not implicit in his former religion. He rejected, for example, the Levitical purity laws that comprised a significant barrier to Jewish relations with the "outside" world. This led Paul to a more open attitude about people of other cultures, if not about people of other religions.

This brief rendering of Becker's longer analysis points to that interesting issue that we keep dancing around in HeRD--the relationship of Buddhist culture to the Thai church. Many of the earlier generation of church leaders were converts who had more or less formal religious training. Did their background plant in them a "latent personal conviction" that remained embedded in their new faith? My intuition and personal experience in Thailand assures me that such is the case. The missionary literature also contends that Buddhism and animism continued to influence the converts. Usually the missionaries lamented that influence, but on occasion they noted that earlier Buddhist religious training made church leaders more effective evangelists than the missionaries themselves. The converts could communicate in the language and idiom of the people while the missionaries couldn't.

What we do not have is a clear map of the relationship of Thai Christian thinking to Buddhist and animistic thought. How do these latent personal convictions manifest themselves among Thai Christians? Just how "latent" are they? Do they comprise a distinctive "Thai" approach (or approaches) to Christian faith? In what ways? In what ways are they cultural "baggage" that hinders the appropriation of the "new faith"? In what ways are they doors to new ways of looking at the "old faith" brought from other countries and cultures? These questions are, obviously, highly complex...and fascinating. Any thoughts?

HeRD #321 - Tatian the Assyrian

Early Asian church history may not be directly related to Thai church history, but it is still interesting. Tatian the Assyrian (ca. 110-180) is an example. He was the key figure in the church at Arbela, a small kingdom located on the Tigris River on the borders of Persia. Moffet in the first volume of his *HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN ASIA* states that Tatian was important because he was the first to bring the written Gospels to the Asian church. His harmony of the Gospels in Syriac was probably the first "major" translation of the Gospels into any language and was instrumental in making Syriac the language of the Eastern Church.

Tatian was also a radical ascetic and the "father" of the Encratites, an ascetic sect located in the desert and mountains of Syria. The Encratites did things like chain themselves to rocks, wall themselves up in caves, and engaged in acts of abnormal self-denial. Under Tatian's leadership, Arbela became a major center for missions to eastern Persia and central Asia. Moffet notes that Arbelan missions were marked by their ascetic nature. He writes, "In the very earliest Christian documents of the East, the call to ascetic self-denial is almost always associated with the call to go and preach and serve. This seems to have been the most striking difference between Syrian and Egyptian saint-ascetics. Egypt, more solidly agricultural, valued stability and tended to withdraw from outside contacts and movements. Its saints ignored the world and retreated to their caves and cells. Syria, on the other hand, with its travel and trading traditions, stressed mobility and outreach. Its ascetics became wandering missionaries, healing the sick, feeding the poor, and preaching the gospel as they moved from place to place." (pp.77-78)

HeRD #322 - Racists?

Did the "old-time" Presbyterian missionaries hold racist prejudices against Asians? That is a question as difficult to answer as it is volatile. Take the following, for example. In the May 1901 issue of *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN*, Katharine Denman made passing reference to her "dark-skinned Laos sisters." ("Laos" here referring to the northern Thai). Is the comment racist? On the one hand, it seems to at the very least indicate "racialist" proclivities. Denman, that is, was conscious of skin-color as a mark that distinguished peoples from each other. She didn't refer to her "rice-eating Laos sisters" or her "short Laos sisters" or to any other traits that might distinguish them. She was race conscious. On the other hand, the remark could be taken as

entirely innocent and having no weight. It is, admittedly, taken out of context. There seems, in this case, no compelling reason to assume the remark is racist.

The question revolves around the definition of racism. Michael C. Coleman published an article on the question of Presbyterian missionary racism towards American Indians in the *JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY* (June 1980) that is helpful here. He concluded that the Presbyterian missionaries working in the last decades of the 19th century were highly ethnocentric but not racist. He argued that they believed that the "problem" of the Indians was their heathenism and their culture. The missionaries held that if Indian children were raised up "properly" they could attain anything white children could. They were not inferior because of race but because of cultural and religious conditions. Coleman's answer may be a little too neat and pat, but on the whole it bears consideration. In the case of the Presbyterians in Thailand, their records are replete with clearly worded ethnocentric statements. There are very few instances where one feels their statements might be racist. My tentative conclusion is that they had little or no racist prejudices against Asians. Their prejudices were ethnocentric.

Sources: Denman, Katharine Andrews, "The Laos Woman's Ordinary Life," *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* 16, 5(May 1901): 131-133; and Michael C. Coleman, "Not Race, but Grace: Presbyterian Missionaries and American Indians, 1837-1893," *JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY* 67, 1(June 1980): 41-60.

HeRD #323 - Not So Very Different

HeRD #322 posed the question of missionary racism and reached the tentative conclusion that the missionaries weren't racists. I would offer the following as one piece of evidence. Edna Bissell, in a letter published in the October 1901 number of *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN*, wrote, "I like the Siamese people very much. I find many good things in them and have come to feel how alike we are after all. Our Father is the same and we are all one great family with the Divine Spark within each soul, only some are waiting to be lighted, and blessed is he who may be used as a taper." One quotation doesn't make the case; but it does lend credence to the argument that the missionaries weren't racists, esp. when we consider the lack of clear, direct evidence indicating they were.

Source: Miss Bissell, letter, 1 May [1901], in *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* 16, 10(October 1901): 287.

HeRD #324 - Futures I

On January 20th and 21st, I had the privilege of attending a two-day seminar entitled, "Visions for Religious Studies in the Next Decade," sponsored by the Comparative Religions Curriculum of Mahidol University. It was held at the Royal River Hotel in Bangkok. The seminar was very valuable, and for the next few HeRDs I'd like to share with you all some of the things I learned and insights I gained from it.

There were three keynote addresses. Phra Dhammabhidok, one of Thai Buddhism's leading thinkers, presented the first. In it he argued that religious knowledge is a different form of knowing from other forms. It gives answers concerning life itself. It has to do with the acquisition of wisdom. It demands an immediate behavioral response from its students. Unlike other forms of knowledge, religious knowledge can't remain theoretical because it's so intensely involved with the issues of living. He contrasted religious knowledge, which he sees as complete in itself, with scientific knowledge. He argued that the world has learned that it can't trust scientific knowledge to provide one might call "ultimate" answers. Scientific knowledge is

unstable, changeable, and therefore unreliable. At one point he went so far as to say that humanity can't wait around for science to finally come up with complete answers.

One might take exception to Phra Dhammabidok's characterizations of both religious as scientific knowledge. The Christian experience points clearly to the constantly changing, never final nature of the Christian understanding of God and the Christian life. Phra Dhammabidok's address, nonetheless, raises crucial issues for the church historian. If religious knowledge is in some sense different from other forms of knowledge, does this mean that the knowledge gained through the historiographical study of the church's past is different from knowledge gained through the study of other histories? Is the knowledge we gain through Thai CHURCH history different in kind from that acquired in the study of Thai history generally? If so, how is it different? Does church historical knowledge demand of its students a response? Or, again, is it illegitimate to apply the methods of the "historical science" to the church's past?

It would seem that a partial answer to these questions requires us to focus on the practitioner of the historical craft rather than the body of knowledge that results from her/his work. If the historian is a person of faith that faith almost inevitably shapes WHAT the historian studies and WHY he/she studies it. This would be equally true, I should think, for a sociologist or a research psychologist. What is truly different about religious knowledge is the knower rather than the knowledge...although knowledge about the ultimate is, admittedly, also different from scientific knowledge in some ways.

HeRD #325 - Futures II

Phra Dhammabidok, the first keynote speaker at the seminar on "Visions for Religious Studies in the Next Decade," is disposed to treat science and technology in all of their various forms as "the enemy" of religion. They pose dangers to religion. He observed that science is Western in origin and based on the premise that Nature has to be conquered. Western scientific thinking assumes that humanity will win its way to a better life when it achieves freedom and independence from Nature. He rejects this world view and argues that it leads not to freedom but to destruction. It makes human life worse, not better. What is particularly important here is that Phra Dhammabidok subsumes the social sciences under the general category of scientific thinking. He argues that they turn human beings into "material things" and, thereby, destroy their humanity. He seems to be suggesting that empirical thinking in all of its guises participates in perpetuating false, destructive values and attitudes.

Phra Dhammabidok's presentation reflects the deep sense of alienation from and resentment of things Western later expressed by several other speakers as well. Few of us will agree with his complete rejection of the empirical method and its world view, but his perspective still requires further serious reflection on the issue raised in our last HeRD. That is the issue of the appropriateness of applying empirical methods to the life of the church. An empirical approach does objectify "things" that aren't objects. It separates things that can't be separated into categories, scales, and bits of data. It quantifies things that aren't quantities. It describes the past through an assemblage of footnotes and reams of ifs, ands, and maybes. Is this the way to a faith-ful knowledge of truth? How much destruction of the very thing we seek is involved? Phra Dhammabidok represents a contemplative tradition, and it behooves us to take his critique of empirical approaches seriously.

HeRD #326 - Futures III

The second session of the seminar on "Visions for Religious Studies in the Next Decade" was a panel discussion on "Religion and the Third Wave." Among the panelists was Dr. Suwanna

Sata-anan, a Catholic scholar and professor at Chulalongkorn University. She brought to the issue of the place so religion in contemporary Thai society a quite different perspectives from that of Phra Dhammabidok. She observed that religion has long made substantial use of the revolutions in communications, beginning with the invention of papyrus. Religionists taken advantage of the printing press, of the radio, and of Internet. They've felt very much at home with all of these technological advances. She devoted some time to describing how many different resources there are for religion on Internet and speculated that in the freedom of Internet there is a great opportunity for religion.

It is significant that Dr. Suwanna's examples of the compatibility of changing communications technologies with religion were mostly Western Christian examples. She was one of the few speakers in this seminar who readily embraced contemporary change and saw in it advantages. She was also one of only three Christian speakers. It seems likely that articulate Thai Christians, Protestant as well as Catholic, would feel less alienated towards Westernizing social and technological change. There are those who argue that this compatibility with the West gives Christians an "advantage" in Thailand. They are, so to speak, riding the wave of the future. I don't think so. It is one more example of Christian alienation from Thai society at large.

As an aside, we should note that it was Protestant missionaries who conducted the first modern public relations/evangelistic campaign in northern Thailand. They were the ones to introduce printing and initiated the aborted changes that would have led to the creation of northern Thai as a "modern" language. Among Protestants in Thailand, at least, there is no question that we have long seen Western technology as a friend and ally rather than as an enemy.

HeRD #327 - Futures IV

Dr. Suwanna, the Catholic scholar featured in HeRD #326, speculated on coming changes in Thai religion. Drawing from global trends, she urged that religion in Thailand was already becoming both more fragmented and more globalized. She had many examples from Thailand, but it was striking that she began with North American Mennonites as almost her "paradigm" for what is coming. She herself has visited Mennonite communities in Pennsylvania, USA, and was deeply impressed by the simplicity and "local-ness" of their lives. Yet they have a global impact through their work in more than 50 nations. They mix "localization" with "globalization". This, she contends, is our future. One of her examples from Thailand is also interesting. She cited the case of the Hope of Bangkok Church, one of the key pillars of Thai Pentecostalism. It is a Bangkok phenomenon founded by Thais, not missionaries that now has a church (or churches?) in Australia. It is, again, both a local and a global phenomenon. We should note here again that Dr. Suwanna greets all of this with no sense of dismay. She appears quite comfortable with the coming order/dis-order she envisions. As we shall see, that is not the case with the second keynote speaker.

HeRD #328 - Futures V

Dr. Pridi Kasemsap was the second keynote speaker for the seminar on "Visions for Religious Studies in the Next Decade." In a meeting that largely featured inter-religious cordiality within a Buddhist context, Dr. Pridi was the one speaker who openly displayed negative feelings towards another religion. The tone and the content of his presentation were decidedly anti-Christian. He began by observing that Thai independence has survived three invading forces, viz. Western diplomats, military forces, and Christian missionaries. He went on to quote with some pleasure the words of King Mongkut in a letter to Anna Leonowens, dated roughly 1861 or 1862. King Mongkut is supposed to have written inviting her to come to Bangkok to teach his children English and the sciences. He specified that he didn't want her to

teach them a new religion as Thailand already had one that taught Thais to know science and ethics.

Dr. Pridi took deep and open satisfaction that Thailand has so successfully resisted the inroads of Christianity ("Christian-ism" might be a better term from his perspective). He noted how Christians have attained high political office and/or substantial influence in South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. But not now...or ever...in Thailand. He gloried in the fact that by law the King must be a Buddhist. He stated that Thailand is a unique country that has preserved its identity and used its religion to preserve its culture. He observed that where Christian institutions formerly dominated education and medicine, now they have much less of a place. Thailand has successfully mastered their subjects and technologies without succumbing to their religion. He concluded his rambling presentation with praise for the strength of Western Christianity by citing the fact that even politically powerful communism couldn't defeat the Christian church. He gave especial praise to Catholic Poland and termed Polish Catholics "religious warriors" in the battle against the communists. He acknowledge that Western Christianity is a powerful religious force but concluded his presentation on a defiant note stating, "But the last country they'll get is Thailand, if they get it at all."

HeRD #329 - Futures VI

The last HeRD summarized Dr. Pridi Kasemsap's anti-Christian keynote address to the seminar on "Visions for Religious Studies in the Next Decade" sponsored by Mahidol University. I listened to Dr. Pridi with very mixed feelings. Let us admit from the outset that if Protestants are going to wage aggressive evangelistic campaigns based on the premise that Buddhists are condemned to eternal damnation we have to expect angry, defiant, and nationalistic responses of this type. Dr. Pridi clearly felt himself under attack by Western Christianity. We also have to admit that Western Christians in Thailand have often voiced a derogatory, condescending attitude towards Thai religiosity. Dr. Pridi repays us in the same coin. We can hardly complain about that. At least he does us the honor of acknowledging the impressive forcefulness of our religion.

On the other hand, I personally couldn't help but feel that Dr. Pridi let the worst in us be the definition of us. (We've long done that to Buddhism, of course). There is so much of what it means to be a Christian that was lost in his attack. There was, furthermore, an implied threat to Thai Christians that is worrisome. Being less than one percent of the population leaves them vulnerable, and if a few Dr. Pridi's started attacking Christianity in public this way there could be considerable social "pressure" brought to bear on Christians. I also felt that Dr. Pridi demeaned himself and his own religious faith by plummeting the depths of religious nationalism. Perhaps even more tragic, he has allowed the worst side of Christianity to dominate even how he understands his own religious heritage. Rather than seeing Buddhism as a path beyond the illusions of mundane life he glories in it as a tool for national policy, a bulwark against Western cultural imperialism. His is a religion essentially AGAINST another religion.

HeRD #330 - Futures VII

The previous HeRD featured a speaker at the seminar on "Visions for Religious Studies in the Next Decade" who doesn't reflect the best side of Thai Buddhist thinking. The third keynote speaker, Dr. Prawase Wasi, most certainly does. They call him a "social critique," but the speech he delivered to this seminar must be classed as prophetic, in the best Old Testament sense of that word. He raised, from a Buddhist perspective, the troubling question, if Buddhism is so good then why is our supposedly Buddhist society the way it is? Why aren't people living according to the Eight fold Path and other Buddhist precepts? Why are we ranked 2nd in the world in the rate

of murders per 100,000? We think Thailand is a good nation, but look at the evil of our political system. Observe how we're destroying our children's futures with our own greed. Ours is a nation filled with the lies of advertising. We can't even distinguish good and evil anymore. Our morals have been destroyed. In this context, we have to ask about Buddhism again.

His powerful critique of Thai society and religion never lapsed into an attack on "the evil West" or on Christianity. It looked, rather, into the roots of Thai social relationships and thinking. What Dr. Prawase found there was the Thai equivalent of racism. Thai society always honors "big shots" whether they are deserving of honor or not. It gives place and power to such people, those who are wealthy or have achieved social status. Thai society condones the misuse of power and has put into a place a justice system that forgives the lapses of the wealthy while punishing those of the poor. He argued that Thai society isn't a "Civil Society." It ignores mutuality and social cooperation. It's a society that doesn't value learning. It's culture has become materialistic to the point that materialism is now embedded in its very structures.

What I found both compelling and humbling from a Western point of view was the parallel between Thai big shot-ism (for want of a better term) and Western racism. Just as racism and sexism lie close to the heart of Western collective sin so big shot-ism lies close to the heart of Thai collective sin. Keeping such a parallel firmly in mind prevents us from taking any superior attitude against Thai society whatsoever.

HeRD #331 - Futures VIII

There was a great deal of meat in Dr. Prawase Wasi's address to the Mahidol University seminar on "Visions for Religious Studies in the Next Decade." One passing comment he made is worth pondering. He referred to the Buddha, Mohammed, and Jesus as great religious figures who "banlu dhamma" (attained Dharma). One of the Buddhist participants in the conference interpreted this to mean that Jesus achieved enlightenment. Christians never speak about Jesus that way, not even when we're speaking the Thai language. Is it possible to do so? What would it mean for us to take Dr. Prawase's characterization of Jesus and interpret it from a Christian point of view? Does speaking of him as an "Enlightened One" obscure or even demean the person of Jesus? Or does it open new avenues in communicating the Good News about him in Thai contexts? What does it mean, furthermore, that Dr. Prawase apparently accepts Jesus as having achieved enlightenment? He clearly is granting Jesus a very high place in his religious world. I don't really even know where to start on this one and would love to have your thoughts.

HeRD #332 - Futures IX

Dr. Prawase Wasi's keynote speech to the seminar on "Visions for Religious Studies in the Next Decade" articulated what amounts to a "theology of research" that contrasts starkly with Phra Dhammabhidok's assault on empirical thinking. Having delivered his prophetic critique of Thai society and religion, he entered into an analysis of how to proceed. Research of various types comprised a significant starting point in his strategy for Thai social and religious change. He observed that currently Buddhist teaching is simply praised for being good. No one is actually studying why it is failing to impress Thai society. We talk about the good, but the good doesn't happen. He then cited specific Buddhist teachings concerning "dhamma wijaya" as the foundation for this type of research. I must confess total ignorance on this subject, but it appears that part of the Buddhist path towards Enlightenment includes "research" into the truth of the human condition. Dr. Prawase urged that we need to engage in just this type of research in order to discover where and why Buddhism is failing Thai society. He specifically mentioned social scientific research.

HeRD #333 - A Buddhist Agenda for the CCT

Having attended the seminar on "Visions for Religious Studies in the Next Decade" on Monday, January 20th, and Tuesday, the 21st, it was fascinating to attend a CCT seminar in the hills near Chiang Mai on Friday, the 24th, and to hear Dr. Prawase speak once again. He presented many of the same ideas to the seminar, attended by over 150 CCT representatives, as he had presented in Bangkok. I found his delivery less compelling this second time around until he came to the end of the presentation. Speaking to the directions the CCT should take in the future, he presented three points. First, he urged the CCT to encourage its members and employees to share in the suffering of others. Suffering is reduced simply in the act of sharing that suffering. Second, he called on the CCT to emphasize attitudes of working together, attitudes and practices that lead to actual cooperation. Good things happen when people cooperate. Third, he told us to "study peace" ("suksa santiphap") and work on creating peace. He called on the CCT to put all of its work into a framework of peace.

Ach. Samran Kuangwaen, the Moderator of the CCT, thanked Dr. Prawase for his presentation with the words, "Dr. Prawase doesn't know the Bible, but he's taught us the Bible. He isn't a Christian, but he brought us teachings from the Bible. I won't soon forget his words." Dr. Prawase spoke as prophetically and relevantly in a Christian context as he does in Buddhist and Thai secular contexts. Anyone who wants to be a truly effective communicator of the Gospel in this culture would do well to study the ways, means, and words of this man. It appears that God went ahead and found a prophet to the Thai people while we Christians have been off dithering and bickering in our own little corners.

HeRD #334 - Showing Love to Senior Citizens

Northern Thailand has conducted one of the most effective family planning programs in the world, with the result that the population's average age is rising steadily. The time is coming when a significant portion of the population will be 60 or older. This raises the question of what is the current condition of Christians over the age of 60 in the North. Ach. [VK], an M.Div. student at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, is exploring this question in his M.Div. Research Project. In a preliminary survey he did last year among a small number (18) of people in Lampang, he discovered an interesting pattern in the relationship between those over 60 and the family members they lived with. Ach. [V] asked if their families took them on trips, encouraged them to socialize, or shared news of various sorts with those over 60. Over 50% responded that their families did little or nothing in these areas. Ach. [V] also asked them if the families looked after and were interested in their health, and here slightly over half the over-60s answered in the affirmative. Ach. [V]'s concludes that family members communicate more interest in their parents'/grandparents' physical well-being than in their mental well-being. He suggested that it appears that family members are more apt to spend time taking their parents or grandparents to the doctor than they are to just sit and chat with them.

Ach. [V], furthermore, compared Christians (10 cases) with non-Christians (8 cases) and found that the Christians tended to show more over all interest in those over 60 in the household. He suggested that part of the reason may be that the Christian seniors themselves were better educated than the non-Christians, while a somewhat higher number of non-Christians were still gainfully employed and thus not seen as needing "special" attention. It must be stressed that all of this is highly tentative because of Ach. [V]'s extremely narrow data base. Yet, it does raise interesting issues, ones that Ach. [V] is pursuing at present in a larger research project.

HeRD #335 - Ministry with Seniors

HeRD #334 reported on Ach. [VK]'s research into the present condition of a group of senior citizens in Lampang. He interviewed 18 individuals, ten of whom are Christians. Ach. [VK]'s data base is much too small to make even tentative conclusions, but his findings do point to avenues for further research.

In terms of actual ministries to or with seniors, it appears that visitation and providing opportunities for socializing among those over 60 may be one approach to explore. Ach. [V] found that 61% of those he interviewed stated that on most days they had no one to talk to during the day. Half said this was absolutely the case while another 11% said it was generally the case. When the Christians were given a list of things they'd like to have and asked to order them from most desirable to least, the two categories most frequently marked as most desired were: "I want to know and be friends with other seniors"; and "I want other seniors and/or the pastor to visit." On the other hand, the statement, "I want the church to establish a seniors' club" met with very little interest. Two-thirds of seniors ranked it next to lowest or lowest on the list. This suggests the possibility that those over the age of 60 would like to have more opportunities for informal socializing. If this data reflects a wider trend, it would appear to also suggest a possible strategy for the pastoral care of this age group in urban northern Thai settings.

HeRD #336 - Gamboling Calves

HeRD #301 quoted Jonathan Wilson's letter that was published in the May 1905 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN. I'd like to return to his words here long enough to consider the scriptural reference to Malachi 4:2 contained in the quotation. It is fascinating for what is probably merely a "technical" reason. Wilson quotes Malachi 4:2 as ending with the statement, "ye shall go forth and gambol as calves of the stall." At a time when I was checking a number of biblical references in missionary writings, I was rather startled to find that Wilson wasn't quoting the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. The KJV reads, "ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." It seemed unlikely that Wilson was misquoting the KJV, esp. since the word "gambol" is hardly a common word in missionary or any other literature. The only other version possibly available to Wilson in 1905 that I knew of was the American Revised Version, published in 1900-1901. And sure enough, Wilson was quoting from the American version, which was based on a revision done in Britain in the 1880s.

This is the first example I've encountered of a Presbyterian missionary in Thailand using any English translation of the Bible other than the KJV. It is esp. interesting that it was Wilson, one of the most conservative of the Presbyterians who was in his 70s by 1905. It should be noted that the American version is one of the most literal translations and follows the Greek very closely. Even so, I wouldn't have expected him to favor any translation other than the KJV. We've made the point several times that the turn of the century era was a time of transition in missionary thinking. This is one more small, but perhaps not minor example of that change.

HeRD #337 - The Pauline Model

In many ways, Paul and Pauline thinking dominate the New Testament. It isn't surprising, then, that so many people "on the mission field" want to emulate his missionary approach. The following, taken from the second volume of Helmut Koester's INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT (page 110), is a succinct description of Paul's missionary model.

"On the whole, a picture emerges which is characteristic for Paul's missionary method. He would settle in the capital of a province, together with a few tested associates, gather any Christians already living in the city, and expand his staff; together with these co-workers he would also found congregations in other cities of the area. During his absence he would maintain

contact through messengers and letters in order to influence the further building and development of these churches. Paul's missionary work, therefore, should not be thought of as the humble efforts of a lonely missionary. Rather, it was a well-planned, large-scale organization that included letter-writing as an instrument of ecclesiastical policy. In his activity in Corinth [50-52 CE] Paul seems to have accomplished the program of missionary work for the first time on a large scale, perhaps using the model which the Antiochian church had developed."

HeRD #338 - Mae Yawt

Mabel Gilson related in the Presbyterian missionary publication WOMAN'S WORK (May 1906) her visit to Mae Dok Daeng and told about one of its members Mae [Mother] Yawt. She complimented Mae Yawt for the way she kept her house spotlessly clean, for her hard-working approach to life, and for being a personally well-groomed individual. Gilson avowed that Mae Yawt was doing more to "transform this land than I can ever do.." She was a "constant object lesson" to those around her. Gilson took pleasure in the thought that she might be able to train up a person such as this herself.

In the Presbyterian approach to conversion, the concept of transformation was central and profound. The Presbyterian missionaries didn't seek just a change of religious allegiance. They sought, rather, a total transformation of the individual AND the society and culture in which the individual lived. They esp. sought changes in values, seeing these as the key to changes in behavior. Gilson, thus, pays Mae Yawt the highest compliment possible when she remarks on her cleanliness and willingness to work hard. Those who criticize the Presbyterians for their over-reliance on institutional work in Thailand should do so realizing that they didn't seek to simply "plant" churches in Thailand. They were social and cultural revolutionaries for whom churches were but one more weapon employed in the total Christianization of Thai society.

Source: Mabel Gilson, "A Visit to a Country Church Near Chieng Mai," WOMAN'S WORK 21, 5(May 1906): 111-12.

HeRD #339 - Uttaradit Split

Last semester Ach. [NP], an M.Div. student at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, wrote a research paper on the withdrawal of a large group of members from the Thai Tawarntam Church, Mae Chuey, of Uttaradit Province. This congregation is a member of the Fourth District, CCT. A significant portion of the church left in April 1993 to join a congregation belonging to the Rom Klao "faction" of the Thai Pentecostal movement. Among those who left were most of the elders and other key leaders in the church. Ach. [N], with the aid of a friend, conducted a number of interviews with those who left. He reported the reasons they gave for their departure in his paper. They are quite revealing of some of the issues facing local CCT churches in northern Thailand today, issues that I would argue are firmly rooted in the past.

Nang (Mrs.) [BI] gave six reasons why she left the Thai Tawarntam Church. First, she liked the atmosphere and the sense of love she found in the Rom Klao congregation. Second, she liked its forms, esp. the sense of excitement in worship. She felt that its worship helped her know God better and to feel happier. Third, at first she was simply curious, which is why she started going. Fourth, she received financial blessings from God that made her life better. She was able to buy a car, buy land, and build a house. She contrasts this with the house she had started to build and never finished while she was a member of the Thai Tawarntam Church. Fifth, her family life was more loving and the whole family went to church together regularly. Sixth, she went to the Rom Klao Church because the pastor of the Thai Tawarntam Church (Ach. [N] himself) refused to accept Pentecostal-style worship. Nang [B] claimed that she and the others

who left thought that when so many members quit together the pastor would have to leave too. Then they could come back. But he didn't leave and so they stayed on permanently at the Rom Klao Church.

Two thoughts. The first is that Nang [B] wanted her own church to change in ways that she felt would make it a more faithful and viable church. She clearly found spiritual nourishment in the Pentecostal movement that she didn't find in the CCT, but she preferred to bring that nourishment into her home church. Second, however, she wasn't willing to work patiently towards that end. When her new and inexperienced pastor proved stubborn, within a matter of months she left. Way back in HeRD #79 we looked at another church split in Uttaradit, and what we found there was this same pattern. A desire for a better way, and an impatience with obstacles to achieving that better way within the life of a "traditional" church. In that pattern, I think we see something of both the strengths and the weaknesses of Thai Pentecostalism.

HeRD #340 - Uttaradit Split: Another Voice

In HeRD #339 we looked at the loss to the Rom Klao Church of a significant number of members of the CCT's Thai Tawarntam Church in Uttaradit Province. Elder [CS], another one of the members who left, offered the following explanation .

He first went to the Rom Klao Church because he was curious about their forms of worship and their method of healing by the laying on of hands and prayer. He noted that his "original" church, the Thai Tawarntam Church, didn't practice faith healing. When he went, he himself had an experience with the laying on of hands that caused him to fall to the ground. He believed that he had experienced the Holy Spirit and received the power of God. From that time on he's gone to the Rom Klao Church faithfully. He stated, further, that the Rom Klao Church has both morning and afternoon Bible study groups, and these help the members better understand about God. Again, his "original" church didn't have such groups.

In spite of what many claim in the CCT, it usually isn't ignorance that impels its members to leave for "greener pastures." The Office of History's study of several such situations dating from World War II onwards indicates that CCT members have generally left out of a sense of hunger for something deeper. It's frequently stronger, more committed members who leave. It's not unusual for them to make some attempts to bring alternative forms into their local churches before they feel "forced" to leave. It also seems not unusual that both those leaving and those happy to see them go treat each other with considerably less than Christian love and patience. The "reformers" are as stubborn in their insistence on change as the "old guard" are in their defense of the faith of their ancestors. Our research also suggests that the result of such splits is usually two (or more!) churches, both (all) of which are weaker than the original congregation. We have found that it also becomes more difficult to preach about Christian love in the larger communities where these splits take place.

HeRD #341 - Ignatius and the Uttaradit Split

We know Ignatius of Antioch only through a set of 7 letters he wrote to churches in Asia Minor and Rome while he was being escorted to Rome as a prisoner condemned to death for unknown reasons. Ignatius was a bishop of Antioch and wrote his letters early in the second century. According to Virginia Corwin in *ST. IGNATIUS AND CHRISTIANITY IN ANTIOCH*, Ignatius had two central purposes in writing these letters. She writes, "He wants to thank the churches for what they have done for him, either in sending delegates or in caring for him during his visits. He writes also to warn seriously against the danger of the factions formed around false teachers, and urges unity with the bishop as a practical means of meeting the danger. He is

concerned with this, however, for more fundamental reasons than a mere theory of polity...for he believes that the very nature of the Christian life and the relation of man to God is threatened by divisions. It is the quality of life in the churches and the heretical beliefs that threaten it that concern him most, and he urges Christians to hold fast to the essentials of Christian faith and life." (p. 21)

In the Thai Tawarntam Church, Uttaradit, one group embraced Pentecostalism because it brought them a deeper sense of Christian life. It brought them closer to God. Some of those who rejected Pentecostalism did so because it seemed antithetical to the received and cherished traditions of a CCT church. Both sides, it would seem, would have responded favorably to Ignatius' ancient call for Christian unity. They seem, however, to give different weight to his call for holding fast "to the essentials of Christian faith and life." Or, perhaps, the sticking point is on the word "essentials," each seeing the essentials of the faith at a different point. One man's "essentials of faith and life" are another woman's heresies. Therein lies a problem we Christians have wrestled with since Day One and still haven't found our way clear of.

HeRD #342 - A Voice from Chiang Rai

The Uttaradit Split discussed in HeRDs #339 through #341 is but one example of a larger historical phenomenon in the North. Pentecostalism reached Chiang Rai Province in 1956, and very quickly thereafter CCT church members began to leave. Jouko Ruohomäki's thesis, "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission in Thailand 1946-1985," (pp. 84-85) provides us with yet another voice. Siimaa Phromrak was born into a CCT church (District Two) in Chiang Rai and later left his church to help form an FFFM Pentecostal congregation. He remembered his former church as being one that had no Sunday school, no youth work, no Bible study, and no special revival. He never experienced either conversion or new life in his church. The church's members acted no differently from the surrounding society.

Khun Siimaa first experienced conversion when a Pentecostal team visited his church. Their preaching impressed on him the fact of his sinfulness and his need to repent. He felt things that he'd never felt in church before. Some six months afterwards he experienced baptism by the Holy Spirit. After that he and others who were inclined to the Pentecostal way began to meet. The sequence of events isn't clear, but at some point a CCT or District Two representative came and demanded to know whether this group intended to stay with the CCT church. The group affirmed that they wanted to worship in a Pentecostal manner, to which the representative is supposed to have replied that if they stayed in the CCT church they had to worship and behave in a manner acceptable to the CCT. Some two-thirds of the congregation, according to Ruohomäki, then left to form their own FFFM congregation.

Again, we find the same pattern as in Uttaradit. Demands and counter-demands. Little if any willingness to compromise. Impatience. Arrogance mingled with fear. On both sides.

HeRD #343 - More Thoughts from Ignatius

Ignatius of Antioch, featured in HeRD #341, is a voice from the third generation of believers in Jesus. As Corwin in *ST. IGNATIUS AND CHRISTIANITY IN ANTIOCH* points out, conditions in his own church and others he knew of led him to emphasize the importance of Christian unity.

Corwin writes, "As a basis for interpreting [Ignatius'] concern we may remind ourselves that his view of the predicament of humanity stresses not SIN but DIVISION. Although this does not seem to him an offense against God, its consequences are so dangerous that men must be

aware of the nature of their plight and act to change it....the bridging of the separations of life occurs only when appropriate decisions are made. Men are divided, within themselves, from one another, and from God. It is this tragic lack of unity that makes them vulnerable to the temptations of the Prince of this world, temptations evidenced in the conflicts within communities and in the unwillingness of the individual to submit himself to discipline. The greatest danger assailing men arises not from outward acts of persecution but from the tendency toward separateness that undermines them. The core of Ignatius' preaching is that this disunity can be transcended." (pp. 247-48, emphasis in the original)

Ignatius offers us an important insight, one that might well be applicable to the situation in Uttaradit and elsewhere in Thailand. From a theological and ecclesiastical perspective, church splits impede rather than impel the movement of the Spirit. They undermine the church rather than build it up. It is ironic that one side of the Uttaradit split justified their actions as being in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Ignatius, at least, would disagree that such could be the case where the result was a church split.

HeRD #344 - The Final Surprise?

Meeks in *THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN MORALITY* surveys the experience of the early church and observes, "One of the most remarkable things about the biblical story is that God, who is represented as being faithful to his covenant, is forever surprising and often dismaying his people. That quality of the story was wonderfully convenient to the first Christians, who were able thus to assert that the crucifixion and resurrection of God's Son, the Messiah, might be the greatest surprise of all, but not out of character. Naturally Christians then liked to presume that it was also the final surprise; henceforth God would act just as the Christian understanding of that revelatory event requires. But that presumption, in light of God's previous record, appears unwarranted." (p. 218)

What dismaying things, one wonders, might a surprising God be doing in Thailand?

HeRD #345 - Like & Unlike

Corwin, in her book *ST. IGNATIUS AND CHRISTIANITY IN ANTIOCH*, introduces Ignatius' ecclesiology with the following observation, "Ignatius' chief concern, as he faced his own death, was to strengthen the church, and this not because he had an overwhelming interest in administrative matters but because he believed that salvation would by most men be achieved, if at all, within the church. It is for this reason that he warns against the teachers of false doctrine, and urges submission to deacons and presbyters and bishops...He saw the church realistically in sober colors, and yet he held that it was a more than human institution." (189)

Corwin's final phrase is striking, the idea that the church is both like and unlike other human institutions. This characteristic makes church history a fascinatingly bewildering enterprise, in that the church's past is both LIKE and UNLIKE the histories of other institutions. It is both the same as and different from. And it is for this reason that the boundaries between the historical study of the church and theological reflection on its nature are so often hazy.

HeRD #346 - The "I" Word

For some years it was fashionable among members of America's Republican Party to refer to the word "liberal" as the "L" word, as if it were too dirty to pronounce in public. In some circles of Protestant Christians the word "institutionalization" might be considered the "I" word, a word too disgusting and despicable to speak of openly. The process by which the early "Jesus

Movement" and the "Christian Movement" that grew out of it gradually were transformed into an institution is one we still struggle with. Protestantism itself has been in some ways a heart-felt search to return to the "golden era" of the earliest church.

Manschreck, in his book *A HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE WORLD*, reflected on just this issue from the perspective of early church history. He describes how the church in the second century created more solid structures of authority for itself in the face of both external persecution and internal theological divisions. As a part of this same process, it also developed more set creeds and initiated the creation of the Christian canon. He writes, "In the process, the church did in fact become a sociological reality, soon to vie with other institutions for status and power. Whether that development was inherent in Christianity or whether some inherent essence in Christianity was lost in the process cannot be easily determined." (p. 37). Any thoughts?

HeRD #347 - Martyrdom

The study of early church history leads one inevitably to the concept of martyrdom. Virginia Corwin, in *ST. IGNATIUS AND CHRISTIANITY IN ANTIOCH*, describes Ignatius of Antioch's feelings about martyrdom. We will recall that Ignatius wrote a series of letters to churches (ca. 108-117) while being taken in chains by Roman soldiers to Rome for execution. These letters are significant because they provide us with one of the earliest descriptions of martyrdom by one about to experience it.

Ignatius believed that his imprisonment and coming execution were honorable things. He declared that he loved his bonds. Yet, he also saw them as being a temptation, one threatening to lead him to boasting and self-congratulations. This was esp. the case since he received praise and honor from the Christians he met on his way to Rome. Nonetheless, he believed that the martyrs were important to the church, most particularly because they were a means for persuading others to enter the church. He embraced martyrdom willingly, fearing only that he might lose his resolve and try to escape it. Ultimately, he saw martyrdom as the "perfecting" of the meaning of his own life. By it he achieved participation in the suffering of Christ. He wrote, "And why then have I wholly given myself up to death, to fire, to the sword, to wild beasts? But near to the sword, near to God; with wild beasts, with God. Only it is in the name of Jesus Christ that I endure everything, that I may suffer with him." (p. 251, quoting from Ignatius' letter to the Smyrnaean Church 4:2)

It would be "nice" to think that this has nothing to do with Thai church history. The fact of the matter is that, aside from the two famous martyrs of 1867 (Nan Chai and Noi Sunya), Thai Christians have long and quietly suffered a variety of non-lethal martyrdoms at the hands of the state, their neighbors, and their families. The Thai church has suffered out and out oppression on a few occasions and ongoing social oppression frequently. In this light, it would be interesting and informative to know how Christians here have experienced oppression and martyrdom.

HeRD #348 - The First Protestant Reformation

Marcion was a 2nd century heretic. We don't know much about him other than that he was a Christian from Pontus in Asia Minor and a wealthy man, probably a shipping magnate. In about 140 CE he appeared in Rome to share with the church there his distinctive views on God, Jesus, the Old Testament, and Paul. He considered Paul the only legitimate apostle and created a New Testament composed largely of Paul's writings, edited by Marcion himself. He believed that the god of the Old Testament was vengeful and the source of evil in the world. In contrast, the true good God was a God of love and grace who sent Jesus into the world. Jesus wasn't born but

suddenly appeared and only had the appearance of being human. His human experiences, including the crucifixion, were also only apparent and not real.

All of this sounds somewhat bizarre today, but after his excommunication by the church in Rome in 144 CE, Marcion set about establishing his own church. He was amazingly successful. "Catholic" Christians in the 2nd century considered his church the greatest danger to the life of their churches. Blackman, in *MARCION AND HIS INFLUENCE*, writes, "Marcion's success as the founder of a church was remarkable, and must have been largely due to an inspiring and energetic personality. Already in the year A.D. 150 Justin could say that his influence extended all over the Empire. A real rival to the growing Catholic Church had sprung into being, and for a few years it must actually have seemed possible that the Marcionite church would become the dominant church." Blackman states, "This was the first 'protestant' schism, and it has real affinities with the Lutheran schism of 1519." (p. 3) The Marcion churches flourished into the 3rd century and only gradually died out by the 5th century. The Marcionite sect lasted, thus, for over 300 years.

This doesn't have much to do with Thai church history, but it's a fascinating chapter from the history of the church.

HeRD #349 - Maturation or Ossification?

HeRD #343 reflected on the institutionalization of the early church. Here are some more thoughts on the same subject, from another perspective.

Blackman's *MARCION AND HIS INFLUENCE* devotes 5 pages to discussing the term "Catholic" in reference to the early church. There is a tradition among many church historians to use the term Catholic to denote the transformation of the earliest church into a rigid, structured, hierarchical, and Hellenized institution. The implication is that "something" of the essence of the earliest church was sadly lost in this transformation. It led to "...an ignoring of the Spirit, a misunderstanding of Faith, the substitution of a philosophic idea of God for the New Testament apprehension of God as the Father of Jesus Christ, and the development of the Logos doctrine." (p. 18) Blackman himself agrees with those historians who question this division of church history into the "true primitive" and the "corrupted Catholic" eras. He argues that the "essence" of catholicity is the belief that Christ is Lord and that belief was certainly not lost to the later church. He sees the developments of the later church already implied or present in the earliest church.

Blackman wrote in 1948. I suspect that church historians of the last 20 years or so might take a both-and approach. In one sense, it is almost a truism that "what comes after" is already implicit in "what came before." Human institutions don't suddenly change radically in ways not implicit in their histories. Yet, important changes did take place that transformed the early church from a movement into an institution. The churches ceased to seriously wait for the Second Coming, and that was a major change in consciousness. The churches replaced the sexual equality or near-equality of the first generation church with patriarchalism in the second and later generations. The earliest church had only informal structures of leadership, based on the members' perception of the leading of the Holy Spirit. The later church put formal structures into place. Beginnings and What Comes After are not identical. They can differ greatly. Thus, we are left with the question of whether or not the later history of the early church led to the "maturation" of the primitive church or its "ossification". Or was it something in-between?

The relationship of later history to the earlier periods of church history is one of no small interest to the study of Thai church history. The issues we've discussed here serve, perhaps, as a warning that we need to be careful and precise in our conceptualization of that relationship.

HeRD #350 - Bangkok Conference

One of our HeRD recipients some time ago forwarded to me an item that appears to have bounced around Internet a bit. It's entitled "Signs, Wonders and Church Growth - Bangkok 14-17 November [1996]." It's interesting enough from a historian's perspective that I thought I'd pass excerpts of it on to the rest of you. It's a remarkable study in how things never change.

The item is a report of a training conference cum revival meeting held in Bangkok. It was led by Wesley Campbell and Jim Goll and was held at Christ Church and at the YMCA. The first paragraph of the Internet report on the conference reads, in part, " 'And we rejoice, for the river is here!' The lyrics of the song the 'River is Here' were translated into Thai and this became the theme song of the Bangkok conference, as the participants always added extra emphasis to the line, the River is HERE!. Here, in Bangkok; a city of ten million right in the heart of the 10-40 window, with less than one half of one percent Christian; and certainly a city somewhere in the "top ten" of spiritual oppression & historical resistance to the light of Jesus Christ. Other David Ruis songs such as 'We will Dance on the Streets that are Golden' and 'We will Break Dividing Walls' were also translated into Thai, and introduced a new dimension of worship to the meetings." The report goes on to express the deep spiritual experience many of those attending experienced. They received new insight, according to the report, into the meaning of holiness and prayer. One person commented, "I believe there was a breakthrough in the spiritual realm over Thailand and people saw something completely new to Thai churches." Others felt they were introduced for the first time to "prophetic ministry." They were impressed and wanted to learn more. Miraculous answers to prayer were also reported. Three people came forward the last evening to receive Christ, and the report states that the meeting ended with a sense of "holy awe." People felt touched by God, and there was a fervent desire born in some for a revival in Thailand. Several people had intense experiences with the Holy Spirit, including visions. Throughout the report is a pervasive sense of something new happening, a sense of a spiritual turning point having been reached.

I'll have some reflections on this report to share in HeRD #351.

HeRD #351 - Reinventing the Wheel

The report of the conference in Bangkok reported in HeRD #350 is intriguing for a number of reasons. What particularly impresses me, from a historical perspective, is not the supposed newness of this event, but the way in which it replicates and captures *typical* themes from Thai church history. First, note the negative attitude concerning the Thai context. It recalls the old-time missionaries' attacks on the "godless heathenism" of the Thai people. Second, observe how the hymns sung are translated and the whole dynamic of the event is foreign in origin and leadership. The "good news" shared at this conference is a foreign good news. Third, and most important here, is the dependence on revivalistic fervency for the renewal of Thai churches and the propagation of the faith in Thailand. Nothing new here at all. Thailand's Presbyterian and Baptist churches went through several phases of fairly intense revivalism between 1924 and 1939, and they experienced much the same feelings as expressed in the above report. The CCT went through another long period of revivalistic emphasis after the War. One of the central lessons of 20th century Thai church history is that this form of revivalism is ineffective in the Thai context. The momentary enthusiasm generated doesn't lead to effective change, and one

could make a case that revivalism is actually detrimental to the church. It gives the appearance of "something happening" without anything actually happening.

The Lesson We Should Be but Aren't Learning From the Past: Over the last 70 years we've continued to do the same old things over and over. We've expressed the same negative attitudes about the Thai context, setting it up as "the enemy." We've engaged in constant "revival". We continue to import foreign influences, in ever new guises. The results are minimal at very best.

HeRD #352 - The First New Testament

My favorite heretic is Marcion. He was insightful, capable, and had as deep a personal faith as any of the saints of the "Catholic" church. It just happened that mixed in there were some ideas, ones that seem rather weird now, that the emerging Catholic church couldn't accept. Most of the seminary grads among us undoubtedly remember that the first fixed New Testament isn't the one we have today. It was Marcion, rather, who published the first "authoritative" New Testament.

Once the church in Rome declared him a heretic in 164 CE, he withdrew from the Catholic church and established his own competing "denomination". In the process, he was confronted with the problem of scriptures. The churches generally accepted the Jewish scriptures for their own, and they added to those various Christian writings including Paul's letters and one or more of the gospels then current. There was no uniform set of Christian scriptures in the second century. Marcion was confronted by the problem that he entirely rejected the Jewish scriptures and most other Christian writings as well. What, then, were the scriptures of his Marcionite churches? He solved the problem by creating the first fixed "Christian" canon. His New Testament consisted of ten of Paul's letters plus an edited version of the Gospel of Luke. I'm not sure if it is correct to say that Marcion "invented" the concept of a fixed Christian canon, but he was the first to create one. The Catholic churches didn't finally arrive at a consensus concerning their canon until late in the 4th century, more than 200 years after Marcion.

There's nothing of direct relevance here to Thai church history. Just another one of those interesting tidbits you all might find entertaining.

HeRD #353 - Redo the Canon??

One example of how church historians are quietly re-writing the history of the early church is their reinterpretation of how the New Testament was formed. Until recently many historians claimed that the Bible emerged in near final form by the end of the second century in response to the challenge posed by the various heresies. The Bible, thus, was something of a "party document" formed for theological reasons. Historians now claim that it wasn't like that at all. The article on "Canon" in the ANCHOR BIBLE DICTIONARY argues that the church created a canon to preserve its understanding of the person of Jesus. Previously, it had relied on oral traditions, but the passing of years made it necessary to preserve some of that oral tradition in written form. During the second century a number of these writings came to have the status of scripture, though what was taken to be scripture wasn't uniform. Churches in different provinces or traditions acknowledged somewhat differing sets of writings as scripture. This situation continued through the third and into the fourth centuries. By the end of the fourth century, the present New Testament had come together in its final form. The ABD article explains, "Those writings that proved, over time, to be most useful in sustaining, informing, and guiding the church in its worship, preaching, and teaching came to be the most highly valued, and gained a special authority in virtue of their usefulness." (v. I, p. 857)

We are in a quite different situation today. The early church fashioned its canon out of what the churches found useful in meeting its needs. It started with the churches' situations and worked towards a scriptures. Today we usually start with the Scriptures and work back to the church's situation. There are times, however, when it is an acute struggle to get those Scriptures into the Thai context. I once heard a missionary lament that the Old Testament had been translated into a tribal language. He felt that it only confused the people. I wonder how true that might not be of much of the New Testament as well. While it seems unlikely that the Thai church will redo the canon to fit its needs, perhaps at least we need to start with the needs of the churches and then work towards a use and an understanding of the Scriptures that fits those needs.

HeRD #354 Changing Perspective

As noted in previous HeRDs, a quiet transformation of our understanding of early church history has been taking place in academic circles for the last two decades or so. One reason, it seems to me, is that sociological analysis focused on the life of the churches has increasingly replaced theological analysis focused on the thought of church thinkers as the main "engine" in studying the history of the early church. Older texts are filled with chapters on the thought of Origen, Clement, Irenaeus, and their cohorts. Far less attention is directed to daily church life. It is hardly surprising, thus, that historians would argue that the New Testament was created in the context of theological disputation with heretics. Nor, is it surprising that the new generation of historians sees the New Testament as a product of the daily needs of the early church's life. Their books focus more on the life of the Christian society, including such topics as social status, charismatic experiences, Christian ethics, the role of women, and numerous other issues.

It would be interesting for someone to survey Thai church historiography and ascertain whether or not there is a central perspective from which most of us in the field are working and how that perspective both aids and limits our current understanding of Thai church history. It is clear that Maen Pongudom (the pioneer professional church historian in Thailand), Prasit Pongudom (his brother & my colleague), and I have emphasized the importance of ideas for understanding the history of the church. To that extent, we may represent the older theological perspective. All three of us, however, have studied general trends in church thought rather than the thought of the "great thinkers." Our tendency, then, is that of moving towards a sociological approach. I don't think we've arrived there, however. As I've argued before, one of the most serious limitations we face in Thai church history is the dearth of historians. Our knowledge is limited to the perspectives and skills of a very few individuals.

HeRD #355 God-Fearers Greek & Thai

Stephen Neill, in *A HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS* (2nd edition), describes several of the significant factors in the expansion of the early church. He places special emphasis on the "God-fearers," Gentiles interested in Judaism but who hadn't undergone adult circumcision. They attended the synagogues and participated in Jewish religious activities, and they were a ready source of converts to Christianity. Neill writes, "It was the presence of this prepared elite that differentiated the missions of the apostolic age from those of every subsequent time, and makes comparison almost impossible. These people, or the best of them, had been well trained in the Old Testament; they had accepted its moral as well as its theological ideas. Many of them brought to their Christian faith a basis of understanding and of disciplined character which made it natural for them to step into positions of leadership in the nascent Christian congregations, and, as it appears, in certain cases they became pioneers in the development of the Church's thought." (pp. 25-26)

Neill is wrong. Northern Thai church history, at least, provides a parallel phenomenon to the "God-fearers". Among its earlier converts were a large group of educated men who had studied in the temples, received there a religious education, and "graduated" from the highest levels of instruction. They were theologically articulate former monks who played a key role in founding and leading of most northern Thai churches prior to World War I. They functioned as a "prepared elite" for the northern Thai church in much the same way as the God-fearers. Just as the God-fearers were trained in the mother-faith of European and early Asian Christians, Greek-influenced Judaism, so too the "nan" and "noi" (honorifics for these former monks) were trained in the mother-faith of Thai Christians, animistic Thai Buddhism.

HeRD #356 - From & Into

Stephen Neill, in *THE CHRISTIAN SOCIETY*, makes the following observation, "The contacts between the christian community and the thought-world of its environment were inevitably disturbing. Living as it does by the principle of incarnation, the christian society cannot affect the world around it except by entering into it and undergoing its influence. The history of christian thought is that of the effort, permanently necessary and never finally successful, to stand on the central line of the christian tradition, without being allured away by the aberrations which may result from the admixture of alien types of thought. In the earliest days, when christian doctrine was still largely unformulated, the danger was at its greatest." (pp. 45-46)

The church in its thought, its social life, and in its ministries faces two risks: the risk of incarnation and the risk of failing to be incarnate. The risk of incarnation is in being "of" as well as "in" the world. The opposite risk is of being neither "in" nor "of" the world. It is more than just word games, however, to observe the two other possible combinations of "in" and "of" in juxtaposition to "the world." The ideal the church strives for is to be "in" but not "of" the world. The greatest danger is that it will be "of" but not "in" the world. At the risk of repeating what appears in previous HeRDs, it appears that Thai Protestantism has largely fallen into this last pattern. It is, in many ways, overtly alien to its sociocultural environment and thus not "in" its world, while at the same time thinking and behaving in ways that are frequently "of" the world. Herein lies what should be the central struggle of Thai Protestantism, namely, to extract itself FROM society in some ways while more deeply entering INTO society in other ways.

HeRD #357 - Double Aliens

Research in the history of the early church suggests that the 19th century Protestant missionaries in Thailand shared the attitudes and values of the early church in several significant ways. They shared a dualistic world view by which God and Satan are engaged in a vast cosmic struggle, one that God must necessarily win. Both the early church and the missionaries, consequently, tended to view Christians as "strangers" in this world and to take a negative view of the world around them. Conversion in both eras required converts to deny important elements of their former lives, particularly those related to religious practices. In the process, the churches of both eras experienced being socially ostracized and politically oppressed. Both shared the patron-client of their larger societies, and individual Christians depended upon the protection of patrons to maintain and improve their lives.

There is, however, an important difference as well. The way in which the early church was a "stranger" in the world differed in significant ways from the way in which Thai Protestantism was and is a stranger in its world. Paul, if the church historians have him right, struggled mightily to transform the Palestinian, semi-rural Good News proclaimed by Peter and James into an urban, Greek message. The church, furthermore, constructed itself out of the forms and

structures it inherited from its surrounding culture. It took the form of voluntary societies which organized themselves to achieve certain social ends, a social form widely found in the urban centers of the Roman Empire. Converts heard a message couched in familiar thought ways and joined an "organization" familiar to them in form and practice. When the early church called on converts to reject "the world" that didn't mean taking on culturally alien thought ways and forms. There was always, in fact, a strong faction in the earliest church that advocated the transformation of the Jesus-faith into something intelligible to Gentiles. There has been no such comparable faction or movement in Thai Protestantism. In contrast to the early church's single alienation, thus, we remain "double aliens" in Thailand. Strangers not only in conversion but also in culture.

HeRD #358 - A Manly Spirit

The Presbyterians strongly emphasized education in their missionary work in Thailand. Asked why, they would have given a number of different answers. John A. Eakin wrote an article in the May 1902 edition of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN that summed up the views of many missionaries on the question of education. He wrote of his male students, "We try to develop in them a healthful, manly spirit, and give them a religion that will do for every day as well as for Sunday."

Source: J. A. Eakin, "The Christian High School at Sumray," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 17, 5(May 1902): 134-135.

HeRD #359 - Feasts & Festivals

On a visit to one of the rural churches in Lamphun Province, the Rev. J. H. Freeman found the church in the midst of a feast being held by the Christians. In his report on this event in the May 1902 edition of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, Freeman observed, "Feasts and festivals form a very large element in the life of the people, before they become Christians, and we are only beginning to realize how this side of native character can be utilized for the spread of the gospel." We could wish that Freeman would have said more, because his insight into northern Thai society is an extremely important one. Even today, ritual and ceremony play a major part in the life of the people, especially for those still living in older villages in the country-side. A great deal of time is given over to house-warmings, weddings, funerals, the celebration of temple events, and other ritual events. It is the major form of communal socializing. It would be interesting to know how the missionaries acted concretely on their insight into the importance of ritual and ceremony in the North. My own experience suggests that a lively, meaningful worship life is a key, if not the key to church renewal in northern Thailand.

Source: J. H. Freeman, "How the Leve Works in Laos," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 17, 5(May 1902): 136-38.

HeRD #360 - The Great Themes

During the course of a class discussion with the M.Div. students taking the Introduction to Church History course I taught first semester at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, we were reflecting on the early experience of northern Thai churches. The five students and I, together, discovered three major themes that summarize the northern Thai church experience in its early stages. Those themes included, first, LIBERATION. The first generation of northern Thai Christians found in their new faith liberation from various forms of oppression and fear. Second, INDIGENIZATION. The convert community brought values and beliefs from northern Thai culture with them into their new religion. Third, ALIENATION. As we talked about this last

point, it was striking to us how much of the early northern Thai church experience could be summed up in the word "moved" (yai, in Thai). They "moved" from one set of patrons to another. They moved from one set of beliefs to another. They frequently moved out of their former homes to live in closer proximity to other Christians. And, in the largest sense, they "moved" societies. They became a distinct and separate social community alienated from the larger society.

These three concepts don't encompass all of the early church experience in the North, but they do go a long way in that direction. The one thing that deeply impressed the students was the impact conversion had on the converts. It was a major step in their lives...and not an easy one.

HeRD #361 - Women's Role: An Early Church Perspective

Back in HeRD #165 we looked briefly at the issue of the role of women in church life, particularly in the early church. That HeRD concluded that it is highly likely that the leadership role of women in the early church was much greater than church historians have recognized. There are at least two issues here, one being the bias and/or ignorance of male historians, and the other being the lack of clarity in the documentary sources.

Elizabeth S. Fiorenza, writing from a feminist perspective, offers us the following observations. She states that the problem historians face in studying the role of women in the early church is the "...scarcity and androcentric character of our sources." She writes that the role of women, "...must be rescued through historical imagination as well as in and through a reconstruction of this movement which fills out and contextualizes the fragmentary information still available to us. The historical texts and information on women's involvement in the beginnings of the Christian missionary movement, therefore, must not be taken as descriptive of the actual situation. Once again, they are the tip of an iceberg in which the most prominent women of the early Christian missionary movement surface, not as exceptions to the rule but as representatives of early Christian women who have survived androcentric redactions and historical silence. Their impact and importance must not be seen as exceptional, but must be understood within the structures of the early Christian missionary movement that allowed for the full participation and leadership of women." (Fiorenza, IN MEMORY OF HER, pp. 167-168)

It is difficult to move beyond all of the rhetoric and feelings generated by women's issues to discover what the actual situation was. Fiorenza's "imaginative reconstructions" of early church history sometimes open doors to new perspectives and at other times appear flimsy and uncertain at best. Even so, historians of the Thai church need to think long and carefully about the issues raised by the above quotation. Although our sources are much richer, they are still discouragingly silent about (and presumably "androcentric") concerning the role of women, esp. Thai women, in the creation and development of the church in Thailand.

HeRD #362 - Issues in the Study of Pentecostalism

Many of our HeRDs in the coming months will be devoted to the Pentecostal movement in Thailand. From the outset, we need to be particularly sensitive to the difficulties involved in reaching a fair-minded appraisal of the role and contribution of that movement in Thailand. This isn't easy because Pentecostalism in Thailand has been divisive and controversial, and the CCT's experience, in particular, with the Pentecostal movement hasn't been a happy one. Churches and families have split because of it. As we've already seen in several HeRDS, however, CCT representatives have frequently only made matters worse. They've treated Pentecostal renewal as a dangerous threat rather than as an exciting opportunity. They've protected older forms of worship that generally don't speak to people's hearts. How, then, do we attain a fair estimation of Pentecostalism?

Fairness is important. Pentecostalism is a judgment on the CCT and other non-Pentecostal churches. It claims that we're unspiritual. It is crucial that we discover the fairness and accuracy of that judgment. In order to assess the Pentecostal judgment we need to discover what has actually happened. Why have there been so many church splits and so much unhappy competition? Is it our closed-minded, un-spiritual defensiveness that is essentially at fault? Or are Pentecostals aggressive sectarian sheep-stealers? Where between these two poles lies the truth of our encounter with Pentecostalism? A defensive, self-justifying attitude towards the past will blind us to the lessons, however painful, our encounter with the Pentecostals has to teach us. On the other hand, a "leaning-over-backwards-to-be-fair" approach could just as well obscure the truth of the past. How then do we find the middle ground and a fair interpretation? These are some of the questions we're going to be seeking to answer.

HeRD #363 - A Pentecostal Perspective on John Song

One of the "sermons" HeRD preaches is that how we look at the past matters. The Rev. Robert (Bobby) Nishimoto provides a case in point in his recently published (in Thai) history of the Pentecostal Movement in Thailand. Nishimoto comes to church history generally and Thai church history in particular with a definite perspective, one that I feel substantially misinterprets the latter, if not the former. He begins his work with a brief sketch of general church history that seeks to demonstrate that Pentecostalism is the true heir to the Christian faith. When he begins his study of Thai church history, however, he ignores the whole history of the church before the Song Revivals of 1938 and 1939. To read Nishimoto, nothing happened before 1938. Dr. John Song was a Chinese revivalist, and his exciting, eccentric preaching style and his straightforward, blunt messages enthused thousands of Thai Christians. He brought a period of meaningful renewal to Thai Protestant churches and left a lingering impact on the lives of many individuals. Nishimoto gives him so much attention because he sees in Song a proto-Pentecostal who facilitated the introduction of Pentecostalism into Thailand. He, thus, claims Song for Pentecostalism and marks in him the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in Thailand.

It's no small matter that Nishimoto's holy history begins with Song rather than the longer history of Thai Protestantism. It creates the impression that all previous work in Thailand was inconsequential to the Pentecostal experience here. Song, in fact, was the culmination of a longer period of revivals that began in Thai Protestant churches in the mid-1920s. That revivalistic movement, in turn, grew out of the longer historical experience of those churches. Pentecostal churches, furthermore, have relied heavily on "converts" from the older churches to build up their own churches. Former CCT leaders played key roles in the early stages of Pentecostal work. The point in all of this is that Thai Pentecostalism is itself an expression of the longer and larger Thai Protestant experience. It's part of the larger tapestry. I would hazard the guess that one reason Pentecostalism has been disruptive rather than healing is because both Pentecostals and their opponents have assumed that Pentecostalism was something new in Thailand. In this case the Preacher was right when he said there IS nothing new under the Sun. The successes and failures of the Pentecostals are as much an expression of 19th and earlier 20th century Protestant history as are the successes and failures of the Church of Christ in Thailand also expressions of that history.

HeRD #364 - Thailand's First Pentecostal Church

The Finnish Free Foreign Mission (FFFM) founded the very first Pentecostal church in Thailand in 1949. It was located in the village of Ban Huey Swing, Petchabun Province. The Rev. Verner Raassina was the missionary in charge of the Petchabun work, located at Ban Lom Sak, some 20 kms away from Huey Swing. As the story goes, Raassina heard that there was a Christian at Huey Swing, and on 1 July 1949 visited the village. There he found Pho Thao Plaw,

an elderly man who had received a Scripture portion 30 years earlier and long waited for someone to explain its meaning to him. After 3 days, some 22 men declared conversion, and on a second visit in August another 20 men and women converted. For some years the church founded at Huey Swing prospered. The FFFM provided it with a lay "pastor," and by 1956 the church had over 100 members. It experienced a particular "outpouring of the Spirit" in May 1956 during the dedication of its new church building.

According to Jouko Ruohomäki in his MA thesis, "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission in Thailand in 1946-1985: A Descriptive History," the situation at the Huey Swing Church then deteriorated rapidly. He gives no dates, but apparently what happened is that the members of the church experienced drought and poor crops. They had to migrate elsewhere, doing so in three different contingents. The main group moved to Ban Huey Yai. There its leader and several members first joined a Churches of Christ mission group and then eventually became Catholics. Ruohomäki argues that the reason they left was because these mission groups offered a better income to the lay "pastor" of the group than could the FFFM. Ruohomäki doesn't tell us what happened to the two other groups, but the result was that the once promising Huey Swing Church died.

Source: Ruohomäki, Jouko. "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission in Thailand in 1946-1985: A Descriptive History." Master's Thesis, Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary, 1988.

HeRD #365 - Burning Questions from the Past

The course is TS 242. The students are 2nd year B.A. and 1st year M.Div. students at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology. The subject is what the early church has to teach us about our situation(s) today. In a B.A. discussion on early church views on Jesus, we struggled with the early church in trying to make sense of how Jesus could have been both man and God. Finally, one of the students asked in genuine frustration, "What are the standards, the measures by which we can judge the humanity and the divinity of Jesus?" In discussion after class, it became clear that this was no academic question. One student said, "Acharn, we're confused about all of this. We don't understand it."

A few days later, the M.Div. students got deeply involved in an issue posed for them by Justin Martyr. Good old Justin came to Christianity via Plato's philosophy. After his conversion he proceeded to infuse Christian theology with heavy doses of Greek thought. The point was made that Justin played an important role in transforming Christianity into a religion the Greco-Roman world could understand and accept. Shouldn't we do the same in Thailand? One student said immediately that in another course she'd taken the instructor used Buddhist concepts to discuss Christianity. She hadn't liked that at all, at first. Why? It seemed wrong. Why? Because I was taught to have nothing to do with Buddhism. OK, now what does it mean that the early church borrowed heavily from its culture at several levels and, thus, became a vehicle for the Gospel that could be accepted culturally? Should we do the same? Or is our situation different? There ensued a long, sometimes tortured discussion that ended up with the questions. And a moment of thoughtful introspection for at least one student.

HeRD #366 - How We Find the Answers

In HeRD #368 we listened to the questions being asked by and of theological students at McGilvary. I was particularly struck by the way in which the M.Div. students dealt with the question of following the example of Justin Martyr in the use of Greek philosophy to interpret Christianity. They didn't ask after the ideas of key Thai thinkers, past or present. They began to

talk, rather, about how much or little they could participate in cultural events such as Loy Kratong and in what ways they could take part in Buddhist ritual.

The point I made with them and want to repeat here is, How Thai! We don't dwell here at the heady level of philosophy so much. Where Thai society posits much of its deepest thoughts and insights is in praxis, particularly in ritual and ceremony. Thai Christians are no different in this regard. You don't find Thai theology in books. You find it in worship. The further point I made was that what we say and how we act publicly isn't typically Thai...sometimes it doesn't appear Thai at all. Now, if in our heart of hearts we're Thai, shouldn't that appear in our faith and practice as well? Greek Christianity was Greek through and through. Shouldn't Thai Christianity be Thai through and through?

HeRD #367 - The Churches of Nakhon Thai District

In 1965 the Pastor of the Pitsanulok Church of the CCT invited the Finnish Free Foreign Mission (FFFM), based in Petchaboon Province, to take up work in the Nakhon Thai District of Pitsanuloke Province. That district was remote and there was no Christian work taking place in it. The FFFM responded by sending a team and holding evangelistic meetings there in February 1965. They met with a response, and FFFM workers and missionaries began to visit the area on a fairly regular basis. The following year a missionary couple, Reino & Anja Pajula, moved to the district. In January 1966 the FFFM baptized 20 converts. In 1967 the Nakhon Thai Church built its first church building, and during the year its membership rose to 67 members. In 1968 four elders were appointed. The church, like many young congregations, had especial zeal in evangelism, and soon daughter congregations began to appear. Jouko Ruohomäki in his thesis "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission in Thailand in 1946-1985: A Descriptive History," lists five localities where churches were established. The communist insurgency along the Laotian border, however, interrupted evangelistic work in the district for a decade (1969-1979). In spite of this interruption, it was estimated that by 1985 there were something over 500 church members in the FFFM churches in Nakhon Thai District.

Stories like this set the old historiographical juices a flowing! Here we have a set of closely related churches in a remote area of the country. One wants to know more about their histories and their experiences. Have they continued to grow? What obstacles have they experienced? Do they have strong or weak leadership? What historical lessons are to be learned from them? What is their relationship to their larger society? Do they differ significantly from other Protestant churches in Thailand? It's truly a shame and a loss to us all when these stories are lost to the larger church...as so many of them continue to be throughout Protestant (and Catholic) Thai churches.

HeRD #368 - Finnish Lessons

In his thesis "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission in Thailand in 1946-1985: A Descriptive History," (p. 59) Jouko Ruohomäki draws a lesson concerning the need for pastoral care gleaned from the first 25 years of FFFM work in Petchaboon Province. He writes,

"The nineteen sixties were a time of effective evangelism. New villages were reached and Christian groups were formed in various parts of the province. The evangelist team was an important factor in spreading the gospel. Nirut was a dynamic and encouraging leader of the team. Baptismal services were held often. Unfortunately we have only estimated numbers of the baptismal candidates. The missionaries' correspondence shows that they were many. As a result there was an acute need for shepherds.

"Because Christian groups were formed as a result of tent meetings and were far from Lomsak [the FFFM center], regular teaching was difficult to arrange due to a lack of workers. As these new converts had no biblical knowledge and no mature Christians nearby, they easily drew back when they faced pressure from their relatives and neighbours. Despite the effective evangelism and a large number of baptismal candidates the church did not grow in the same proportion.

"At the beginning of the nineteen seventies the rough estimation of the number of Christians in Petchaboon Province was about 600. But a survey done in 1973 showed that the membership was only 314."

The first lesson here is the one Ruohomäki draws, namely that an evangelistic approach that doesn't give great attention to the rest of the ministries of the church, particularly pastoral care, isn't going to accomplish much. The second lesson, one he doesn't draw, is that evangelical and Pentecostal fervor in and of themselves don't hardly get you anywhere in Thailand.

HeRD #369 - Double Alienship Revisited

HeRD #357 introduced the concept of double alienship. The early church felt itself alienated from the world, but it still shared the forms and thought ways of its larger societies. The Thai churches are double aliens in that they not only feel alienated but also have overtly alien social forms and, to some extent, thought ways. At the close of last semester at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, the M.Div. students and I returned to this issue. I hadn't shared with them this concept of double alienship, but in an intense and wide-ranging discussion they discovered it for themselves. One of them then asked, "Is this [being alien to Thai society] a good thing or a bad thing?" She argued that Jesus himself was alienated from the world just like Thai Christians are. Further discussion led to the conclusion that actually wasn't the case. Jesus was different in some ways, but he didn't withdraw with his disciples from society. His teachings too were themselves Jewish in their origins and expressions. The early church, as well, was mostly a part of its surrounding societies.

So, the Thai churches are doubly alienated from society. Still, the students persisted in asking, is that a good thing or a bad thing? At the end of this discussion, I observed that perhaps we should frame the question differently. Let's not make it a moral issue of good and bad. Let's frame it as a communications issue. If the church is to be a medium for the communication of God's love and mercy to the world, does double alienship hinder it from carrying out that ultimate task? I think it does.

HeRD #370 - A Makronian Approach to Indigenization

Last year, my sister and brother-in-law, Marilyn and John Olson, (recipients of HeRD) visited us here in Chiang Mai. In the course of their stay we stopped in at the local Makro store. Makro is a warehouse operation run by an American chain store. It's one huge building, no interior walls, filled floor to rafters with shelving stocked with goods. Cheap(er) prices. Bulk. Being quite familiar with the form, they were fascinated with the contents. Makro in Chiang Mai is nothing like Makro in America...the foods, the goods being sold are mostly Thai and Asian. Tons of noodles, dried squid, weird fruits. Sure, there's many items familiar to Americans, but there's a whole lot more that aren't. Makro's management knows that if they want to make money they have to play to the local market. In outward appearance, their stores are alien. But hundreds of people a day spend their baht at Makro because INSIDE it's something familiar and comfortable. Makro took the local market and repackaged it in an American form...wedding what some might call the "best" of those two worlds. There's a lesson here that Thai Protestantism

isn't learning.

HeRD #371 - Where We've Been

HeRD is back again, and you'll notice that the HeRD list is growing. We've added several new recipients in the last few months, and it might be helpful to review where we've been this year. HeRD, it is becoming increasingly apparent, is not just a "diary." It's an ongoing set of arguments about how we should view the church's past and present in Thailand. A brief review here will help put some of those arguments on the table.

We started the year out with a set of guest HeRDs from Dr. Philip Hughes. Philip shared the results of a questionnaire he did with McGilvary Faculty of Theology students on their Christian experiences. He found that informal and personal factors, such as parents, were much more important to becoming and remaining Christian than such things as revivals. That's a HeRD argument. HeRD is skeptical of revivalism and evangelistic ideologies that mark out evangelism as "the" premier ministry of the church. In the last three months, we've also raised the issue of whether or not the "old-time" missionaries were racists and come to the tentative conclusion that they probably weren't. Nine HeRDs were devoted to themes coming out of a seminar sponsored by Mahidol University on the future of religious studies in Thailand. Another HeRD argument is that we need to listen to people of other faiths. The church will effectively communicate the Christian message here only as it experiences and communicates a more positive attitude towards them. In February, HeRD looked at CCT church splits over Pentecostalism and argued that spiritual arrogance on both sides is a root cause of these splits. Several HeRDs dealt with early church history. It seems clear to me that the early church explored a wide variety of options in forming the Christian faith. Protestant missions in Thailand has idealized the early church while severely limiting the options for faith, or so HeRD is arguing. An important idea that showed up in HeRD in March is the concept of "double alienship." Early Christians felt alienated from the world, but the forms and expressions of their faiths arose out of their own cultures. Thai Protestant Christians are double aliens in the sense that they are both a separate community and a community whose forms and expressions are frequently quite alien to Thai society generally.

Welcome to the new recipients of HeRD. One other thing I'd like to add here. I value your comments. They educate me, even when I disagree, and they help shape HeRD. Even an occasional, "I liked that one" or "That wasn't too useful" is valuable.

HeRD #372 - Musical Modernization

A conversation I had some time ago with Ach. Solot Kubatarat (Music Department, Payap University) about traditional northern Thai music highlights just how extensive Presbyterian missionary modernization in northern Thailand has been.

Traditional northern Thai music, according to Ach. Solot had no musical notation. The music was generally simple, and each tune could have many versions depending on the particular artist. The same tune varied in length as well as "interpretation." Tunes, thus, weren't fixed and tended to change over time just as spoken language itself changes over time. Artists, furthermore, could play a tune in different ways depending on personal inclinations and even whims. How a tune was played also depended on the instruments involved. The important thing to note here is that music wasn't fixed.

When the Presbyterian missionaries introduced Western hymnology and music into northern Thailand, they imported not only an entirely new musical heritage. They brought with them a different way of thinking about music. Missionary music was fixed by a written notation. It was stored on paper rather than in oral traditions passed from artist to artist. Obviously, there is still some variation in Western music and hymnology, but the limits are far narrower. Mastery of missionary music, thus, required new skills and a different attitude about music. It required a different type of musical "discipline," a discipline that assumed that there was only one "right way" to play any given piece of music. The composer retained far more ownership of her or his music. Indeed, it's difficult to think of northern Thai music as even having "composers" in the Western sense of the term. Playing music, one might argue, was thus more a matter of being "re-creative" rather than "creative." It would be fascinating to know in more detail how 19th century northern Thai Christians experienced church music and to what degree mastering that music required an actual shift in consciousness.

HeRD #373 - In Transition

A well-known international evangelist passed through Chiang Mai some months ago and spoke to a pastor's meeting held at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology. His address to the pastors contained a fascinating contradiction. He is reported to have stated, on the one hand, that there is a crying need for Christianity in Thailand. He called the Kingdom a "land of darkness" and Buddhism an idolatrous religion. He claimed that the reason this beautiful land is being destroyed is because it lacks Christ. The job of every pastor, thus, is to win new converts to the Christian faith. So far, he sounded like a 19th century re-run. On the other hand, this foreign evangelist is also reported to have stated that in winning new souls to Christ Christians shouldn't attack other religions but should respect the beliefs of other people. Preach only Christ. Buddhism is idolatrous, in sum, but we should respect the beliefs of those who practice it. From a Judeo-Christian perspective, that sentence is nonsense. Idolatry is rebellion against God. It is putting up false gods in place of the One True God. How then can Christians "respect" the beliefs of those in rebellion against God?

What leads an internationally recognized evangelist to advocate respecting idolaters? His comments reflect a shift in understanding concerning people of other faiths that is quietly taking place in Christian thinking. Our heritage is a radical dualism that consigns all non-Christians to the fires of Hell. But on-going contact with peoples of other faiths coupled with Jesus' own willingness to dialogue with Samaritans, Gentiles, and even prostitutes and tax collectors casts doubts on the traditional stance. Those who immerse themselves in a foreign culture for decades are particularly prone to learning to respect the people of that culture. They learn, for example, that Thai Buddhism produces truly pious, profoundly moral individuals whose thinking sometimes resonates with Christian perspectives. What we're left with, then, is a contradiction. Some Christians remain entirely convinced that all "non-Christians" are damned. Some others have entirely rejected that attitude. The rest are situated on a sliding scale between these two points, with the general trend moving slowly away from the former. Our thinking is in transition, which fact leaves us with apparently logical contradictions and a general fuzziness concerning our attitudes towards people of other faiths. They are idolaters. We respect them.

HeRD #374 - Experiences Compared

Jouko Ruohomäki in his thesis "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission in Thailand in 1946-1985: A Descriptive History," describes the work of the FFM's missionary in Petchaboon Province in the mid-1950s this way: "Elis Pehkonen's spiritual gift was evangelistic. He was eager to reach new people in new villages and the work grew steadily. He had been able to purchase a jeep and with several nationals he drove from market to market distributing Christian

literature and holding open air meetings. He had talented young Thai workers like Nirut and they received an effective on-the-job training. These Thai men preached the gospel in a way that ordinary country people understood their message." (p. 50)

There's much here that is familiar from the perspective of northern Thai missionary work up to World War I. The Presbyterians used elephants or horses instead of a jeep. They didn't hold open air meetings during the day, but they did have open public worship services (sometimes attended by hundreds) in the evenings. They too traveled about with "native" workers. The only other difference I detect here is that usually the Presbyterians' traveling companions were more mature men, though not always. They were men with a good temple education who could do precisely what Ruohomäki claims for the FFFM's young men. They could put the missionaries' message into words people could understand.

If there's a lesson here it's simply that the handful of Finnish Pentecostal missionaries working in Petchaboon in the 1950s conducted their evangelistic work much like the handful of American Presbyterians in the North did in the 1880s. You'd think it might not be that way, the two missions coming out of different cultures and theological traditions and 70 years apart, but it was. The modest results were about the same too.

HeRD #375 - She's a Historian

In his popular science fiction work, XENOCIDE, Orson Scott Card includes an ongoing dialogue between the representatives of two alien races attempting to make sense of human beings. One of these discourses concerns a human named Valentine. "She's a historian," states one being. The other replies,

"Explain this."

"She searches through the books to find out the stories of humans, and then writes stories about what she finds and gives them to all the other humans."

"If the stories are already written down, why does she write them again?"

"Because they aren't well understood. She helps people understand them."

"If the people closer to that time didn't understand them, how can she, coming later, understand them better?"

"I asked this myself, and Valentine said that she doesn't always understand them better. But the old writers understood what the stories meant to the people of their time, and she understands what the stories mean to people of HER time."

"So the story changes."

"Yes."

"And yet each time they still think of the story as a true memory?"

"Valentine explained something about some stories being true and others being truthful. I didn't understand any of it."

"Why don't they just remember their stories accurately in the first place? Then they wouldn't have to keep lying to each other."

HeRD #376 - Pentecostal Beginnings in the North

Pentecostalism first came to northern Thailand in 1956 when Samaan Vannakiat and Chaiyong Watanachantin arrived in Chiang Rai Province. These two young men were profoundly touched by the Osborn Pentecostal revival meetings held in Bangkok in that year, and in their newly won enthusiasm toured the province visiting churches and sharing that experience with others. Within a short period of time, five Pentecostal groups were formed, largely out of members of CCT churches. At some point shortly thereafter, the Finnish Free Foreign Mission

began to take an interest in these northern Thai Pentecostal groups and sent a missionary to visit them. By 1958 the FFFM was sending regular teaching missions, and three of the groups (Chiang Rai City, Pa Daen, and Ban Ring) were reported to have over 100 members each. In that same year, 1958, the Tynkkynen family moved to Chiang Rai to become the first FFFM missionaries assigned to the North. Even before their arrival, the Chiang Rai Pentecostal churches were spreading into regions where there were no CCT churches. In 1959 the Pa Pong Church dedicated of what seems to have been the first Pentecostal church building in the North.

HeRD #377 - Sheep Stealing I

On the face of it, "sheep-stealing" is an apparently simple phenomena. One church or mission sets out to steal the members of another church of mission. The following set of HeRDs, based on Ruohomäki's thesis "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission in Thailand in 1946-1985: A Descriptive History," argues that sheep-stealing is more complex than that. The FFFM felt itself victimized by the depredations of other missions. CCT leaders have accused the FFFM itself of stealing CCT members, notably in Chiang Rai Province. Ruohomäki seeks to demonstrate that the FFFM was only a victim and never a victimizer. In the process he develops a clear, narrow definition of sheep-stealing. It's too narrow, or so I'll argue.

The whole subject of sheep-stealing deserves considerable attention. It has powerfully influenced Protestant church and missionary relations, esp. since the 1950s. I was quite taken aback recently to hear a church leader argue that the church splits that take place from sheep-stealing are good. They show that the Holy Spirit is at work. Research we've done in the Office of History in Chiang Mai, Nan, and Uttaradit Provinces demonstrates that the opposite is true. Sheep-stealing not only poisons ecclesiastical relations, but it also kills or cripples local churches. It splits families as well as churches. It frequently results in two (or more) smaller churches, neither of which can sustain a strong congregational life. It throws the whole idea of Christian love into disrepute with others. It introduces ugly notes of judgment self-aggrandizement, and self-justification into the church. It's very difficult to believe that the Holy Spirit has anything to do with it.

HeRD #378 - Sheep-Stealing II

Ruohomäki, as we noted in HeRD #377, devotes attention to the issue of "sheep-stealing" in his thesis on the history of the Finnish Free Foreign Mission. The FFFM accused other missions of sheep-stealing. It was accused by others, notably the CCT, of the same behavior. Ruohomäki sets about to prove two things. First, he seeks to show that the FFFM was a victim of sheep-stealing. Second, he wants to demonstrate that the FFFM itself never engaged in stealing other churches' members.

Ruohomäki makes a good case for being victimized. In the 1960s, he writes, "The FFFM met a lot of problems from a new American mission called Church of Christ (non-instrumental). Some missionaries of this mission came to Petchaboon and tried to persuade the workers to leave the FFFM. The Church of Christ missionaries promised better support and even motorbikes to the evangelists if they were willing to abandon their mission. They tried to convince [them] that the FFFM missionaries were heretics. According to them, teaching concerning the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and healings of the FFFM were heretical doctrines. Even the playing [of] musical instruments in church meetings was against Biblical principles according to them." (p. 53) Ruohomäki reports that the depredations of the Churches of Christ mission were successful and all but one of the FFFM's Thai workers quit to join the new mission. They were re-baptized in the process.

There is no question but what the Churches of Christ (Non-instrumental) did engage in overt and aggressive sheep-stealing, esp. in the 1960s. Its missionaries believed that the members of other churches weren't saved. They were the modern equivalent of the Jewish synagogues of New Testament times. These missionaries, apparently, reasoned, then, that by divesting other churches of their members they were following Paul's model and methods. Ruohomäki sees sheep-stealing as being this type of overt, intentional, and aggressive deconstruction of other churches. I want to suggest that there's more to it than that.

HeRD #379 - Sheep-Stealing III

As we saw in HeRD #377, Ruohomäki in his thesis on the Finnish Free Foreign Mission defines sheep-stealing as the over, intentional, and aggressive raiding of members from other churches and/or disrupting the work of another mission. His "model" for sheep stealing is the actions and attitudes of Churches of Christ (Non-instrumental) missionaries. The question of sheep-stealing doesn't end there, however. The FFFM itself has been accused of sheep-stealing as well, particularly among the churches of the CCT's Second District (Chiang Rai Province) in the 1950s and 1960s. As we would expect, Ruohomäki denies that such was the case. In doing so, he relies on the concept of overt and aggressive intentionality with which he judged the Churches of Christ.

In making his case for innocence, Ruohomäki makes three important points. First, he argues that the CCT members who joined FFFM churches were mostly nominal Christians without experiences in personal regeneration. The CCT churches themselves, furthermore, were responsible (by implication) for the condition of their members because they were spiritually lifeless. They provided no experiences in revival and no study of the Bible. Their members acted no differently from society generally. The churches had very few activities. Second, the Pentecostal Movement in Chiang Rai was started by enthusiastic young Thai Christians. The FFFM arrived only after Pentecostal groups had already been formed. Third, the FFFM never engaged in intrusive behavior. It specifically never tried to buy away CCT leaders or members. Ruohomäki does acknowledge, however, that the FFFM left the door open for "unconverted" Christians to join its churches. He argues that no mission can claim exclusive right to a particular area or field. Nor can it try to force its members to stay in its own fold if they become convinced that another mission or church is more biblical. He argues that this is a matter of religious freedom. He quotes another FFFM missionary to make the point that, "We have not seduced anyone out of from one's church. Instead Presbyterians [the CCT] in the beginning excommunicated those, who took Biblical water baptism." (Ruohomäki, 81)

The conclusion is inevitable, then, that by its own lights the FFFM didn't indulge in aggressive, intentional, and overt sheep stealing. It didn't intentionally raid or disrupt the work of the CCT and its churches in Chiang Rai Province. We'll look at this defense again in HeRD #380.

HeRD #380 - Sheep-Stealing IV

Jouko Ruohomäki's thesis on the history of the Finnish Free Foreign Mission understands sheep-stealing as being the overt, intentional, and aggressive appropriation of the members of another church or mission. On these terms, he argues that the FFFM didn't steal CCT members in Chiang Rai in the 1950s and 1960s [see HeRD #379]. It seems to me, however, the FFFM did just that. FIRST, the FFFM's had a hostile attitude towards CCT churches. They were supposedly weak, irresponsible, and didn't teach the truth about the Holy Spirit. Ruohomäki portrays them as being beyond hope of renewal. SECOND, the FFFM ignored the situation facing the Chiang Rai churches. They had been hit by depression in the 1930s and then by war, persecution, and social

isolation in the 1940s. Those churches, meanwhile, had a history of revivalism going back to the 1920s, which is why the FFFM found many of their members responsive to Pentecostal revivalism. It's true that these churches also resisted Pentecostal "inroads," and I don't know the details of that resistance. In other similar situations both sides were guilty of stubborn spiritual arrogance [see HeRDs #339-342]. We can assume that something like that was going on here as well. THIRD, while Ruohomäki brands the CCT's members as "unconverted," he is also highly complimentary of the quality of the leadership former CCT members gave the FFFM's Chiang Rai churches. He openly attributes those qualities to their previous Christian experience. He favorably contrasts the FFFM Chiang Rai churches to those in Petchabun Province where there was no core of former CCT members around which to shape their congregations.

The Chiang Rai churches, in sum, weren't so entirely worthless as Ruohomäki claims, even by his own standards. They had provided their members with a Christian background. They had their own revivalistic traditions. It is true that they weren't living up to their potential and had many weaknesses. One has to ask if that, however, justified the aggressively negative attitudes the FFFM took towards them? Ruohomäki himself points out that eventually a more friendly relationship developed between Chiang Rai's CCT and FFFM churches. By his own statements and the historical situation of the Chiang Rai churches, then, it appears that a more kindly, friendly, and patient FFFM attitude was possible and even warranted. It's true that FFFM missionaries didn't engage in overt sheep-stealing. Pentecostal "nationals" with informal ties to the FFFM appear to have initially performed that task in their stead. The FFFM does appear to have encouraged aggressive, negative attitudes that provided it with the opportunity to form FFFM churches around cores of former CCT church members. That's sheep-stealing. The FFFM was covertly rather than overtly aggressive, but still aggressive. The definition of sheep-stealing, then, needs to include the fostering of negative, rebellious attitudes in the members of other churches. Where the consequence of the presence of one sect or denomination is the significant loss of members from other churches to it, sheep-stealing is probably on.

HeRD #381 - Golden Age Christianity

Reflecting on the meaning of early church history for the church today, Wayne Meeks in *THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN MORALITY* states, "Not only can we not replicate the golden age of Christian beginnings, there was no golden age to replicate. Jesus did not arrive in Galilee proclaiming a complete, systematic, and novel Christian ethic, nor even a compact set of fundamental principles that had only to be explicated by his apostles. There was not even, I have argued, any such thing as 'New Testament ethics.' What the ethnographer of early Christianity finds is only a record of experimentation, of trial and error, of tradition creatively misread and innovation wedged craftily into the cracks of custom, of the radically new mixed up with the familiar and old, of disputes and confrontation, of fervent assertions of unity amid distressing signs of schism, of opposite points of view on fundamental matters, of dialectic and change. Because Christian moralizing begins in history, begins in the midst of Israel in the midst of a Hellenized and Romanized world of manifold native cultures, it is not even possible to say precisely where and when it begins to be distinctively Christian, and difficult to know, in the whirl of syncretism, what distinguishes it. There has not ever been a purely Christian morality, unalloyed with the experiences and traditions of others." (pp. 215-16)

Meeks is writing here specifically about Christian morality, but his observations apply to the early church in every facet of its life. We Christians believe, nonetheless, that God appeared in the midst of this haze of human uncertainty. From that appearance we crafted the Christian religion, mixing into it all manner of things old and new. The price we pay for having an incarnational faith is that by its very nature it participates in and reflects the haziness and the complexity of human life. The "old-time" missionaries in Thailand tried to protect the Thai

church from having to struggle through the haze and complexity of incarnation. We Protestants sought to import and establish a "golden age" Christianity here, and in our failure to be more syncretistic in the manner of the earliest church have made it more difficult rather than less to share the Good News with this culture.

HeRD #382 - First Apostle to Siam?

It is our good fortune at the Office of History to have a photocopy set of the lectures in Thai Catholic history that Fr. Dr. Surachai Chumsriphan delivers to Catholic seminarians. Those lectures begin with some background information, and raise the possibility that St. Francis Xavier was the "first apostle" to Siam. A Spaniard, St. Francis first arrived in eastern Asia in 1542 with the intention of carrying out evangelism. He traveled widely, and during those travels he stopped in Malaca, at that time a Siamese dependency. Assuming that he must have taken time to preach the Christian religion, he officially became the first missionary in modern times to evangelize territory under Thai suzerainty. He traveled on to Japan, however, and found there a strong response to the Christian message. In Japan St. Francis discovered yet another vision, this time for China. His correspondence from 1552 indicates a firm intention to open a mission in China, but he was faced with obstacles in trying to get into China from virtually every direction. It appeared to him that his best hope was the Kingdom of Ayudhya, where he hoped to go in the near future. He got as far as Malaca, where he died on 11 December 1553.

Perhaps its stretching things a little to call St. Francis Xavier the first apostle to Siam. The first missionaries didn't reach Ayudhya for over another decade. He did, however, initiate the missionary movement towards Siam. He did reach territory officially under Siamese control. One can mark the beginnings of modern missions in our vicinity with his work. Fr. Surachai argues, thus, that St. Francis is a good candidate for the title of "Siam's First Apostle".

HeRD #383 - The First Generation

In his article on the Pauline Churches in *CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS*, Jurgen Becker describes the Pauline churches felt a deep tension with society and broke away from it in many ways. A key factor in their negative attitude towards society was their expectation that Jesus would return soon, which led them to distance themselves from their former lives and live in preparation for that event. Becker writes, "The mission congregations of the young churches in the modern age have taught us that the life of the first generation is always thoroughly shaped by its break with the status quo. This sharply felt contrast between the old and the new causes Christians of the first generation to develop a negative ethic that emphasizes behavior that distinguishes them and sets them apart. They are noticeably uncertain about the extent to which they can still be involved with the past without once again becoming dependent on it; therefore they prefer to set themselves apart in all areas." [p. 202]

Becker, as an early church historian, seems to be reading "forward" from the early church's experience into those of so-called "young churches" today. He hasn't taken into account the differences between their situations and that of the early church. He ignores, for example, the role of the modern foreign missionary in maintaining religious boundaries. He fails to allow for differences in social and cultural settings. Becker, finally, fails to remember that the young churches don't behave as if the Second Coming is an imminent event.

In the case of northern Thailand, I think that Becker is wrong about the inclination of the first generation of converts. What evidence we have in missionary writings indicates that northern Thai converts by-and-large preferred what we might call a "soft" conversion that would allow them to continue to live in society much as they had before. This was certainly true of the

first six converts in 1868-1869. Nan Ina, the first northern Thai convert, tried mightily to convince Drs. McGilvary and Wilson to let him be a hidden disciple. More generally, the tenor of missionary correspondence suggests that they had to struggle to maintain clear boundaries between Christianity and Buddhism-animism. It appears, in fact, that it is the later generations of Christians who cherish and insist on being separated out from society.

HeRD #384 - Circles

Every Protestant mission arrived in Thailand claiming to know who's saved and who's damned. As the number of Christian missions and groups has multiplied, however, the question of damnation and salvation has gotten more complex. It's now become an intra-religious as well as inter-religious issue.

Ruohomäki's thesis on the Finnish Free Foreign Mission brings some focus to this theme. The FFFM has had, over the years, to make decisions about its relationships with other Protestant, esp. Pentecostal bodies. He laments the proliferation of Pentecostal groups and calls for greater cooperation and coordination among them. At points, Ruohomäki sounds like a mainline ecumenical, but he's an "ecumenical" within a circle that seems to include mostly (not exclusively) other Pentecostals. I sense here a "compatibility" scale. We all find our place at some point on the scale and then look up and down the scale to see who's closest to us. They're our friends, the ones with whom we can establish "ecumenical relations". The further up or down the scale someone is from us, the less inclined we are to develop such relations and the more likely we are to judge that group or person as "unsaved". The residents at each of these points, meanwhile, assert that they proclaim a unique and truly true Truth. What's strange, however, is that whatever our particular brand of Christian Truth, we're all struggling with the same issues and we're all on the same scale. As Ruohomäki's ecumenical sentiments suggest, there's varying degrees of Evangelical, of Ecumenical, of Pentecostal, of Liberal, of Fundamentalist, and of whatever else in all of us.

I have a theory. Every Protestant mission group has come to Thailand assuming that non-Christians aren't saved. We've treated Buddhists from that attitude. It seems to me that the way we've treated our Buddhist neighbor historically became the way we treated our Catholic neighbor...and not too long thereafter became the way we treated some, many, or most of our Protestant neighbors as well. We've done unto ourselves, if this theory is correct, that which we've done at others. It just doesn't seem to this humble, confused church historian that Jesus had THIS in mind when he commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

HeRD #385 - The Joys & Dangers of Institutionalization

HeRD #346 raised the question of whether the institutionalization of the early church led to its growth or its demise. Dr. Mike Leming responded by sending me a handout from his Sociology of Religion course at St. Olaf College. It's longer than the usual HeRD but pertinent to Thai church history, and I turn it over to you here in full. Thank you, Mike.

Source: McGuire, Meredith B., RELIGION: THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

Five inherent dilemmas that institutionalization poses for any social movement. On the one hand, institutionalization enables the emerging movement to express and spread its perspective; on the other hand, it contains built-in tendencies toward stagnation and disorganization, separating members from the initial shared experiences of beliefs that held them together.

1. **MIXED MOTIVATION.** The earliest stages of a movement are characterized by a single-mindedness of followers; either the cause or the charismatic leader unites members' motivations. As the movement stabilizes, other motives come to the fore: desire for prestige, expression of leadership and teaching abilities, drive for power, search for security, respectability, economic advantages and so on.

2. **SYMBOL SYSTEM.** (i.e., language, ceremonies, and physical symbols of central meanings) In the earliest stages of a movement, members develop symbols by which they attempt to share significant experiences. These special words, ceremonies, and objects express what it means to be a part of the movement and its distinctive way of life. Without this objectification (i.e., transforming subjective experiences into concrete, shared images), there would be little basis of commonality among movement members. Shared symbols hold the members together and become part of the message they carry to prospective recruits. At the same time, however, there is an inherent tendency in the process of institutionalization for these symbols to become remote from the experiences and meanings that shaped them. They are cut off from the subjective experience of members who use the symbolic objects, group language, or ceremonies; they become ends in themselves or "things" to be manipulated for achieving ends. Without symbolization, the central meanings of the movement cannot be transmitted or shared, but symbolization contains the inherent risk that symbols will become alienated from the subjective life of the members.

3. **ORGANIZATIONAL ELABORATION OF STRUCTURES VERSUS MOVEMENT EFFECTIVENESS.** The long-term impact of a movement hinges upon transformation of bases of authority and leadership from a charismatic mode to either traditional or legal-rational structures. When a movement becomes established, there is a strong tendency for the organization to calcify around the memory of the early dynamism; its own tradition becomes the rationalization for why things should be done a certain way. Early stages of movement organization involve simple structures such as the charismatic leader and followers or leader, core followers, and other followers. The transition to legal-rational structures is typically accompanied by the elaboration and standardization of procedures, the emergence of specialized status's and roles, and the formalizing of communication among members. Division of labor and formalization of emergence of specialized status's and roles, and the formalizing of communication among members. Division of labor and formalization of structures make a growing movement more efficient, but the process may also make it less effective in the long run. The bureaucratic impersonalism and complexity may obstruct some of the movement's original goals. Members come to feel more peripheral to the movement, and their motivation becomes problematic.

4. **NEED FOR CONCRETE DEFINITION VERSUS LEGALISM.** On the one hand, the movement's message must be translated into concrete terms in order to apply to people's everyday lives. On the other hand, the concretization that occurs as the movement becomes institutionalized promotes a legalistic approach to those very terms. Legalism reduces the insight of the ethical message to petty conformity.

5. **POWER.** The developing movement needs to structure itself so that its message and meaning remain firm. It needs to protect itself, both from threats within and without its boundaries. A certain amount of internal power gives the nascent movement strength against threats that from threats within and without its boundaries. A certain amount of internal power gives the nascent movement strength against threats that would dissolve it. On the other hand, that same power may be asserted against deviant and dissenting members. Members' compliance may be assured by external pressures or coercion rather than by inner conviction and commitment. Similarly, desire for power and influence may motivate movement leaders to assert

themselves in other institutional spheres, diverting the movement from its original message and goals.

Neither direction (institutionalization or non-institutionalization) is completely satisfactory. The very processes that would enable a social movement to realize its ideals contain inherent contradictions, which simultaneously prevent the movement from accomplishing these goals.

HeRD #386 - The Human Jesus

Research into the beliefs of the Thai church will almost certainly demonstrate that most church members don't believe that Jesus was a human being in any meaningful sense. He is, rather, a kingly figure of limitless spiritual power, all-knowing and perfect even in his human "form." Marcus J. Borg's MEETING JESUS AGAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME offers an interesting re-humanization of Jesus, one that appears to be culturally relevant to Thailand. Acknowledging the limits of our historical sources, Borg describes the type of person Jesus must have been given his portrait in the Gospels. He paints four broad "strokes" in his characterization of Jesus. He sees Jesus as being a SPIRIT PERSON, one who had a profound personal experience of the divine. Jesus was a TEACHER OF WISDOM who taught a subversive, alternative wisdom. He was a SOCIAL PROPHET in the tradition of the classical prophets of the Old Testament. He was, finally, a MOVEMENT FOUNDER, who initiated the Jewish restoration movement that became Christianity. Borg insists that all four of these strokes fit well into Jesus' social, cultural, and religious heritage. Borg's Jesus wasn't perfect in the sense common piety insists upon. He was, rather, a highly intelligent, articulate, and spiritually sensitive person who made a significant impact on other people's lives.

My point here is that it is possible within the Thai cultural and linguistic context to talk about a Jesus who was fully human. Borg is suggesting that Jesus experienced "enlightenment" albeit an enlightenment understood and explained in the religious categories of Palestine rather than India. He taught wisdom, again a central religious category and concern in the Thai religious context. Thai history is no stranger to social prophets or to religious movements. This Jesus we can clothe in the religious language of Thailand and make sense of him in Thai religious categories. The issue facing the church today, if we want preserve the central tradition of the church, is not one of affirming Jesus' divinity but of re-discovering his humanity.

HeRD #387 - Purity vs. Compassion

Borg's MEETING JESUS AGAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME argues that Jesus attacked the purity system of first century Judaism. That system divided Jewish society into classes of pure and impure based on adherence to complex purity laws and rituals as well as on wealth, gender, and nationality. God, according to the purity system, accepted the pure and rejected the impure. Jesus opposed this system with a compassionate God who loved the poor, social marginals, cripples, women, and even Samaritans. Borg states, "Whereas purity divides and excludes, compassion unites and includes." (p. 58) He also argues that this sense of compassionate inclusiveness was one of the key marks of the early Christian movement.

The Protestant missionary record in Thailand, in light of Borg's views on Jesus, is a mixed one. Protestant missionaries have most certainly preached a compassionate Christ and embodied that preaching in actions. Missionary medicine is an important case in point. Protestant missions, however, also divided the pure from the impure and consciously isolated its churches from Thai society in an attempt to protect their purity. The history of Protestant missions, thus, reflect BOTH the Jesus' compassionate ideology AND the purity ideology of Jesus' opponents. I would

argue that we can't understand both the failure and the successes of Protestant missions in Thailand apart from this inherent contradiction. In its compassion for the marginals of Thai society, Protestant Christianity has been good news for Thailand. In its demands for purity and its denial of Christ-like inclusiveness it has been bad news. From King Mongkut onwards, Thailand has quietly accepted the good news and largely ignored (and sometimes deplored) the bad news of Christianity.

HeRD #388 - The Honorable Pastor

Ach. Kasem Apiwong, an M.Div. student at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, has submitted a "ministerial thesis" report on pastoral care in northern Thailand as part of his course work. He surveyed 72 pastors from 6 CCT districts concerning their financial and work situation. Among other things, he asked these pastors the question, "Do you agree or disagree that the church [you serve] honors you?" This is an important question. Ach. Kasem writes, "In church work pastors must receive praise, acceptance, and respect from the church's members. These things have no little part in helping a pastor's work to prosper." There is a widely held perception that pastors receive relatively little respect. Church members, so the theory goes, give less honor to pastors than society gives to Buddhist monks because their status is less clearly religious and set apart from daily life than that of the monks. Pastors are married, draw salaries, and live "in the world." They seem less holy than the monks.

Ach. Kasem's findings contradict this perception. Of the 72 pastors responding to his questionnaire, only one "entirely disagreed" or "disagreed" with the statement that she or he received honor from church members. Nearly half "entirely agreed" (34) that church members honor them. In a second question, Ach. Kasem asked pastors if their members respected and trusted them in their work. Only 2 of 70 pastors responded negatively. Forty "entirely agreed" or "very much agreed" that such was the case. These responses suggest that church members treat their pastors with respect. There is apparently no role confusion in the minds of church members concerning the pastoral office. It is possible, thus, that the northern Thai church has assimilated the pastoral role in some important ways and gives its clergy respect just as the Buddhist faithful honor monks. It seems also possible that the northern Thai church has assimilated and accepted the premise that "ministry" should be conducted in the world rather than apart from it. If so, this reflects a shift in religious consciousness. Clearly more research needs to be done on this point.

HeRD #389 - Pastoral Profile

HeRD #388 drew on the research of Ach. Kasem Apiwong into the current state of pastoral care among northern Thai churches. Ach. Kasem distributed a questionnaire to pastors in 6 northern districts of the CCT and received back 72 responses. (There are slightly less than 100 pastors serving in these districts). The results of Ach. Kasem's research tell us something about the identity of CCT northern Thai pastors.

Of the pastors responding, 53% have a bachelors or masters degree in theology. One half have ten years or less experience in pastoral care. Some 84% are married and 93% are male. Just over 44% are 35 years of age or younger. Of these pastors, 58% serve churches of 130 members or less. If one, thus, is looking for an "average" CCT northern Thai pastor, that pastor is male, married, in his mid-30s, has a theological degree, and is serving a smaller congregation. He has some pastoral experience.

These figures reflect the reality of CCT pastoral care in the late 1990s. In the last 15-20 years the CCT has made considerable progress in putting a pastoral care system in place, but that task is not yet complete. CCT pastors still tend to be young and of limited experience, but at the

same time they are increasingly well-educated. A more seasoned pastorate is taking shape. The smallness of CCT churches remains a major problem, however, as most churches still have to struggle to pay their pastors a fair wage. Many churches can't support a pastor at all.

HeRD #390 - Pastoral Values

In his research on the state of pastoral care in northern Thailand, Ach. Kasem Apiwong asked about pastoral values. The list of values he drew up is based on his own research interests and doesn't necessarily represent key or core values. The results, however, are still quite interesting. Highest on the list is "Obeying Christ's Commands." Of those responding, 75.71% gave it the score of "most important." Running a somewhat distant second is "Justice," which received a "most important" score of 56.33%. In third place was "Living a Christ-Like Life of Sacrifice" with a score of 47.22%. Overtly religious values consistently scored high. At the bottom of the list of 12 values, interestingly enough, is "Attaining Praise in the Christian and General Communities," which received only 12.5% in the "most important" category. Second lowest is also interesting, namely "A Financially Secure Life," which scored at 22.54%. Third lowest is "Good [Work] Benefits," with a 25% score. These scores accord well with research I did a few years ago into the state of pastoral care in the CCT generally.

At least one striking result in Ach. Kasem's research is the relatively low scores given to service to others. The value of "Helping Others without Expecting Repayment" scored only 25.71% in the highest category. "Love and Concern for Neighbors" received a slightly lower score of 25.29%, while "Feeling Pride in Helping Others" was scored as "most important" by only 31% of the pastors. The pastoral attitude towards service implied by all of these scores is that northern Thai CCT pastors tend to see ministry in terms of service to God rather than to neighbor.

HeRD #391 - Return to the Conventional

Borg in MEETING JESUS AGAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME argues that Jesus taught an "alternative wisdom" that ran very much against the "conventional wisdom" of his own time. In the process he called into radical question some of the most central elements of his own culture, including the social structures of a patriarchal society. It appears that the church over a period of centuries quietly moved away from Jesus' alternative wisdom towards accepting Greco-Roman conventional wisdom, a process that began even before the year 100 CE.

It seems possible (at least as a matter worthy of study) that northern Thai Protestantism has to a degree replicated the move from alternative to conventional wisdom. Protestant missions taught northern Thai Christian converts to think and behave in ways strikingly different from their animistic neighbors. While still believing in spirits, they displayed little or no fear of them. They, for example, frequently moved on to land held to be demon-infested. They eschewed spirit-propitiation in a society that placed high value on such activities. They displayed new attitudes towards women and lepers, ones quite out of keeping with northern Thai society generally. In these and other ways, Christians defied conventional wisdom. It appears, superficially at least, that Protestant Christians today have largely returned to accepting the conventional wisdom of their increasingly materialistic and secularized society. Christians don't appear to have any exceptional attitudes or values that make them stand out today as they did in the past. As but one example, those who work in the area of AIDS ministry claim that Christians generally react with same mixture of fear and abhorrence of AIDS victims as do those in society generally.

HeRD #392 - History

"History, all history, is based on probabilities."

- F. C. Grant, "Jesus Christ," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible

HeRD #393 - Missionary Westernization in the 17th Century

Fr. Surachai Chumsriphan's lectures in Catholic Church history at the Saengtam Seminary (photocopy at the Office of History) describe the work of Fr. Tomasso Valguarnera, a Jesuit missionary who first arrived in the Kingdom of Ayudhya (Thailand) in 1655. Valguarnera was a highly capable individual who initiated a resurgence in Thai Catholic missions. An important part of that resurgence was Westernizing activities. Valguarnera founded a school and college for his parish, which was made up of several nationalities including Japanese. He later built the "College of San Salvador." It isn't clear from Fr. Surachai's lectures whether or not Thais attended these institutions. King Narai also called on Valguarnera to design and oversee the construction of several fortresses and a palace. He compiled what may have been the earliest missionary dictionary of the Siamese language. According to Fr. Surachai's lectures, furthermore, Valguarnera was also a close compatriot to King Narai. All of these activities and Valguarnera's special status mark him as an important figure in the introduction of a Western consciousness, styles, and approaches into the Kingdom of Ayudhya.

HeRD #394 - The First Missionaries

Fr. Surachai's lectures (cited in HeRD #393) state that the first known Catholic missionaries to reach Ayudhya were the Portuguese Dominican priests, Frs. Jeronimo Cruz and Sebastiao da Canto. They arrived in 1567. Fr. Surachai notes that there has been a long-standing and widely held misunderstanding that they reached Ayudhya in 1555, but documents from the Dominican archives show clearly that the date of 1567 is the correct one. According to those records, these two priests were well-received by the general populace and royalty. They are supposed to have learned Thai quickly. Their primary responsibility, however, was the pastoral care of the large Portuguese community resident in Ayudhya. Surachai emphasizes that many people visited the missionaries and discussed religious questions with them. He also maintains that these two missionaries became very popular and their influence reached even into the palace. It was that very influence, however, that proved their undoing. Muslims living in Ayudhya, according to Surachai, became jealous of this Catholic influence and feared the priests would use their influence against Islam. The Muslims fomented mob violence against the Portuguese in hopes of luring the priests out to try to quell the riot. They did, and in the confusion of the moment Father Jeronimo, was assassinated. Fr. Sebastiao was wounded but soon recovered. He and two other priests were later executed by the Burmese when they captured Ayudhya in 1569.

Several points. First, one has to wonder whether the two missionaries made as significant an impact as the Dominican records suggest. If Protestant missionaries are any measure, one has to make allowance for enthusiastic early reports from the field. Second, Jeronimo and Sebastiao were sent primarily to be pastors rather than evangelists, an interesting reversal of the Protestant order of things. If they were half as beloved and popular as Surachai records, they appear to have been quite good at their calling. One might even speculate that it was their pastoral skills that attracted others to come and discuss religion with them. Third, their ministry was not directed toward the local populace. It comes as something of a surprise that the earliest form of ordained Christian ministry in Thailand was that of pastor to a foreign community church! Fourth, we have to assume that in their religious discussions Jeronimo and Sebastiao didn't resort to confrontation or overt attacks on Buddhism. Such an approach doesn't gain the support of Thai kings or win popular approval among the people. Finally, we can also assume that these early

priests played a less obvious role in Westernization in comparison to the Presbyterian missionaries in the North. They were members of a relatively large, diverse foreign community, unlike the McGilvarys who became the only Western residents of Chiang Mai when they arrived.

HeRD #395 - Isolation

The American historian Daniel Boorstin has emphasized the importance of "distance" as a factor in American history. He argues that North America's distance from Europe and the distances imposed by an expanding frontier were crucial factors in the American historical experience. Boorstin's insight into the importance of distance, applied more modestly, provides a clue to the historical experience of one Karen church here in the North.

The Phorn Niran Church is located about 30 kilometers north of Chiang Mai in the Mae Sa hills region and is a member of District Nineteen of the CCT and the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC). Its experience is one of distance and isolation. It was founded as a community in the early 1960s when both Christian and non-Christian Karen families migrated into the area. Eventually the village became all Christian (including a few Catholic families). There were no other Karens in the area. Travel in and out of the village, until recently, was on foot or, later, by a very bad road. Karen church leaders visited it on a yearly or semi-yearly basis. The Huey Kao congregation in Chiang Mai served as its "mother church," but representatives from that church visited the Phorn Niran group less than once a month, usually not staying over night. The Phorn Niran Church's distant location, thus, put it on the periphery of the KBC. It was isolated, and this isolation, in combination with its small size, has had negative consequences. As a relatively small community, the congregation couldn't afford a pastor of its own. It didn't develop strong internal leadership. It conducted few activities. The church's isolation and smallness, in sum, left it generally weak. It has fewer activities, less giving, and a smaller proportional worship attendance than many other Karen congregations of its size.

The "lesson" that small, isolated churches have trouble sustaining viable congregational life is hardly startling. What is interesting here, however, is that in a northern Thailand Karen context a church isn't isolated because it's out in the hills. It's isolated, rather, because of its distant from other Karen hill churches. The fact that the Phorn Niran Church is closer to the KBC offices in Chiang Mai than all but one other KBC church is irrelevant.

HeRD #396 - Not Fair

John R. Davis' book on "contextualization," *POLES APART?*, is a stimulating read for those who are interested in the issues of Christianity and culture in Thailand. It's not very good history, however. Davis creates a strong impression that the "old time" missionaries serving in Thailand prior to 1950 were "anti-contextual." They refused to use any part of the culture to express Christianity because they looked on the natives as primitive, animistic, uncivilized, and pagan. (see pp. 18-19)

Davis is only partly correct on this point and leaves his readers with an impression that is quite unfair to the missionaries themselves. If by "contextualization" we mean adapting Christianity to Thai culture(s), they indeed tried to do that. First, from the very beginning Protestant missionaries struggled to translate the Bible into Thai and, later, northern Thai. They attempted to create a Thai-language Christian literature. Second, in the North at least, a number of missionaries engaged in a very close study of Buddhist texts with an eye to finding ways to explain Christianity more clearly to Buddhists. Third, again in the North, missionaries relied on temple-trained converts to carry out primary evangelism. They freely conceded that these elders could "tell the story" in far more culturally appropriate ways than could the missionaries. Fourth,

understood rightly, the so-called "Three-Self Movement" (Self-Propagating, Self-Governing, Self-Supporting) that began in the late 19th century was a step towards contextualization. Fifth, it appears from the Presbyterian records that the veteran missionaries went through their own personal contextualizations, esp. in their attitudes towards Buddhism and the value of Thai ways. I assume that a careful study of missionary contextualization before 1950 would turn up other patterns.

While we can't write these efforts off as a failure, it is true that earlier generations of missionaries didn't get very far in their contextualization. The central reason was because they were also profoundly ethnocentric, which is Davis' point. They believed that the Anglo-American Protestant civilization represented the Gospel most accurately. "Contextualization" largely meant TRANSLATING Western words, concepts, and forms into ones Thai peoples could understand. In one sense, then, Davis is correct in saying the missionaries were "anti-contextual" because of their ethnocentric biases towards their own culture and against Thai cultures. Yet, they had their own love for Thailand as well and did attempt, within the boundaries of their ethnocentrism, to locate Christianity in Thai contexts. Davis presents a black and white picture, where the fact of the matter is that it was quite gray.

HeRD #397 - Etic vs. Emic

John Davis writes in POLES APART? that, "Those who theologise from an ETIC (outsider) perspective generally disqualify themselves on two accounts. FIRST, they tend to superimpose their own theological assumptions without being aware of it and, SECOND, they generally lack sufficient empathy with the receptor culture to enable them to theologize 'incarnationally'. At best, the ETIC approach would need a tremendous amount of EMIC [insider] input, to make it at all significant...THE EMIC APPROACH TO THEOLOGISING IS THEREFORE THE MOST NECESSARY FUNCTION OF COMPETENT NATIONALS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH IN ANY GIVEN AREA, AT ANY GIVEN TIME." (p. 21, emphasis in original)

These sentiments represent a significant shift in Protestant missionary thinking in Thailand. Prior to World War II, only a few missionaries would have doubted the essential importance of etic perspectives for the Thai church. Few would have trusted emic approaches. It would be interesting to know to what extent missionaries today agree with Davis, both in theory and in practice. My guess is that most would agree in theory but few when it comes to the specifics of practice.

HeRD #398 - Research, Research, Research

In POLES APART? Davis implies through a series of rhetorical questions that Thai churches have failed to develop ceremonies, rituals, and activities that are "functionally equivalent" to those found in Thai societies generally. He asks, rhetorically, "Is it not the case that ceremonies within the Christian community have been reduced mainly to Sunday functions in Church?" As far as CCT churches in northern Thailand go, my experience is that the answer to his question is, "No, that's not the case." If it's one thing the churches do a lot of, it's hold services in homes and other venues to celebrate a variety of occasions that Buddhist northern Thais also celebrate in ritual. Research done by Philip Hughes, furthermore, suggests that northern Thai Christians frequently use prayer as the functional equivalent of spirit propitiation. My impression is that Christians from the Northeast, Central Thailand, and from tribal groups share these characteristics with northern Thai Christians. Further investigation, I think, would show that Christian churches engage in ritual as variously and at least as often as the temples.

The point here, however, isn't so much that Davis is wrong and I'm right as it is that neither of us has any solid evidence on the matter. I'm arguing largely from personal experience and so is Davis, apparently. The mandate for continuing historical and sociological research by the church in Thailand is a huge one. If we're serious about wanting to contextualize the Christian message, it seems only logical that we should find out more about those contexts. This means putting field research at the center of our efforts to understand our neighbors. It also means emphasizing listening skills over talking skills.

HeRD #399 - The Constitution

The CCT's very first constitution, approved at the 1934 General Assembly, is a fascinating document. It summarizes the historical experience of Thai Protestantism and set patterns for church government that are still in place today. In its introductory section, the 1934 constitution defined the "Church in Siam" (the CCT's first name) as an ECUMENICAL CHURCH committed to encompassing all Protestant churches in Thailand. That section also committed the CCT to an INDIGENOUS PATH based on self-government, self-propagation, and self-support. It recognized and validated the CCT's PLURALISTIC DENOMINATIONAL HERITAGE by allowing a diversity of worship, baptismal, and administrative practices. By the ecclesiastical structure it established, the document also defined the CCT as a CONNECTIONAL CHURCH in the REFORMED TRADITION, that is a church committed to the "presbyterial" form of church government. It gave considerable powers to the "phak" (district/presbytery), and it also defined a relatively large role for the General Assembly and the General Council (the General Assembly's agent when it isn't in session). The constitution reflects the Presbyterian understanding that church governing bodies are essentially ecclesiastical "courts" with quasi-judicial powers. In all, this document neatly summarizes essential features of the CCT's continuing identity as an ecumenical church committed to being the church "in" Thailand. It was pluralistic in denominational heritage and ethnic background in 1934 and is even more so today. It values a central, shared identity and structure as essential to its mission and ministry.

Two critical observations. First, the 1934 constitution is Western in form and conception, quite out of keeping with its formal commitment to three-self indigenization. While this is obvious and to be expected, we still have to understand the essential dilemma that continues to face the CCT today. As it becomes more sensitive to the need for indigenization, it must seek a balance between what it was and what it seeks to become. The structures of the past are still much with us and resist change, as they're bound to do. The CCT can't discard the past but it can't stay chained to it either. Second, it is striking that the 1934 constitution doesn't embody its commitments in the structures it puts in place. Evangelism, for example, is strongly affirmed as a key ministry. The constitution does nothing, however, to give that commitment a place in its structures and procedures. Its authors apparently saw it as a document for governing rather than ministering.

HeRD #400 - Movies, Bangkok, and 1933

Josephine Albert Tate wrote an article on the impact of American films on Siamese young people in the October 1933 issue of the SIAM OUTLOOK, a Presbyterian Mission publication. The article begins, "'Have you ever been to Hollywood?' and 'Have you ever seen a movie star?' were among the first questions asked me by Siamese youth upon my arrival in Bangkok. These questions are indicative of the growing interest in movies here. As a Matter of fact the average student in Bangkok is as well acquainted with the present day movie stars as is any of his American 'cousins.' Pictures of favorites are to be seen displayed in lockers, and current movie magazines (as 'current' as can be obtained so far away from America) are frequently in evidence." (p. 141)

A survey Tate conducted of students at the Bangkok Christian College found that nearly 1/3rd of the boys ages 17-20 attended movies weekly. About 1/4th attended twice a month and nearly all the rest of the students went to the movies at least once a month. Favorite movies included "The Sign of the Cross," a religious movie that had just been shown in Bangkok and, running a close second, "Tarzan of the Apes." The boys favorite actors included "Chevalier, Fairbanks, Gaynor, Cantor, Carroll and Novarro."

Tate felt that American movies were having a mixed impact on Bangkok youth. On the one hand, she approved of the greater freedom in "boy and girl relationships" portrayed in these movies. She felt that Siamese youth needed to experience freer gender relationships. On the other hand, American movies were also perverting Bangkok young people with a get all you can get however you can get it "morality". One Siamese "racketeer" was reported to have informed a missionary that he learned everything he knew about his illegal business from American movies. Tate concluded, "Missionaries strive to portray the higher ideals of their homeland, but the movies tell a different story and its a story which is accepted as the typical picture of American life." (p. 13)

HeRD #401 - What Do YOU Think of America?

From Josephine Tate's article in the October 1933 issue of SIAM OUTLOOK (pp. 142-43) we read, "...I asked Siamese students to tell some of the things they had learned about America from the movies they had seen. Here are some of their answers:

'There are plenty of gold mines in America.'

'Americans are the most wonderful dancers in the world.'

'It is a country where there are lots of gangs and it is dangerous to live there.'

'America is the land of movies.'

'Americans are rich and they use their money in many ways, mostly careless ways.'

'The men and women are good friends.'

'American women are the most beautiful in the world.'

'I think Hollywood is the Paradise city of the world.'

'America is the land of romance.'

'I have learned very much about wars and American warships.'

'The girls have many boy friends.'

'America is the richest country in the world.'"

Source: Josephine Albert Tate, "Movies and the Youth of Siam," *Siam Outlook* 9, 4(October 1933): 141-144.

HeRD #402 - Definition of Indigenization

In July 1929 Protestant missionaries and church leaders attended a joint "Conference on the Siamese Church" in Bangkok. Among the issues addressed at that conference was the need for a national Thai church. In the course of its discussions, the conference formulated a definition of an "indigenous church" that reads, "An Indigenous Church is one which has become so conscious of its own individuality and mission, that its every expression is perfectly normal and natural." The definition goes on to state, "Out of its life issue an art, literature, architecture, customs, forms of worship, a program of service, an organization and an interpretation of the Gospel which do not appear strange, but make the national at home."

It's fascinating and revealing to find this quite modern sounding definition articulated in a meeting held 1929. We will recall from HeRD #396 Davis' assertion that missionaries prior to 1950 were "anti-contextual". I argued there and repeat here that such a sweeping judgment is far too simplistic and not really fair.

Source: "Findings of the Conference on the Siamese Church," 19-23 July 1929. In the Records of the American Presbyterian Mission, Payap University Archives. [Box 9, Folder 14]

HeRD #403 - Counting Christians

Church membership statistics, as we all know, aren't trustworthy. An article in the January 1935 issue of SIAM OUTLOOK, written by Asher B. Case, provides a case in point. It reports that in 1933 the churches related to the American Presbyterian Mission recorded significant gains in members, reaching a total of 9,237 communicant members. The following year, however, those figures took an even larger nose dive. The total communicant membership dropped to 8,713, a loss of 524 members. Case attributes this dramatic drop, in significant part, to the founding of the Church of Christ in Siam (today's CCT) in April 1934. He observed, "More than half of this loss was due to the trimming of church rolls in order to avoid paying the General Assembly assessment for those who had fallen away." (p. 70)

Lesson: if you want to know how many members a church or denomination really has, put a head tax on 'em!

Source: Asher B. Case, "Facts From the Statistics," *Siam Outlook* 9, 1(January 1935): 70-71.

HeRD #404 - Ministry With Seniors I

M.Div. students at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology must submit a thesis as a part of their graduation requirements. They can choose to write either an academic or a "ministerial" thesis, the latter focusing on a practical issue of church life. Ach. [VK] has submitted his thesis on ministry with seniors [see HeRDs #334 & 335]. His thesis is that churches have to begin to consider the implications of Thailand's aging population for ministry, and in arguing this thesis his research raises a number of important issues.

Ach. [V] begins his research with a statistic. Whereas in 1947 (2490) in Thailand the average life span for men was 48 and for women was 51, by 1985 (2528) those figures had increased to 61.75 years for men and 67.5 years for women. Those are substantial increases, but what is striking is that the gap between women and men grew from 3 years to 6.5 years. Women, it appears, benefited more from improvements in medical services more than men. It would be interesting to know why, but from the perspective of the church's ministry with seniors these figures are important for another reason. They suggest that there are more women seniors than men. Ach. [V]'s survey of two congregations in the CCT's Third District, Lampang, found that women constituted over 60% of the seniors in those churches.

It is worth pondering what a preponderance of women seniors implies for ministry with seniors. One example. In an interview I did several years ago with three women pastors, they argued that from their experience one of the advantages women have in pastoral ministry is in their relationships with seniors, esp. women seniors. The mother-daughter relationship lends itself very well to nurturing and pastoring in a way "natural" to Thai societies. Women pastors, in the role of daughters, can get closer to older women (and older men as well, to a degree) where older women may feel less comfortable around a male pastor. These pastors found that they could very naturally go into the kitchen or other parts of a home and even help in household chores, things male pastors could do less easily and were less inclined to do anyway. Perhaps, then, the rise of ministries with seniors opens the need for involving more women in full-time pastoral ministry.

HeRD #405 - Ministry With Seniors II

Ach. [VK]'s "ministerial thesis" on ministry with seniors points to a fascinating difference in the experience of urban and rural seniors. He took as his sample the seniors (ages 60 and older) in the First Church, Lampang and in the Prasobsuk Church, a rural congregation in Lampang Province. The urban church members reported a much greater involvement in home activities and responsibilities than did the rural ones. Where 84% of the urban seniors take care of the home where they live and 68% look after it while other family members are away, among rural seniors only half look after their homes and merely 14% look after the home when others are away. Another interesting contrast is found in the authority of the seniors in the home. Of the urban seniors, 61% stated that they make decisions concerning home life, and 66% claimed that they act as family advisors to those they live with. Among the rural seniors, however, only 10% reported that they make decisions concerning home life, and just 4% said they acted as family advisors. These figures suggest that urban seniors are more tied to their homes than are rural seniors. They are, at the same time, also more empowered than the rural church seniors.

Ach. [V] accounts for these differences as being, in part, based on the fact that urban seniors are generally better educated. It appears more likely, however, that the explanation is found in the differing life-styles of rural and urban people. Urban families are much more fragmented. Family members spend less time together and less time at home. Retired urban seniors, necessarily, take on an important role as the "stay-at-homes" whose presence is more dominant in the home because they're there more than are other family members. The urban seniors, furthermore, were not only better educated but many of them had held business or civil service jobs. One suspects that they are continuing to exercising the habits of being in charge and giving advice and direction they developed during their working years.

However we look at these figures, Ach. [V] is certainly correct in his summary statement that those who would engage in ministry with seniors need to be aware of these differences. Working with urban and rural seniors are not the same thing. Working with seniors of differing work experiences is also not the same thing.

HeRD #406 - Ministry With Seniors III

It seems sometimes that the solution to every local church problem is an activity. Data taken from the responses to several questions in Ach. [VK]'s questionnaire throw some doubt on the wisdom of using an activities approach to ministry with seniors in the two churches he studied. His research found, first, that 71% of the older members (60 and older) in First Church, Lampang and 74% of those in the Prasobsuk Church took part in no church activities other than worship. When asked why 50% of the First Church and 40% of the Prasobsuk seniors stated they were either in "Poor Health" or "Too Elderly". Another 34% in First Church and 44% in the

Prasobsuk Church claimed they were either "Not Interested" or "Have Other Business". Thus, 84% of the seniors of First Church and 83% of those in the Prasobsuk Church claim poor health or lack of interest as why they don't participate in church activities. That's a very high percentage. In amongst all of these numbers is a tendency to be unable to or uninterested in attending church activities. Activities, in any event, will fail to address the church and spiritual needs of half or nearly half of all the senior members of these two churches. They feel unable to physically attend activities outside the home.

Another statistic from Ach. [V]'s report sheds further light (or confusion?) on all of this. When asked about attendance at Sunday morning worship, 74% of First Church seniors and 90% of the Prasobsuk seniors claim to attend worship with some degree of regularity. Clearly something is going on here, when such large percentages declare themselves ABLE and WILLING to attend worship but UNABLE or UNWILLING (as we saw above) to participate in other activities. Perhaps these figures reflect a trait we've mentioned several times before in HeRD, namely that northern Thais place considerable importance on ritual and worship. It may be, then, that these seniors find other activities beyond their physical capabilities or have little inclination to attend them because they see non-worship church activities as being unimportant. If this is the case, then holding activities for seniors would seem to be counter-productive, not likely to get anywhere.

HeRD #407 - Ministry With Seniors IV

Ach. [VK]'s thesis argues at various points that seniors don't get enough attention from their families. He calls for a more sensitive, attentive, and intensive approach to ministry with seniors. The more I read his data, however, the more I'm beginning to wonder about his assumptions that the category of "seniors" is a valid one for Thai society. It is clear from his data that the family members of the rural congregation he studied don't treat their older family members in a special way. They don't give them special attention. For example, he found that the rural church families seldom hold special events for their senior members. Or, again, they don't discuss family "news" very much with the older family members. One can read this in several ways, of course. It's possible that these rural people are a bit uncouth and insensitive. Or, it may well be that in the context of rural community life seniors remain full community members and simply don't need special attention, at least for as long as they are in reasonable health. Ach. [V]'s data indicates that the urban church families do give more special attention to older family members, but from his point of view the level of attention is still too low. Perhaps something of the same attitude about "seniors" is at work here, namely that being over 60 or being retired doesn't put a person in a special category. Ach. [V]'s data indicates that the urban church seniors play a very active role in family households once they're retired. What doesn't appear very clearly, however, is a sense that they've been removed into a special age category.

There's a move in Western nations to de-toxify the category of "seniors" and to see people over the age of 60 or 65 or whatever as people quite able to live full, active lives. If Ach. [V]'s findings are reasonably valid, it seems possible that Thai society, esp. rural Thai society, agrees. All of which, finally, would seem to throw into considerable doubt the whole idea of a specialized ministry with seniors, at least in the two churches Ach. [V] studied.

Pure Speculation: Maybe we're taking the concept of youth ministries and trying to apply it to the "other end" of society. Maybe we shouldn't.

HeRD #408 - Ministry With Seniors V

We're still working on Ach. [VK]'s thesis on ministry with seniors. He argues from his research that while communication between seniors (ages 60+) and other household members takes place, that communication is of a low quality. When he asked senior church members if they converse with others in the household regularly, the scores were generally high, esp. among the urban members. He also found, however, that when he asked if household members were communicating "useful" information about themselves to seniors, the responses were much more negative. Of the urban seniors, some 39% respond in the lowest category of "very little," while 38% of the rural seniors responded similarly. Strikingly, when Ach. [V] queried seniors about how pleased they were with the actions and conversation of other household members, the scores revealed a fairly high level of displeasure. He concludes that there's a lot of talking going on, but there's not much meaningful communication involved.

I'd like to emphasize again that Ach. [V]'s data base is very small, amounting to only 88 individuals in two churches. His questionnaire and analytical methods are not those of a professional sociologist. He raises, nonetheless, issues that are worth further investigation. His data suggests that family communications systems are largely composed of inconsequential, unhelpful, and irritating chatter. That's not an issue limited to any age group, if true, and it suggests a possible major theme for pastoral ministry generally, i.e. teaching and encouraging the use of meaningful family communications skills.

HeRD #409 - Patterns in Karen Church History

The Office of History has initiated a long-term project studying the history of a cluster of Karen churches. Preliminary interviews with the members of five churches suggest a number of patterns or issues that will have to be studied in some detail. These include, ONE, conversion stories. There are many converts in these churches, and it appears that most of them became Christians because of dissatisfaction with animistic practices, because of the experience of miraculous healings, or through a combination of these two factors. TWO, migration patterns. Every church visited thus far is the result of Christian migrations, sometimes unto land held to be spirit-infested. Other Karens didn't dare occupy such land. THREE, an apparently interlocking system of evangelism, pastoral care, and Christian education that both gained converts and then nurtured and educated those converts. If it proves out that the Karen churches did have such a system, it would provide an interesting contrast with the Presbyterians' northern Thai missionary work which largely failed to develop such a system for its local churches. FOUR, the role of Karen educational institutions in church life. Karen Christians have strongly emphasized education for their children, but there seems to have been mixed consequences for the churches. Educated children tend to move away from Karen locations. Older church members also complain that the more educated their children are the less committed to the church they are. FIVE, the role and/or non-role of missionaries. It is striking that Western missionaries appear to have had little to do with the founding and early lives of all the churches visited thus far. The only missionaries ever mentioned are Karen missionaries sent to Thailand by the Karen Baptist churches in Burma. One informant argued, however, that the missionaries played a large, if distant role in providing over all direction and financial assistance to Karen missions.

SIX, the Christian role in modernization. It is also striking that thus far tentative questions about differences between Karen churches and other Karens, about Karen identity, and about the relationship of Karen Christian thinking to the animistic heritage of the Karen people are greeted with puzzlement and even non-comprehension. My first impression is that Karen Christians understand themselves in distinction to and over against Karens generally. Several informants emphasized that Karen Christians are better educated, economically better off, healthier, and by implication more progressive than other Karens. In the Musikee area that we're studying, I was

told that nearly all of the government school teachers are Karen Christians. Most local civil servants are also Christians.

Most of these patterns or issues aren't unique to Thai Karen Christians. They are themes central to the study of the Protestant (and probably Catholic) experience in northern Thailand (and probably all of Thailand).

HeRD #410 - The Gospel of Jesus

"The gospel of Jesus--the good news of Jesus' own message--is that there is a way of being that moves beyond both secular and religious conventional wisdom. The path of transformation of which Jesus spoke leads from a life of requirements and measuring up (whether to culture or to God) to a life of relationship with God. It leads from a life of anxiety to a life of peace and trust. It leads from the bondage of self-preoccupation to the freedom of self-forgetfulness. It leads from life centered in culture to life centered in God." (Borg, MEETING JESUS AGAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME, page 88)

HeRD #411 - Institutionalizing the FFFM

Bobby Nishimoto's history of Thai Pentecostals and Charismatics traces the tensions the Finnish Free Foreign Mission experienced in establishing an organizational structure for its churches. He notes that the FFFM had long held the view that ecclesiastical institutionalization is dangerous to the working of the Holy Spirit and resisted attempts to create a national structure for its churches. Finally in 1987 the mission gave in and agreed, reluctantly, to the election of a national committee for its churches. Nishimoto gives a number of reasons for the establishment of the Full Gospel Fellowship in Thailand. The immediate cause was the loss of a number of congregations in Loei Province to other groups. More generally, many FFFM churches had apparently been left largely on their own without support. They had no larger organization to turn to for assistance. Many of these churches had no pastors, and they had long been losing members because of their weak congregational lives. Nishimoto points out that even in 1987 the FFFM's missionaries didn't want to make this move. Their Thai colleagues, however, insisted, and they gave in. The first national committee was composed of 7 Thai members and 3 missionaries. The Rev. Boonmark Piramun, was elected the first moderator. (Nishimoto, STORY OF PENTECOSTALS AND CHARISMATICS IN THAILAND, p. 97).

It seems that the issue of organization was viewed differently by the missionaries and their Thai co-workers. The missionaries stood on ideological-theological ground. They feared ecclesiastical organization would hamper the work of the Holy Spirit among the churches. They believed that New Testament principles require the independence of local churches. Thai church leaders, however, saw the issue in terms of power and local church life. According to Nishimoto (p. 82), they first raised the issue of power-sharing in 1970, but no changes were made at that time. Nishimoto believes that the FFFM's failure to change was one of several issues that caused a number of Thai workers to leave the FFFM. We can assume that those workers observed that the FFFM itself had a structure and even formed a legal "muniti" (foundation) in 1970. If the mission has a national structure, they must have wondered, why shouldn't the churches also have one? For the missionaries, in sum, the issue was biblical and theological/ideological. For Thai church leaders it was ecclesiastical and political.

HeRD #412 - SDA Experiences

Very little is known about the history of the Seventh Day Adventists in Thailand, even by the SDA churches and institutions themselves it seems. It came as a surprise to me to learn that

the SDA's Siam Mission was founded in 1919, much earlier than I had supposed. The Office of History recently acquired a copy of *LIGHT DAWNS OVER ASIA*, 1990, a compendium of SDA mission histories in Asia. Sunti Sorajjakool wrote the history of SDA work in Thailand. His summary of the SDA experience in Thailand (p. 254) is informative. He writes,

"Thailand is a Buddhist country, and Thais are satisfied with their religion. This is one of the main reasons it is hard to win the Buddhists into the Adventist Churches.

"After working in Thailand for sixty-nine years, the Church has a membership of 11,777. Of this number, 5,432 are refugees. The rate of church growth is very slow compared to some Christian countries in the Far East.

"Medical work is very effective in breaking down prejudice. The Advents hospitals have been instrumental in winning some patients to Christ.

"Boarding schools are much more effective than day schools. Through the three boarding school each year there are about sixty to eighty baptisms, compared to two to five baptism a year in the day schools.

"Public evangelism and personal work by pastors and laymen are still effective ways of winning souls. People living in rural areas are much more responsive than those living in the cities. Most of the baptisms are from rural areas and tribal groups. The church should find new ways of reaching the city people--finding out what they are interested in and what their needs are, and looking for ways to meet their interests and needs.

"Changes come fast these days. The Church cannot afford to use the same old methods it used ten or fifteen years ago. It must keep up with the times by using new approaches that can meet the needs of the city people as well as of the village and tribal people."

HeRD #413 - Reflections on SDA Experiences

HeRD #412 reported on Sunti Sorajjakool's summary of Seventh Day Adventist missionary experience in Thailand. Sunti argues in his summary that it's hard to convert Buddhists because they're satisfied with their religion which explains why SDA work in Thailand has resulted in fewer converts than in many other Asian nations. Medical and educational institutions are important forms of SDA evangelism. Rural people and tribal peoples are easier to convert than urban people. There is a need for new methods of evangelism.

Those who know Christian work in Thailand won't be surprised by any of this. I'd like to pick up on a couple of points, however. First, we find here again the central, almost exclusive emphasis on evangelism typical of most Protestant missionary work. The ideology of evangelism is so pervasive that it goes largely unnoticed in most Protestant circles. It's unconsciously assumed that church work means evangelism and that evangelistic success is the measure of a mission's overall success. Second, it's one thing to call for new methods and approaches to keep up with "the changing times." It's quite another thing to actually unearth those methods. New methods, if they're not just gimmicks, imply new perspectives, a willingness to consider new data, and an ability to discard ineffective ideas and attitudes. Discovering new methods suggests rethinking goals as well as strategies. I suspect that few of those associated with Protestant missions and church work are willing to go that far in searching out new methods. And I also suspect that supposedly new approaches based on the same old ideology of evangelism won't bring the significant change Sunti himself seeks.

British-North American Protestantism, historically, has conducted an impressive, often highly successful world-wide public relations campaign (we call it evangelism). It invented many of the techniques now generally used in public relations and in modern entertainment. What is it in the Thai religious attitude, so frequently denigrated and abused by the practitioners of Protestant public relations, that by-and-large effectively resists Protestant blandishment?

HeRD #414 - Ideas & Attitudes

Charles R. Taber, in *THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH WITH US: "CULTURE" IN MODERN PROTESTANT MISSIONS*, states in his introduction,

"It is the major thesis of this essay that the ideas and attitudes about culture displayed by missionaries are crucially shaped by their own ambient culture, by their theological beliefs, and by their personal experiences; and that these ideas and attitudes in turn crucially affect for good or ill how they understand and do mission. This is true even when the ideas are tacit and inchoate; it is of course also true when they constitute concepts which are quite explicit and even highly self-confident." (p. xvi)

Which is to say that missionary ideas, attitudes, values, and beliefs are one crucial element in the shaping of the church in Thailand. I use the North American image of the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers to introduce Thai church history to students at McGilvary Theological Seminary. These two great rivers flow independently of each other for hundreds of miles until they join. At that point the muddy waters of the Missouri mix with the clearer waters of the Mississippi to form a new consistency, not as clear as the one or as muddy as the other. Thai Christianity is like that. It's a meeting of Asia and the Europe/North America in which the ideas and attitudes of the missionary West inter-mingle with those of Buddhist-animist Thailand and becomes something that contains elements of both but isn't exactly, completely either.

HeRD #415 - No Big Change

The establishment of the "Church of Christ in Siam" in 1934 is generally looked upon as a key event in the history of Thai Protestantism, at least by those in the CCT. In some ways it is a seminal event, but if viewed from the perspective of 1934 itself the founding of the CCT was anything but earthshaking. The first General Assembly consistently affirmed continuity with the past and took no actions that could be considered serious steps towards a truly independent life of its own. Nothing so summarized the modesty with which the CCT started out its life as the words of the Rev. Paul A. Eakin, Field Secretary of the American Presbyterian Mission (APM). The minutes of the 1st General Assembly record that, "Missionary Paul A. Eakin explained officially the relationship between the American Presbyterian Mission and the Church of Christ in Siam. In sum, he stated that the two bodies would work together and that the Presbyterian Mission would gradually turn various activities over to the Church of Christ in Siam according to how much the Church of Christ in Siam is able to receive."

The atmosphere of the General Assembly was such that these words were most likely heard more with relief than surprise. They signaled an indefinite continuation of the Thai church's dependency on outside leadership and funding. The CCT of 1934, then, was more of a vision for what the future could be rather than a present reality. The General Assembly opened doors, suggested directions, and affirmed traditions that have had a large bearing on what the CCT has become, and to that extent it was one significant moment in the much longer process of the creation of the CCT. That process is still going on today. Its significance, however, lies in the fact that the General Assembly of 1934 regularly voted for no change or slow change rather

than major or rapid change. The infant CCT, one supposes, could hardly have been expected to do anything else, esp. in the 1930s when the very concept of a "national church" was still foreign to most Thai Christians. It does seem paradoxical, nonetheless, that while the APM had pushed its churches so strenuously towards "independence," when the moment arrived it made so little of it. It appeared content with the form rather than the substance of Thai church independence.

HeRD #416 - Generations

According to Jouko Ruohomaki's thesis on the history of the Finnish Free Foreign Mission, Ulla and Verner Raasina began slum work in Thon Buri in 1981. These pioneers of the FFFM initially hoped to involve the Thon Buri Full Gospel Church in their work, but after early success met with resistance and disinterest. The work fell to them and other FFFM missionaries. Ruohomaki writes, "Concerning [the] Thomburi Full Gospel Church Mr. Raassina told that he had hoped for more understanding and patience from the church members in this project, because when this church was established most of the members were slum dwellers themselves. They were sick, tuberculotics, unemployed, without any trade skills, even some were opium smokers. When these people had experienced regeneration their social status changed also. Already in the second and the third generation there were well-to-do and skilled people and many have academic education. Now there is a great need to get this new educated generation to understand the responsibility in helping others. It is the time to educate a social conscience." (p. 134)

There are lots of themes to pick up on here. Yet again we find that conversion frequently brings people into closer contact with the "modern" world, its benefits and its values. Christianity in Thailand, over the decades, seems to have been more of a vehicle for social change (and mobility) than religious change. In the process, it seems to lose early visions of compassion. Ruohomaki's analysis of the Thon Buri situation suggests that these problems are also not limited to any one denomination or theological persuasion.

HeRD #417 - The Impoverished Pastor

We've made the point several times that the CCT's northern Thai churches have made significant progress in pastoral care over the last two decades. Pastoral salaries, an important factor in that progress, have risen steadily even in the last five years. The following excerpt from Ach. Kasem Apiwong's "ministry thesis" [see HeRDs #388-390] suggests that this progress hasn't reached every pastor.

Ach. Kasem found that the lowest paid CCT pastor of a northern Thai church was receiving just 2,000 baht (US\$67) per month. He writes, "The researcher [Ach. Kasem] had a chance to talk with this pastor. It's actually true that this is all he receives. He related that he had finished an upper grade of high school and also received a theological certificate from a seminary (outside the CCT). His wife has also studied theology, and they have two children. They have to rent a house at a cost of 800 baht per month (an elder in the church is the owner). His wife has no income, but the church does take up occasional special offerings for the family and also provides her with some special work opportunities. While it's true that only a few pastors live in these conditions, we shouldn't overlook them; because they show us that there might be several different ways in which churches treat pastors. Pastors may have to be willing to live with conditions such as this if they don't want to lose their jobs and income."

It's true that pastors and other church workers should be willing to make financial sacrifices. My own research into CCT pastoral care found that quite a few pastors were willing to do so, but none of them felt happy about it. They mostly felt taken advantage of, and all of

them worried about their families having to live in or on the edge of poverty. There's also an issue of justice involved here.

HeRD #418 - Buri Ram Success

Bobby Nishimoto's *THE STORY OF PENTECOSTALS AND CHARISMATICS IN THAILAND* (Thai Edition, p. 90) tells the story of Ach. Sumruey Simsiriwat, pastor of the Full Gospel Church in Buri Ram, and his work with that church in the 1980s. Ach. Sumruey went to the Buri Ram Church intending to lay strong foundations for the congregation's life. The Buri Ram Church was a small, Pentecostal church with a history of problems. It had experienced the loss of a number of members. Ach. Sumruey emphasized three things in his ministry, namely: evangelism, members taking responsibility for church life, and tithing. He met with a good response, esp. concerning tithing. By 1988 the church could fully support its pastor and was growing in membership, which reached 100 by 1995.

This brief story points to some common themes in pastoral care in Thailand. First, the assumed measures of success are clear. They are growth in membership and in giving. Second, it appears that the Buri Ram Church and its pastor took "self-support" (meaning the ability to fully support a pastor) as its goal. The church's location in a provincial center gave it significant advantages over rural churches in this regard. Its members undoubtedly include civil servants, business people, and others with regular salaries. Third, it required the "right" pastor to move the congregation along in a new path. It would be interesting to know more about Ach. Sumruey, his personality, his leadership style, and his pastoral skills. Fourth, we can assume that the Buri Ram Church was the "right" church as well. A success of this sort requires strengths on the part of both the pastor and the congregation. As I've already indicated its location was probably one factor that made it "right". Finally, in spite of the image of Pentecostal success created by two or three mega-churches in Bangkok, the Buri Ram Church success parallels the more modest but still substantial success stories of church-pastor relations elsewhere.

HeRD #419 - Chiang Rai Success

Nishimoto's *THE STORY OF PENTECOSTALS AND CHARISMATICS IN THAILAND* (Thai Edition, p. 90-91) reports another success in pastoral care, this time among the Finnish Free Foreign Mission churches in Chiang Rai Province. He reports that in 1979 the Rev. Lauri Ahonen and family, only two years in Thailand, moved to Chiang Rai. Ahonen found that the ten FFFM churches in Chiang Rai were almost completely dependent on foreign funds for pastoral care. Other FFFM missionaries had learned through bitter experience that if they didn't maintain pastoral salaries the pastors would leave to work for other missions or groups. The pastors themselves preferred getting their salaries from the FFFM, as they didn't feel they could depend on the churches. These churches were mostly small, poor, rural congregations. Only 3 of them gave anything towards paying their pastor's salary, and their contributions were small.

Ahonen set out to change this situation. He held seminars and meetings that pushed the idea of "self-support." It took two to three years before the churches began to respond, but by 1985 the FFFM reported that all of the Chiang Rai churches were entirely self-supporting. Although Ahonen remained in Chiang Rai only three years, Nishimoto gives him full credit for this significant change. (p. 91)

One wants to know more. What was Ahonen's approach? Why did he succeed where others failed? Why did the churches respond positively? What were the reactions of the pastors? What salary levels are we talking about? One thing is clear in this case. Change required missionary initiative. From a CCT perspective this is striking, since the movement towards a fully self-

supporting pastoral care system has come from within the churches itself. One is also struck by the apparently quick and whole-hearted response of the churches. CCT churches have been less responsive on the matter of self-supporting pastoral care, and not a few northern Thai CCT churches remain content to depend on lay leadership rather than struggle to pay a pastor.

HeRD #420 - You're Fooling Yourself

Ach. (now Dr.) Saad Chaiwan wrote an article in the December 1975 issue of CHURCH NEWS (khao krischak) entitled "Questionnaires and the Church's Ministry." (We should note that CHURCH NEWS is the official magazine of the Church of Christ in Thailand). Ach. Saad wrote, "The greatest failing of Christian institutions and churches in Thailand today is that they blithely assume they are progressing or expanding. They believe that church members have a strong faith in God and that [church] institutions are successful in their instruction, or their service to society, or their administration. Pastors, clergy, church leaders, and leaders of the various institutions rest proudly in their successes, which they blithely think have met or are meeting their objectives." He then declares, "Believe it, you're fooling yourself." Ach. Saad goes on to pose a set of rhetorical questions intended to point out that church leaders and the administrators of religious institutions have failed to use interviews, questionnaires, and other research techniques to evaluate their work. He writes, "We can just about say that a full 100% never did these things. Why is it that clergy, pastors, and institutional leaders don't get results from their work? Because they've lost themselves in the idea that they're already doing what's right. They don't see their own faults." Ach. Saad argues that these leaders generally blame someone else for the problems they're facing and states, "We should stop fooling ourselves and start examining ourselves and our work. We should do this so that our churches and institutions grow both spiritually and physically...Let's survey and critically research the work of the institutions and churches to see what are their strengths and weaknesses, their outstanding and weak points. And let's correct the problems according to the facts that we discover." (p. 24)
AMEN

HeRD #421 - Sunday School I

Sukonrak Pannya recently submitted a "ministerial thesis" to the McGilvary Faculty of Theology on the subject, "Research on the Sunday School Problems for the Children of the Uttaradit Churches." She studied both the context and the actual conduct of Sunday schools in three rural CCT congregations in Uttaradit Province. She found a strong commitment to providing Sunday school in all three congregations as well as a number of serious problems facing these churches in actually fulfilling that commitment.

One of her most important findings was that a major issue is the churches' social and religious contexts. She tested for three factors that she felt might have an impact on the number of children attending Sunday school, namely birth control, migration, and church splits. She found that birth control has had a major impact on the those numbers. In 1977, 17 babies were born in the three churches. In 1996 there were only 3 babies born. There was a steady drop in births until 1991, at which time the drop leveled off. She also found that migration has played a role in reducing the number of children in Sunday school. Of a total of 117 children born in the three churches between 1977 and 1996, 23 (19.7%) had moved elsewhere either to study or be with their parents. Most of these parents moved to larger cities to seek employment. Finally, although two of the three churches suffered major splits, she found that they lost only 10 children as a result. Ach. Sukonrak concludes that these splits didn't have as significant a direct impact as either migration or birth control. In any event, it's clear from her thesis that all three churches are now experiencing serious difficulties in providing a Sunday school education for

their children. Some of these difficulties--having to teach students of widely varying ages in one class, for example--have to do with small numbers of students.

HeRD #422 - Sunday School II

HeRD #421 reported some general findings made by Ach. Sukonrak Pannya in her thesis on problems facing the Sunday schools of three rural churches in Uttaradit Province. As part of her research, Ach. Sukonrak distributed a questionnaire to the parents of children studying in these Sunday schools. Among other things, she tried to ascertain the parents' commitment to Sunday school. She found that commitment relatively high. In one question, she asked how important learning about the Christian faith had been to the parents themselves when they were younger. Out of 30 responding, 18 (60%) indicated that learning about their faith had been "Extremely Important" to them. Only one answered that it had been "Not Very" important. She also asked them how frequently they sent their children to Sunday school and found that in spite of many problems, including a lack of teachers, just over half of the parents claimed they were sending their children to Sunday school at least three times a month.

These three churches, like many other CCT churches in the North, are suffering from a lack of students, of appropriate curriculum materials, and a dearth of trained teachers. There has been some inclination to point to these problems as further evidence of the inherent weaknesses of the churches themselves. It appears, however, that "the problem" is not a lack of interest, concern, or appreciation for the importance of Sunday school. It also is clear from HeRD #421 that some of the problems are caused by general social trends over which the churches have no control. Our data base here is very slim, and Ach. Sukonrak's research is not that of a professional. It, however, opens the possibility that "the answer" to Sunday school is not somehow "reviving" the churches but rather providing them with specific tools, ideas, and alternatives for Christian education. Among other things, it's clear that someone needs to start thinking about and experimenting with viable alternatives to Sunday school itself.

HeRD #423 - The Jesus Seminar & Thai Church History

The "Jesus Seminar" is a controversial group of "Jesus scholars" who are attempting to ascertain the actual words and actions of Jesus. It treats Jesus as an ordinary historical figure and the New Testament books as typical ancient documents. As described by Carl W. Conrad in a document entitled "Jesus at 2000" (see the HarperCollins Web site), the very first premise of the Jesus Seminar is that, "The historical Jesus is to be distinguished from the gospel portraits of him." It also claims that Jesus' teachings were circulated by word of mouth as an oral tradition. "The oral mentality," the Seminar holds, "remembers, not the precise words, but the core of what was said." The Jesus Seminar concludes that, "Only a small portion of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the gospels was actually spoken by him." Its whole orientation towards the Bible is that, "The Bible should be studied without being bound to theological claims made by the church."

The Jesus Seminar provides an important model for the study of Thai church history. If the study of the church's past is to be of value to the church, it has to be de-theologized. We have to be able to stand outside of our own faith traditions and treat them as the human institutions they are. The study of history tells us nothing about God, and any claims historians make, as historians, about God or other "spiritual powers" should be rejected out of hand. It treats evidential materials in certain ways to discover what humans have done in the past. Historiography is a tool for the study of OUR past, not God's. Its particular value is that it helps us to see the church's humanness. It de-theologizes the church. De-theologizing the church through historical study, however, leads back to a "faith purpose". All Christian theologies are

dangerous. They always tend towards idolatry. They always tend to confuse human attempts to understand God with God. Historiography, thus, can be useful to the church's on going prophetic critic of itself.

HeRD #424 - Christianity a Judaism

We've noted a number of times in past HeRDs that historians are re-writing the history of the earliest church. They're fleshing out the implications of the church's Jewish origins by arguing that Christianity only gradually emerged and separated from Judaism in a process that took many decades. Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner note in *JUDAISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT* (pp. 4-5) that Christians have long treated the Jewish elements of early Christianity as an alien presence. They write, "But the earliest Christians insisted that they formed 'Israel' and devoted rigorous thought to the demonstration that theirs was the Torah's sole valid meaning and their Founder its unique medium of fulfillment. In due course they produced the New Testament, but for at least the first hundred years of Christianity their only revealed Scripture was the same Torah that (the rest of) Israel received as God's revealed teaching. So far as possible, these same people appealed to the Torah to validate their faith and studied the Torah to explain it." They continue, "Consequently, to distinguish between the religious world of the New Testament and an alien Judaism denies the authors of the New Testament books their most fiercely held claim and renders incomprehensible much that they said." Chilton and Neusner then argue that early Christianity has to be seen as "a Judaism." They state, "That simple observation explains why here we see the New Testament as the statement of Judaism (more suitably, a Judaism, among many), and further accounts for our insistence that Christianity's practices and beliefs for its writers and their audience constituted (a) Judaism, and are to be interpreted as such."

Chilton and Neusner's views on the relationship of early Christianity to Judaism offer a potentially exciting research perspective for the study of early Thai Protestantism. The historical situations are quite different, but can we in some senses treat Thai Protestantism as "a Buddhism"? It's clear to all that there's been a lot of "carry over" from Buddhism(s) into Thai Protestantism(s). Much more study needs to be done on that process. Chilton and Neusner's perspective offers an interesting framework for such study.

HeRD #425 - Images of the Church

Where do our images of the church come from? The Thai Protestant image comes in important measure, I think, from its revivalistic and evangelistic heritage. A long series of articles and news items that appeared in *CHURCH NEWS* in the late 1940s and the 1950s describe the work of Ach. Puang Akkapin, the CCT Moderator. Ach. Puang made frequent forays into all parts of the CCT holding revivalistic and evangelistic services. His purpose was to enthuse the church with revivalism as a way to equip it for evangelism. Taken together, the articles project a general image of the church and suggest that the churches should be alive, on fire, enthused, and committed to the end that they would actively and effectively involve themselves in evangelism. Ach. Puang's campaigns and those of a number of others, including Ach. Tongkham Puntupongse, shared the older Presbyterian missionary perspective that evangelism is the church's main mission. What is striking is that the activity of evangelism appears to define the nature of the church, rather than the nature of the church defining its activities. The classic missionary view of the church virtually defined it as a permanent evangelistic society.

It's also striking that the revivalistic-evangelistic image emphasizes overt emotional "heat" and projects a "hot" image of the church quite out of keeping with Thai society's general

religious orientation, one that tends towards contemplation, detachment, and a "cool" heart. Thai Buddhism meditatively extinguishes desire. Thai Protestantism battles sin. One wonders how meaningful a hot, fighting religion is to a society that values and deeply adheres to a cool, contemplative religious orientation. Others would argue, however, that the "hot" Protestant revivalistic-evangelistic orientation is really more well adapted to the TV-world of Thai young people. It does seem true that youth music fests & Christian revivalistic fests share a common format. Lots of room for debate on this one.

HeRD #426 - The Satisfied Pastor

We looked at Ach. Kasem Apiwong's research into the state of the life of northern Thai CCT pastors and their families in HeRDs #388-390. His thesis raises further issues, esp. concerning the feelings of pastors about their financial situations. Ach. Kasem asked the pastors if they were satisfied with the package of benefits (medical, retirement, etc.) they were receiving. The scores were relatively low and reflected definite feelings that these benefits are inadequate. He also asked about the balance between income and expenses for pastors' families, and here the scores were even lower. There is a strong feeling that incomes are not meeting family needs. Ach. Kasem, however, also asked pastors if they are "satisfied with their condition of life." Here the scores were considerably higher, with 60 of the 69 respondents stating they were "somewhat satisfied" (24), "satisfied" (32), or "very satisfied" (4). While these scores still reflect some dissatisfaction, both Ach. Kasem's research and my own have found that the feelings pastors evince concerning the state of their lives are more positive than actual physical and financial conditions would seemingly warrant. The responses to other questions in Ach. Kasem's questionnaire indicate that these are real feelings, not just something stated on a form. When asked, for example, whether they would consider moving to a better paying job, most pastors responded negatively. They claim to feel relatively good about being a pastor. They generally feel they're honored, accepted, and making a good contribution to the life of the church they serve. Through all of this runs an understandable thread of ambivalence. Scores aren't high, but they tend toward that direction. All of this is a matter crying for more systematic study. We can conclude, tentatively, that these pastors willingly, but unenthusiastically, sacrifice financial well-being to continue in their chosen profession.

HeRD #427 - Things That Fail to Happen

"History often is most deeply affected by things that fail to happen, by leaders who do not lead, by groups that acquiesce in the flow of events, by prophets who do not protest, and by churches and sects that, for reasons of fear, greed, or sloth, compromise with the world and 'make no waves.'"

Davis Winston, "Buddhism and the Modernization of Japan," HISTORY OF RELIGIONS 28, 4(May 1989), 306.

HeRD #428 - Reactive Adaptation

Davis Winston, in an article entitled "Buddhism and the Modernization of Japan," [HISTORY OF RELIGIONS 28, 4(May 1989), 335] presents the following general conclusions based on his study of the role of Buddhism in Japanese modernization during the Meiji era. He writes, "If the ideas of institutional religion are as fluid as I think they are, one is led to expect three things: (1) that religious notions will usually be involved in social and historical change not as the initiators of that change but as bystanders or collaborators, (2) that religion will respond to change by modifying its own ideas and practices, and (3) that this modification will

take place not just to accommodate changing conditions in religion's secular environment but also in response to the needs of religious institutions."

HeRD, you will note, is constantly proposing interesting lines of research to follow. Here's another one. It would be fascinating to study Thai Protestantism, esp. in the last fifty-plus years, to determine to what extent it exemplifies or contradicts Winston's three points. I suspect that it largely exemplifies the general type of reactive adaptation to changing social circumstances that Winston outlines.

HeRD #429 - Purity Revisited

In reaction to earlier HeRDs on Jesus' views concerning purity and compassion, Dr. John Hamlin, former President of Thailand Theological Seminary (now the McGilvary Faculty of Theology) and an Old Testament scholar, replied, "Herb: I've been thinking about the matter of purity and/or compassion.

"The Hebrew word *qadosh* is translated "holy" in English versions. So we find a *holy* God who "shows himself *holy* by righteousness" (Isa. 5:16), whose "name is *holy*", and who "dwells in the high and *holy* place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit" (Isa. 57:15). God says to his people "You shall be *holy* for I the Lord am *holy* (Lev. 19:2), and this includes compassion for the poor (vv. 9-10), integrity in word and action (vv. 11-12), protection of the rights of the neighbor (v. 13), especially the handicapped (v. 14), no hate (v.17) or vengeance (v. 18), in a word love for neighbor as the self (v. 18).

"The problem is that this word *qadosh* has been translated into Thai as "borisut" which means "clean" or "pure" as I remember. The only other translation I know of is "saksit" preferred by Catholics, I believe. It emphasizes the otherness, the mystery of divine presence, but does not seem to me to carry the full meaning of the Hebrew usage, especially in the prophets.

"Perhaps "borisut" was too resonant with Thai society, at least one aspect of it. The translators may not have had the time or the knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. On the other hand, what word would be adequate? I know Herb Grether wrestled with this a lot.

"Peace. John

"John Hamlin 8:47 pm 06/25/97"

HeRD #430 - Oral Tradition In Reverse

Oral traditions come before written texts. We all know that. The sayings of Jesus, for example, were preserved as oral traditions for some time before they were written down. Northern Thai church history provides us with an example of the reverse, a written body of material that was transformed into an oral tradition. The Presbyterian Laos Mission ("Laos" meaning northern Thailand) Press produced a series of northern Thai script hymnals, the last of which was published in 1914. Not long after that date, probably just after 1920, the churches began to use central Thai hymns and hymnals in place of the northern Thai. This change was part of the larger process by which central Thai replaced northern Thai as the "official" dialect for worship. We know very little about this change, but we can assume that it didn't proceed uniformly. That is, some churches most likely switched to central Thai early on and others stayed with the northern Thai for some years. But what eventually happened, beginning in the 1920s, was that an older generation was versed in northern Thai hymnology, while their children learned only central Thai hymns at church. (We should understand here that virtually all of the

tunes in both scripts were Western tunes.) The use of the northern Thai hymns was further discouraged by the fact that the younger generation couldn't read northern Thai. Government and mission schools taught only in central Thai.

The published northern Thai hymnals, fell into near total disuse. But, or so it appears from oral history interviews, parents still taught their children to sing the old hymns at home. In a few cases they taught them the script as well, but for the most part the children either had to remember the hymns or to write them down in central script. Some older northern Thai Christians today, those in their later 60s and upwards, can still sing from memory hymns contained in the northern Thai hymnal although they themselves never could read northern Thai. These hymns, that is, have survived as an oral tradition taught at home long after the demise of the northern hymnal. The written text, thus, preceded the oral tradition, a fascinating reversal of the process. It seems, however, that the "middle generation" has not passed those hymns on to their children. The use of northern Thai hymns is all but dead and memory of them is fading rapidly.

HeRD #431 - Review Note Again

HeRD continues to grow, and over the last month we've added a number of new recipients. It may be helpful, as we start up in September, to review briefly where we've been and where we're going. Entries concerning Presbyterian missions, esp. in the North, dominated much of HeRD's contents during its first year or so, which began in August 1995. Soon afterwards, however, quite a few entries on early church history also began showing up. By 1997 we began to branch out considerably, and Presbyterian topics have all but disappeared from HeRD. In May HeRD contained a number of different subjects including a series on sheep-stealing. We also had a series on pastoral ministry issues, one that grew out of the research of an M.Div. student at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology. In June we had items on Catholic history in Thailand, on missionaries and indigenization, and a longer series on ministries with seniors that, again, was based on research done by a masters' student at McGilvary. In July we really skipped around, looking at Adventist, Pentecostal, and CCT histories. We had a couple of items on Sunday school issues based on research done by yet another McGilvary student. There has been the odd plea for more research and less rhetoric thrown in as well. Through out there have been occasional items on the early church, one or two of which stirred up some objections and questions. I've been playing with the idea that Thai Protestantism is as much an expression of Thai Buddhism as it's an expression of its Western Christian roots. Not everybody is taken with the idea.

Coming up are a few items on the Book of the Acts that come out of my research preparation for a course on New Testament church history. Then we'll have quite a few on research into the Thailand Assemblies of God. Reflections on Thai Pentecostalism will be a major focus for us in September.

Let me take this opportunity to thank Philip Hughes once again for his special set of HeRDs in August. Welcome to our newcomers.

HeRD #432 - Accommodation

Some months ago I had the privilege of listening to an elder preach a sermon on the relationship of Thai customs to Christianity. He raised the question of giving donations to the local temple for various occasions. The elder, who is quite conservative theologically, asked his congregation straight out, "Can we give donations to the temple?" One would have expected him to answer in the negative, but he didn't. He argued, instead, that Christians can give financial gifts to temples. His rationale is intriguing . He cited Jesus' statement, "Give to Caesar what

belongs to Caesar and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21) and stated that after we've given our tithe to the church, we are free to dispense with the rest of our income. We've given to God what belongs to God. It's perfectly acceptable, thus, to give some of what's left to the temple. In fact, it's important for Christians to show "namchai" to their Buddhist neighbors by doing so. "Namchai" amounts to a generous, other-oriented kindness and concern for the other's well-being. In this case, it can be translated as "love for one's neighbor."

This is a striking example of "doing theology" in a northern Thai setting. In this case, the elder worked out his theology from two traditions. As a good Protestant, he began his argument from Scripture. He specifically cited one passage and alluded to another (love your neighbor). These two passages instructed him to love his Buddhist neighbors and gave him permission to do so, but only after he'd affirmed his primary allegiance to God through tithing. It is especially worth noting that he forged his specific action on the anvil of northern Thai values, ones he shares with his neighbors. In his context, making an occasional donation to the temple is a way of showing "namchai" (love). His indigenous theology, thus, affirms key northern Thai values while discarding narrower Western Protestant strictures.

HeRD #433 - Looking at Acts

The next few HeRDs contain some personal reflections on the Book of the Acts as history. Their only direct connection to Thailand is that they are the result of my preparation for a course in New Testament church history.

The first verses in Acts (1:1-5) point to an awkward problem that the historian faces in his or her study of Acts. Acts is "holy history". It tells the "history" of the Holy Spirit. That's where the problem starts. History, as I've argued before, can't document the activities of the Holy Spirit. It can only deal with what people BELIEVE about the work of the Spirit. The historian, then, necessarily disassociates herself from the faith claims of Acts and proceeds with the single goal of mining Acts for the historical data it contains. And that's where the problem appears full-blown, because in "mining" Acts the historian has to also make decisions about the reliability and veracity of Acts as a source of historical data. How trustworthy is it? And, in making that decision, historians get tangled up with the concept of holy history. They have to decide how little or much writers of holy history corrupt historical data. In making that decision concerning Acts, historians run the gamut from total acceptance to near total rejection of its historical accuracy. So far as I can tell personal theological stance has as much to do with their attitudes as "dispassionate" historiography. The simian fundies lovingly embrace Acts and naively think it tells it like it was. The pinko liberals don't believe a word of it. They naively write Acts off as nothing but Pauline sectarianism. It is impossible, in short, for historians to ignore the fact that Acts is theology and simply dig out its historical content. They have to decide whether and to what extent the theology corrupts the historical data.

HeRD #434 - John & Jesus

Some church historians contend that Jesus was originally a disciple of John the Baptist. Acts 1:21-22 encourages that theory. The disciples, in this passage, were selecting someone to take Judas' place among the Twelve. Acts states, "He must be one of the men who were in our group during the whole time that the Lord Jesus traveled about with us, beginning from the time John preached his message of baptism until the day Jesus was taken up from us to heaven." (TEV) If Matthew and Mark are correct, Jesus didn't begin his public ministry until John was put in prison (Mt. 4:12; Mk 1:14. Luke doesn't affirm or contradict this point.) In the Synoptics, Jesus only calls his disciples AFTER he began his public ministry. That means, if Acts 1 is accurate, that Jesus and the Twelve were associated with each other BEFORE Jesus began his

public ministry. That would mean they were associated before Jesus' disciples became HIS disciples. A viable explanation seems to be that Jesus and the Twelve were originally part of John's group of disciples. The Gospel of John adds to the intrigue. According to John 1:35-42, one of Jesus' first disciples, Andrew, was originally a disciple of John. This little gaggle of biblical citations doesn't prove that Jesus and his disciples were originally fellow disciples of John. On the other hand, such an explanation of these facts is plausible and explains how Jesus first knew who he would call to be his inner circle of disciples. It also suggests that the Good News Jesus preached was influenced by his experience with John. Perhaps it was John who first awakened Jesus' deep religious concerns and faith. Or, again, perhaps John first helped Jesus articulate such concerns, wherever they may have originated. This all isn't quite pure speculation, because all four of the Gospels and Acts point to some special relationship between Jesus and John. It does help us, furthermore, to appreciate more fully the human side of Jesus. He, like the rest of us, was profoundly influenced by his culture, society, and particular individuals he knew.

HeRD #435 - Something Happened

Christianity is a historical fact, or, more precisely, an unimaginably huge conglomerate of such facts. Accounting for it isn't easy, particularly since the church insists that it is the result of a series of miraculous events. We run, yet again, into that problem that historiography can't deal directly with such events.

This brings us to Acts 2:1-4, the account of the Pentecost appearance of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. Whatever the reality behind the experience, this account makes it clear that the disciples shared in a deep mystical experience. They saw a vision of flames and heard unearthly sounds. They spoke in other languages. However skeptical we want to be about Acts, this account offers a cogent, credible, and even likely explanation of the origins of Christianity. Jesus' disciples had some sort of a shared experiences that deeply impressed them. Those experiences caused them to assert that the dead Jesus wasn't dead, an incredibly wild claim by any measure. These experiences were evidently shared by hundreds of people. They didn't flow naturally from the events--the crucifixion of Jesus--that took place prior to it. They contradicted those events. Now, as historians, how do we account for the emergence of the Christian religion? It is harder, for me at least, to believe that it was just a hoax perpetrated by a bunch of Galilean peasants than to accept as historical fact that those peasants shared in a mystical experience that led them to behave in a way that otherwise is highly unlikely. It is probable that something like Pentecost happened, although as historians we can't know more than that with any degree of certainty. We just don't have sufficient data on the matter. One can account for Christianity, in any event, only in terms of its own faith. It exists because of the beliefs of its earliest adherents. Their beliefs, in turn, were shaped by three experiences. The experiences of Pentecost, of the Risen Lord, and of the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

HeRD #436 - Galilee & Jerusalem

In both Acts 1:11 and 2:7, the earliest disciples are referred to as Galileans, a term that some historians think was the earliest name for the Jesus Movement or Jesus Sect. However that may be, it is true that the Jesus Movement originated in Galilee and was dominated by Galileans, including Jesus, of course. There are traditions from the later Galilean churches that claim for themselves the honor of being the first churches. They claimed that they were founded directly by the resurrected Jesus. If Acts is at all accurate historically, however, then we have to say that the international expansion of the Jesus Movement started in Jerusalem, which quickly became the center of the movement. It seems that the list of overseas (Diaspora) Jewish communities

listed in Acts 2:9-11 isn't just the places where Peter's audience came from. It's actually a list of regions and cities into which the early church expanded from its center in Jerusalem.

I mention this for a couple of reasons. First, the Jesus Movement was a highly complex, diverse phenomenon from its inception. It had its origins in Galilee, but its center was in Jerusalem. It quickly won adherents from among the overseas Jews visiting or living in Jerusalem. It took on, in fact, the incredible diversity of first century Judaism itself. It's important in our own age of rampant and contending Christian ideologies to remember that the church has always been far more complex and diverse historically than the ideologists would have us believe. Second, there are historians that criticize Acts for presenting too simplified a schema for early church history--i.e. from Jerusalem to Samaria to Antioch to Paul's missionary journeys. That's the story Acts does tell, but I don't think that Acts itself claims that's all the story there was. There is evidence in Acts, at any rate, of the larger story in which the Jesus Movement seems to have popped up in several cities and regions almost simultaneously rather than one after another.

HeRD #437 - A Bunch of Drunkards

When you get down to it, Acts has a certain feel of historical reality. Acts 2:12-13 is a case in point. The disciples, under the influence of their Pentecostal experience, have been speaking in a variety of foreign languages before a large crowd. Acts records two reactions among their auditors. Some are amazed. Others are amused. Some want to know what this all means. Others write the disciples off as a bunch of drunkards. Whether or not this particular event took place, it seems entirely likely that the good citizens of Jerusalem reacted to the Jesus Movement's enthusiastic proclamations of the Risen Lord in just these ways. Some found that message amazing and asked after its meaning. Others took these nutty, emotional sectarians to be crazy. What's important to me, as a historian, is that Acts doesn't claim that the first reaction of the crowd was one of instant, miraculous belief. If it had done that, I'd be inclined to judge it as the figment of ideological imaginings rather than a reflection of historical realities.

HeRD #438 - The Needs of the Churches

On 8-10 May 1997 some 120 local church leaders and representatives from all 19 CCT districts met at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, Payap University, for 3 days of consultations on future directions. Out of their consultations came a statement that lists the churches' needs in 4 categories including 18 items. The 4 categories are "Principles," "Personnel," "Mission," and "Administration." Some of it is the "usual stuff" that you would expect from such a wish list, but at other points it's an enlightening and even somewhat surprising document. In the two items under "Principles," for example, it calls for mutual concern to be the CCT's basic operative principle and urges that this principle be written into the new CCT constitution, which is being written at this time. There's a heavy emphasis on lay leadership training. One item under "Personnel" is particularly noteworthy. It calls on the CCT to develop, as a matter of policy and praxis, a "Christian education movement," to be implemented at the district and local church levels. An item under "Mission," calls on the CCT to encourage its churches to become educated churches that conduct themselves according to the Bible. It's striking that Christian education receives more prominent attention than evangelism and that nowhere on the list is there a call for revivalistic approaches. More generally the statement emphasizes educational, nurture, administrative, and pastoral care issues while evangelism is mentioned in only two items. If this list is truly reflective of the sentiments of local church leadership, it suggest that a fundamental shift in consciousness is taking place. Even 10 years ago, evangelistic concerns would have received greater attention. It is doubtful that anyone would have called for a "Christian education

movement" in the churches. In this statement, even church administration issues are more frequently mentioned than evangelism.

It seems to me that there is a shift taking place. Although the CCT's churches have been lax in the practice of evangelism, evangelism and revivalism historically dominated its agenda to the near exclusion of other ministries and concerns. It's only been in the past ten to twenty years that many church leaders have awakened to the fact that there's a connection between emphasizing evangelism and the inability of the churches to function as viable, alive Christian communities. It takes a lot more than evangelism to create such communities.

HeRD #439 - Evangelism in a Bangkok Context I

Last month I had the privilege of interviewing Dr. Wirachai Kowae, pastor of the Rom Yen Church in Bangkok, and the leading figure in the founding of the Thailand Assemblies of God. TAG is a Pentecostal denomination that has experienced fairly strong church growth over the last 20 years or so, especially in comparison to other groups founded by post-World War II missions. Dr. Wirachai explained that in starting and building up the Rom Yen Church he had very little financial resources and so had to keep things simple. He described his approach as a "friends and relatives" approach. It depends on family relationships or friendly relationships built up over a period of time. Dr. Wirachai emphasized that Thai people like good relations. He also noted that it is rare to find someone who converts after first hearing about Christianity. The foundation for conversions has to be built up over time.

Dr. Wirachai observed that as a rule major evangelistic stadium campaigns are a poor way to found churches. First, they're expensive and time-consuming. Second, the conversions that come of those campaigns aren't based on personal relationships but on a momentary experience. Third, the converts themselves come from scattered locations. The Thai churches simply aren't large enough or wealthy enough to follow up in any effective way. Dr. Wirachai believes that stadium campaigns have other uses, but they're not the best way to establish local congregations in Thailand.

HeRD #440 - Evangelism in a Bangkok Context II

Dr. Wirachai Kowae [see HeRD #439], founder of the Thailand Assemblies of God, claims to be a successful evangelist, with all of his success coming from non-Christians. He admitted, however, that his record in keeping converts in his church has, until recently, been a very poor one. Through constant evangelism his church grew, but a large percentage of converts eventually left. Dr. Wirachai also came to realize that he couldn't depend upon the members of his church to assist him in expanding its work. He was a leader who could create followers, though he lost many in the process, but not a pastor who could create other leaders. He came to the point where he had to decide if he was fit to continue to be a pastor, and as he tells it out of this crisis in his pastoral ministry he started in a new direction. Although still deeply committed to evangelism, he started to emphasize pastoral nurture and leadership training. By his own admission it took him over 25 years to learn this lesson.

These sentiments, while based on one evangelist's personal experience, reflect once again one of the definitive trends in Thai Protestantism over the last two decades. The post-World War II Protestant experience has taught virtually all segments of the church a hard lesson about the realities of evangelism in Thailand. Numerical results, even among the Pentecostals, are slow in coming. Christian losses are a large fraction of Christian gains. It requires a huge effort to sustain growing churches in Thailand. A major reason for this, historically, is that the constant emphasis on getting converts has left little time for nurturing those converts. The commitment to

evangelism, it now appears, hasn't diminished, but it's being re-routed into a growing concern for the quality of local church life.

HeRD #441 - A Convert's Story

During my visit to the Sareephap Krungthep (Bangkok Liberty) Church last month, I had a brief opportunity to chat with a young member, a woman in her early 20s who is studying for an MA in English at Ramkhamhaeng University. From memory, here's her story. As a teenager in her middle or late teens, she was invited to take part in a cell group sponsored by the church. She attended, out of politeness and curiosity and nothing more. Her family was Buddhist, but they seldom participated in merit-making activities. The thing that impressed her about the Sareephap Church, a Thailand Assemblies of God Church, was the caring concern of the members for each other. She was esp. taken with the fact that married couples were faithful to each other. She feels that the enthusiastic, modern-ish music and worship style of the church was a secondary factor in her decision to convert. That alone wouldn't have attracted her. But she loves the worship style. So does her mother. Her father was put off by it for some time but has converted and attends church regularly. He still doesn't much like all the noise in worship, but again she observed that he attends because of the quality of life of the church and its members. Her nuclear family are all members, now, of Sareephap Church. A younger sister was the first to convert after her. Her mother was the second. In answer to the question, why did they convert, she replied, "I changed." That impressed them. She herself has just started a small cell group of five in her home area. All of the members are teens and all are already Christians. As a cell leader she attends a regular, permanent program of study and training that includes courses in doing personal evangelism, the Bible, and leading cell groups. I asked her if she does evangelism among her friends, and she said that she feels she shouldn't. They'd just tease her and write her Christian overtures off as a joke. She's introducing them, however, to other church members who, she hopes, can share the Christian message with them.

This brief story stands on its own and doesn't need any fancy historiographical analysis. I'd only observe that this wasn't a programmed interview. Her answers were thoughtful, intelligent, and articulate.

HeRD #442 - Pentecostal Beginnings in Nakhon Pathom

Dr. Wirachai Kowae is a leading light among Thailand's Pentecostals and the virtual founder of the Thailand Assemblies of God. Dr. Wirachai was born in a "nominal" Christian family in Nakhon Pathom. Nakhon Pathom today is a satellite city of the greater Bangkok urban complex, located to the south and west. Christian work began there just after the turn of the century. His families' roots were in the old British Churches of Christ Mission and, by extension, in the CCT. He became a Pentecostal at the early age of 15 at a time when the Thai Pentecostal movement was just starting. As he tells it, his faith journey was profoundly influenced by two young men, Samarn Wannakiat and Chayong Kimhachan. These two had attended the revival campaign conducted by Tom Osborn, the American Pentecostal revivalist whose 1956 Bangkok revivals really set Thai Pentecostalism in motion. Those revivals had a deep impact on Samarn and Chayong, to the point that they began to visit churches and share their experience. Chayong was from Nakhon Pathom. They visited young people in Nakhon Pathom and shared their Pentecostal experience with these young people. A small group was founded. Wirachai says that he wasn't among the first to form the group but joined very soon thereafter.

Dr. Wirachai states flatly and bluntly that if the Nakhon Pathom Church had been more open to and accepting of these enthusiastic, spirit-impelled young people they would never have left the CCT. Church people, however, believed that they were possessed by evil spirits rather

than the Holy Spirit. The group, thus, was driven underground in terms of the church. They had to sneak off to study the Bible and share in fellowship. Dr. Wirachai also notes, however, that as a group of young, inexperienced Christians, they did sometimes go to excess. They lacked mature guidance in their Pentecostalism. What direction they received were from visits to the group by Samarn and Chayong, who very quickly themselves became related to the Finnish Free Foreign Mission. It became quite natural, then, that these young, rejected converts to Pentecostalism would come within the circle of the FFFM, although Wirachai notes that several of their group never left the CCT and eventually dropped away from Pentecostalism.

HeRD #443 - The Pentecostal Worship Trap

Pentecostal worship in Thailand involves drums, guitars, overhead projectors, and song leaders. It is to an extent "free" in form and yet has clearly determined expectations as to what should happen. The point here is that Pentecostal worship is more complex and more difficult to do well than the old-fashioned mainline style of worship. It requires more technological expertise and musical ability. This is fine for larger Pentecostal congregations where the funds and resources are there to do worship in this way. But what about the struggling little congregation with a pastor whose technical and musical skills are limited at best?

In August I visited one such Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) congregation in Samut Prakan, close in to Bangkok. If it is at all typical, then the answer to the above question is simple: they're trapped by the Pentecostal form, not freed by it. The service I attended was marked by poor guitar playing and inept singing. The service lacked the programmed spontaneity of Pentecostal worship in larger settings. Of the 20 worshippers present only 5 or 6 displayed Pentecostal worship behaviors of hand raising or swaying bodily movements. Their behavior seemed artificial in the presence of a poorly led, poorly performed worship service.

The event was a clear witness to the powerful influence of tradition and inherited images, the influence of the past. The worship leader was trying to conduct Pentecostal worship as he understood it, but what he was doing was quite out of keeping with the small size, low level of sophistication of his congregation, and his own modest skills as a worship leader. He was trapped by his worship heritage. It seems to me that Pentecostal worship isn't appropriate to small congregations, not without substantial adaptation. From what I learned about TAG, however, it seems that its pastors are intent on replicating rather than adapting the Pentecostal style in its smaller churches. It seems likely that the result is a lot of poorly done worship that's quite out of keeping with the intent of Pentecostal worship as well as the image people both in and outside of that tradition have of it.

HeRD #444 - Fluid Boundaries

Interviews with pastors, members, and missionaries related to the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) suggest that the institutional boundaries between the various Thai Pentecostal groups are fluid and somewhat blurred. One pastor, who's been with TAG only three years, insisted repeatedly that he didn't care much about which "kana" (group) he worked with as long as "it teaches the Bible." Another pastor and an elder both indicated that TAG churches steadily lose an appreciable number of members to other Pentecostal churches. They both alluded to these people as being Pentecostal "tourists" who move from church to church. One Assemblies missionary stated that fully half of TAG's pastors are immigrants from other Pentecostal groups and that there is a constant movement of pastors in and out of TAG.

There are a number of possible issues here. It seems that many of the "mainline" people who have "converted" to Pentecostal churches have been disaffected members, and it's possible

(likely?) that their disaffection carried over and is later applied to their new churches. One also suspects, furthermore, that Pentecostalism offers enthusiasm and joy as its rewards and that, as the enthusiasm and joy wears off in one church, the seekers of these things move on to the next watering hole. For pastors, one wonders if the issue isn't more a pragmatic need for a larger potential employment base. TAG is small and doesn't leave much room for movement and advancement within itself. More generally, it may be that the Pentecostal suspicion with organization and institutionalization is also at work here.

Whatever the sources of Pentecostal migration-ism, it's a serious issue for Pentecostal churches and structures. The strength of any organization depends on committed leaders and adherents. Organizations require clear institutional boundaries. Pentecostal structures have those boundaries, but many Pentecostal leaders and adherents don't honor them. As a result, Thai Pentecostalism is at one and the same time highly fragmented institutionally and yet strangely ecumenical in its adherents' attitudes about Pentecostal boundaries.

HeRD #445 - Evangelism That Works and That Doesn't

The Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) offers clear examples of churches that are growing and those that aren't. The Sareephap Krungthep (Bangkok Liberty) Church is growing and doing so increasingly rapidly. Although it conducts some organized evangelism, the pastor states that most of its new members come through personal contacts. They are "friends and relatives" [see HeRD #439] of members who are attracted by the quality of the congregation's life, its concern for its members. Pastors of two TAG churches that aren't growing, on the other hand, both voiced a firm commitment to organized evangelistic campaigns of pamphlet distribution, house to house visitation, and street evangelism. They both lamented the lack of workers and funding they believed necessary for effective evangelism. The contrast between their attitudes and approach and those of the Sareephap Church are almost stark.

If there's one lesson that comes out of early church history, it's that the early church grew because of the quality of its own life. It was a compassionate, viable faith alternative. More money for more pamphlets wasn't the issue then, and I don't think it's the issue now.

HeRD #446 - The Salary Trap

In an interview with Ach. Chalerm Getgaew, Acting Director of the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) Bible School, it became apparent that TAG is struggling to work out a viable policy on pastoral salaries. He reckoned that the average pastoral salary in the Bangkok area was about 7,000 to 8,000 baht per month, which is much less than the CCT averages. Four years ago the average salary for Bangkok pastors in the CCT's 6th District was about 16,000 a month, and the 7th and 12 Districts (both Thai-Chinese) were both above 12,000 per month for their Bangkok pastors. TAG has followed a general policy of providing outside salary assistance for new churches, but there is heavy pressure on pastors to attain "self-support" as quickly as possible. TAG doesn't want its churches to become permanently dependent on outside funds. The amount of salary support provided appears to be limited at best, so that pastors are living off of minimal salaries while under considerable external and internal pressure to get off those funds as quickly as possible.

Thai Protestantism today places a major emphasis on self-support for local churches. TAG is but one example. I wonder, however, how realistic or wise this emphasis is. Few pastors have the management skills necessary to create self-supporting churches. Some pastors do so, but it's an extremely difficult task that requires creative administrative and money-making skills. Bible schools and seminaries don't teach those skills. Missionaries and higher church leaders generally

don't have those skills themselves. In many instances, furthermore, the churches' potential for self-support are limited, long-term, and dependent on attaining a level of viable congregational life that is also beyond the skills level of many, probably most pastors. Matters are made only worse by the insistence that self-support is a matter of faith. If the pastor and the church have "real faith" then they'll achieve this goal. Failure to do so shows they don't have "real faith". The result is a great deal of stress caused by unwarranted, unrealistic expectations of pastors.

HeRD #447 - TAG Numbers

One of my informants in the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) provided me with the following admittedly very rough survey of TAG churches. TAG has over 70 churches and worshipping groups. Of these churches, my informant named 18 that have strong potential for growth and viable congregational life. That is, roughly 20 of 70 congregations (28.6%) have a hopeful future. That's less than one church or group in three. When I asked him how many of these churches ARE alive and growing congregations, he could name only four, possibly five churches, less than one in ten. A second informant stated there are 15 churches (21.4%) that are to varying degrees alive, growing congregations. It is very likely that these admittedly very imprecise figures are about the same as or slightly higher than those for most other Protestant missions and churches in Thailand. If this is so, it means that something like 70% to 90% of Thai Protestant churches are small, uninspiring, and weak.

HeRD #448 - Movement and Institution

Pentecostalism began as a genuine religious movement within Thai Protestantism. Many of it's earliest participants were Christians belonging to CCT churches. It's important leaders were mostly already Christians. Yet, from the outset this movement expressed itself through institutional structures, primarily missionary structures. The Finnish Free Foreign Mission (FFFM) actually pre-dated the movement, which emerged from the Osborn Revivals of 1956. Other missions began, one after another, to appear on the scene. The Pentecostal movement, thus, quickly fragmented into a number of foreign missions and, later, Thai-founded churches. Organizationally, then, Thai Pentecostalism was, and is, both a loose, free movement and a set of tightly-bounded institutionalized structures. These two aspects, moreover, seem to parallel each other as much as or more than they overlap.

It works this way. While everybody is working under some more-or-less denominationalized structure, there is a great deal of migration across the boundaries of those structures going on. Some members attend a couple of different denominational churches at the same time and others move from one to another frequently. In the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG), for example, leaders refer frequently to the fact that they constantly are losing members to other Pentecostal groups. It's clear, however, that they also pick up members as well. Pastors and other church leaders also freely move between Pentecostal groups. They say that the denomination or the church doesn't matter, as long as it teaches the right doctrines. All of this is made more complex by the fact that Pentecostals frequently feel uneasy with structure and organization. Some are vocally opposed to them. The FFFM, for example, is an organized structure whose missionaries historically have been personally and collectively strongly opposed to fixed structures.

Some reflection follow in HeRD #449.

HeRD #449 - Movement and Institution II

HeRD #448 described Thai Pentecostalism as being both a movement and a set of fixed, bounded, and structured institutions. This phenomenon requires far more study. I'm quite sure that I don't understand very well what it means for those who are experiencing it. Here, in any event, are a couple of observations that may even carry some weight.

First, we should observe that the phenomenon isn't unique to Thai Pentecostals. There's evidence to suggest that the old Presbyterian churches had a movement flavor to them in their early years. They had a loose, enthusiastic sense of newness. But the Presbyterian missions immediately imposed a single structure on the churches, and it appears that the movement atmosphere died away within a relatively short time. There were, furthermore, no alternatives and no moving back and forth across Christian structures.

Second, while there are plusses and minuses to the Pentecostal situation, it seems likely that this movement and institution phenomenon is on the whole a weakness rather than a strength. Structures require loyalty and continuity to be effective. That's apparently not easy to come by among Pentecostal groups. Structures have to create a sense of particular identity and successfully socialize members to that identity. Again, this appears more difficult in a Thai Pentecostal setting than it does, for example, in a CCT setting. Furthermore, my impression is that each of the Pentecostal groups is "doing its own thing" without paying much attention to what's going on in other groups. This means that the inherent potential for cross-fertilization and shared learning in being a movement isn't being realized. So, it's the worst rather than the best of both worlds. The movement undermines the structures' needs for developing loyalty and identity. The structures undermine the movement's potential for cross-fertilization and sustaining a shared purpose.

And, my guess, is that few, if any, Pentecostals in Thailand are very much aware of the possible implications of this phenomenon. The Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG), for example, seriously considered handing over its theological education program to an independent Pentecostal seminary whose roots are in other groups, not TAG. From the CCT's experience, seminarians trained in non-CCT institutions are frequently problems, and a lack of loyalty to CCT structures is one of the most serious of those problems. TAG is apparently oblivious to the dangers involved to its institutional life in this case.

It seems, in sum, that there is an inherent contradiction in the current Pentecostal situation in Thailand. It is, in a sense, a bounded or structured movement, which is something of a contradiction in terms, as well as in social configuration. It is both rigid and fluid at the same time.

HeRD #450 - Christianity & Judaism Again

Over the course of the last year, HeRD has revisited the First Century relationship between Judaism and Christianity a number of times. My thesis is that the relationship offers us comparative insights into the relationship between Thai Protestantism and Buddhism, which is a central issue for the study of Thai church history. Gerd Theissen's collection of essays and articles entitled SOCIAL REALITY AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANS offers further insights on this issue

In an article on Paul's views on Judaism and Christianity, Theissen argues that the relationship can be viewed in three different ways. All three ways are found in Paul's writings. First, Christianity can be seen as a parallel phenomenon. Both were oriental faiths preaching a compassion ethic and benevolent social relationships. Second, Christianity was an open Judaism. Judaism was closed to the world around it, while Christianity was far more open. Paul, according

to Theissen, conceived of Christianity as "a Judaism for non-Jews." (p. 205) Third, Christianity was a universalized Judaism, in which salvation was no longer determined by national origin. Paul, in sum, saw Jews and Gentile Christians as being in a complex relationship. They shared many things. Gentiles, indeed, stood in the same relationship to God as Jews. At the same time, they had to a degree exchanged places, with Gentile Christians taking the role of Jews and Jews the role of Gentiles in their faithfulness and lack of faithfulness to God.

This is helpful, to me at least, in that it suggests that we shouldn't look for just one relationship between Protestant Christianity and Buddhism in Thailand. I've argued that Buddhism is one of Thai Protestantism's parent faiths. Theissen's perspective would encourage us, within that framework, to look for the parallels between the two Thai faiths. It would further encourage us to see what changes have resulted from the "wedding" of Western Protestantism and Thai Buddhism. How has each transformed the other? Have role reversals taken place? I suspect they have and that Thai Protestantism is actually more like Roman Empire Judaism in its relationship to Thai society than it is like Roman Empire Christianity. That is, it's the social fringe group cum tribal religion rather than an open, universal religious tradition.

HeRD #451 - Dead Church in Ayudhya

The Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) founded a church in Ayudhya in 1969. It was one of the first two TAG congregations but no longer exists. The reasons for its demise provide us with some insights into the difficulties and pitfalls in founding churches in Thailand.

According to Ach. Anupharp, the son of a former pastor at the Ayudhya Church and the current Moderator of TAG, there were a number of problems that led to the demise of this congregation. First, there was a great deal of resistance to Christianity in Ayudhya, the former capital and cultural center of Thailand. It's a city with a long and proud history. Ach. Anupharp felt it was a very religious city and didn't welcome a new religion. People tore up their pamphlets. During an open air evangelistic event, the screen they were using to show Christian films was cut down. Second, the pastor-evangelists of the early 1970s didn't understand the importance of leadership development. It wasn't enough, according to Ach. Anupharp, to do evangelism and even pastoral care. The key to this church's future was leadership development, and it didn't receive that development. Third, the Assemblies of God Mission didn't have adequate financial and leadership resources to sustain the congregation, and the congregation was too small to sustain itself. Finally, the church building was located well outside the city in the midst of rice fields. It was hard to get to, and attending worship wasn't convenient for the members.

The insight into the need for leadership training deserves special note. The old Presbyterian missions were emphasizing the same need well over a century ago, although they didn't address it effectively. The CCT has long concerned itself with the same need. It seems, from interviews with three informants, that TAG has become seriously aware of the need for leadership training only in the last few years. What this suggests is that with the formation of each new church and mission group, all of the old lessons have to be learned again. The "collective wisdom" of other Protestants is ignored and even rejected. There is at best only a dim realization among all Protestant groups that a collective wisdom even exists.

HeRD #452 - Porous Boundaries

Last August, I had the pleasure of spending a brief two days with missionaries of the Lutheran Mission in Thailand (LMT) and leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT). In the course of an interview with one key ELCT leader, he stated that being a Lutheran

isn't important in and of itself. He didn't want to emphasize "kana nikai" (denominations), and he avowed that personally he feels loyalty only to God and not to any one "kana" (group, organized body). He argued that Christians should be teaching what God has done for all of humanity. They shouldn't be proclaiming denominations but, rather, should be proclaiming God to the Thai people. Being Lutheran is good, he acknowledged, but what we should emphasize is God. During our conversation, he also stated that he was raised in a CCT congregation and in no sense rejects his CCT background.

These sentiments and other ELCT contacts, mostly informal, indicated to me that the boundaries between the ELCT and the CCT are quite porous. On a larger scale, this informant's views are reminiscent of attitudes among Thai Pentecostals about "kana nikai" (see HeRD #444). It seems possible, perhaps likely, that the existence of a huge number of denominations in Thailand only obscures an underlying unity. Two sets of questions emerge. First, if Thai Protestantism shares an underlying unity what does this mean for the conduct of church life and ministries? It seems to imply that the relatively rigid organizational boundaries between denominations are unnecessary and obstructive. Is that the case? Second, what is the value of having lots of denominations from a Thai Protestant perspective? Do they function primarily to increase employment opportunities? Do they multiply the number patronage systems available? Do they open more opportunities for participation by more people?

HeRD #453 - Patronage Issues

Thai churches are patron-client churches. An interview with Arve Haugland, who worked with a church and its evangelist-pastor in the Northeast, of the Lutheran Mission in Thailand (LMT) points to some of the issues involved. First, the members of the congregation were very poor people who converted for a number of reasons. Having converted, they expected that the church's leaders would help them financially and materially. Pressure to assist, of course, falls heavily on the missionary. Second, they found that it was impossible to work as a team with the pastor-evangelist. He seemed to be very concerned about maintaining his status and tended to look on the missionaries as competitors rather than co-workers. Third, the evangelist-pastor showed no interest in carrying out leadership training. It appeared that he feared, perhaps subconsciously, creating potential competitors. Fourth, the fact that the congregation was paying part of the evangelist-pastor's salary made him all the more concerned to maintain his status in the congregation, or so it seemed to the Hauglands. Finally, when the evangelist-pastor left his congregation, many of those who had converted because of his evangelistic efforts dropped away from the church. There was a definite lack of acceptance for the person who took the former pastors' place.

Arve would agree that there's some amount of guesswork and speculation involved in his interpretation of the evangelist-pastor's behavior. The general pattern, however, was clear. The pastor acted in ways that protected his own authority and limited the threat of competing powers within the congregation. More thoughts on this in the next HeRD.

HeRD #454 - Patronage Issues Again

Arve Haugland's experiences with patronage issues in a Northeastern church (see HeRD #453) suggest some of the issues patron-client social structures raise for the Thai church. Protestant missionaries have struggled with these issues from the time they founded their first churches. There is a problem, however. Westerners, by and large, don't like patron-client social structures. They feel very uncomfortable with how clients are "forced" to depend on patrons for their well-being. The expectations placed on missionaries personally in such a society make them feel burdened, inadequate, and, at times, angry. What seems to have happened historically is that

missionary discomfort with patronage social systems has prevented them from asking fundamental questions about how the church can best live and witness in patron-client societies. Rather than accepting patronage structures as the context within which the church reflects and acts, the missionary tendency seems to have been to reject the context. There's a feeling that they have to change the churches socially. They have to make them more democratic.

Here, as well as in many other areas, this fundamental rejection of existing Thai structures has made it impossible for the missionaries to engage in constructive theological reflection "from within". It has also prevented them from teaching or modeling for converts how to do such reflection. It seems that no one, missionary or Thai, has wrestled with the question of how to be a patron faithful to Christ. Thai churches, in consequence, are filled with patrons who take typical social behavior as their measure rather than scriptural-theological considerations as their guide.

It is clear that Protestant missionaries (Western and Asian) have long rejected Thai society and culture as a viable medium for Christian faith. That process of rejection is still going on today, mostly at a very deep gut-level. And it continues to have devastating consequences for churches born in the missionary socio-cultural enclave.

HeRD #455 - Trapped in the Past I

Acharn Banchop is a former bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT) and an instructor at the Lutheran Institute for Theological Education (LITE) in Bangkok. In an interview with Acharn Banchop, he reflected on the meaning of its missionary heritage for the Thai church. I'd like to share his thoughts with in two or three HeRDs, because Ach. Banchop was struggling with key historical issues.

I asked Ach. Banchop about the issues currently facing the ELCT. He responded by expressing his own personal sense of struggle over two central "facts", one theological and the other historical. Theologically, the Christian faith is a universal faith that is intended for all people. Historically, it's perceived in Thailand as a Western religion. Thai Christians have had to give up a lot of their own culture in the processing of becoming Christian. Acharn Banchop expressed considerable frustration at how this historical processed trapped the Thai church in cultural irrelevancy. He feels that the Thai church has to discover a sense of its own identity. Thai Christianity has to have a Thai structure. It has to be known through its own culture. As Ach. Banchop put it, Thai Christians need to know the universal content of the Gospel and dispense with the Western form. He's not proposing a violent revolution and states that it will take time to achieve these changes.

These issues are nothing new to the recipients of HeRD, but it's helpful to listen in on a Thai Christian wrestling with them. Beneath his words, there was a sense that something is fundamentally "wrong" with Thai Christianity. One senses this feeling in many places in the Thai church today. Ach. Banchop's thoughts are one attempt at articulating the origins of that "wrong-ness". More in the next HeRD.

HeRD #456 - Trapped in the Past II

The Lutheran Mission in Thailand (LMT) was formed in 1980. From that date to the present it has established churches with a combined membership of 1300 members, marking it as a "slow growth" mission. One key Thai leader associated with the LMT's "offspring," the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT), offered the following explanations for slow growth.

In part the problem lies with the LMT itself. It formulated evangelistic strategies and methods at a time when it was still young and its missionaries didn't understand Thai culture. According to this ELCT leader, the mission has persisted in using those same strategies and methods even though they've never worked very well. The churches themselves, however, also long failed to learn some important lessons. They particularly failed to appreciate the need for sound pastoral care. In earlier years most of the leaders were trained as evangelists and didn't know much about pastoral care. This failure has led to the loss of many, many members. Patterns of conversion have presented the churches and the mission with yet another problem. Converts frequently "attach" themselves to the missionary or the pastor who converted them. This pattern encourages pastors to seek and hold power in their own hands. It also means that the personality of the pastor is an inordinately significant factor in evangelism and in post-conversion church life. Inevitable changes in leadership lead to a loss of church members and make parish life unstable.

There is here an interesting model for interpreting the historical experience of church groups in Thailand. This model would have us look at initial mission strategies and methods and track their persistence over time. It would examine how the Thai churches and their leaders function within that framework. It would study cultural factors involved, particularly in conversion.

HeRD #457 - Lutheran Decision

The Norwegian Missionary Society and the Finnish Evangelical Foreign Missionary Society jointly established the Lutheran Mission in Thailand in 1980. Upon its formation, the LMT had to decide whether to join the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) or the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT). The LMT recognized that theologically and ecclesiastically it was closer to the CCT, but in the end it decided to join the EFT. Although a number of factors were involved in its decision, it appears that the central concern of the LMT was that in the CCT it wouldn't be able to preserve a uniquely Lutheran identity for its churches. In particular, it feared that the central Lutheran emphasis on "Faith Alone" would be difficult to maintain. Some early members of the LMT, argue that the decision to join the EFT was a wise one although they acknowledge that the LMT still feels somewhat out of place there. The mission wanted from the beginning to establish an Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT), which it did in 1994. The EFT, he suggests, is a "cooperational" rather than "confessional" organization so that it is easier to maintain the ELCT's confessional identity.

Someone should study the success or failure of the LMT in creating a distinctive Lutheran church in Thailand. Overtly it succeeded. But one wonders if its Thai churches are "Lutheran" in any meaningful sense of the word. First, the LMT depended heavily on former CCT personnel to create the ELCT (See HeRD #452). Unlike Pentecostals with former CCT connections, these persons haven't rejected their CCT past. One can't help but suspect that a significant amount of "uncontrollable" non-Lutheran influence has already crept into the ELCT. Second, the whole program of starting with a northern European, Christian, and Lutheran emphasis on grace seems problematical at best. The LMT began with a patently foreign agenda. To what extent are the peoples of Thailand interested in such an agenda? Does it respond to their faith needs? Is European Reformation Era Good News also good news to Thai peoples? If the larger history of Protestant missions is any indication, the answer is probably, "no". It appears quite likely that the two sets of cultures the LMT found in place here, namely Thai cultures and the prior Protestant Christian cultures, have frustrated the "Lutheran agenda" from the beginning. One suspects that the ELCT's Lutheran identity is only a thin veneer at best. If the 150-plus years of Presbyterian experience is any guide, this situation isn't likely to change in the future. But all of this is guess work and intuition on my part. Somebody should dig into the truth of it all.

HeRD #458 - Karen Churches & Church Buildings

Some five year ago, the Phorn Niran Church of the Karen Baptist Convention (District 19 of the CCT), located near Chiang Mai, dedicated a new building. At that time, the homes of the members were small and in poor condition. They presented quite a contrast to the church's new building, which was comparatively substantial and "modern". This was at a time when the financial condition of the members was improving. When asked why they built a new church building before putting up new houses, the members replied that they wouldn't have "felt right" if their homes were newer and better than the church's building. So they built it first and subsequently began building new houses for themselves. It's not clear whether this is a general phenomenon among Karen churches or not, but the churches in the Musikee area are reputed to have the same attitude.

Where did this deep respect for the church building come from? Traditional Karen religious practices don't even include buildings. Northern Thai congregations don't, so far as I know, make a correlation between the state of one's own house and that of the church's building. It doesn't seem likely that missionaries would have been the direct source of such ideas. So, why this feeling that the physical condition of the church building has to be as good as or better than one's own house? Is it generally prevalent among Karen churches or only localized in some areas? Does it reflect some aspect of traditional religious thought? Is it an adaptation of some missionary teaching? Did it "come over" from the much larger Karen Christian community in Burma? It would be fun to know the answers to these questions.

HeRD #459 - Ministry I - Burning the Dragon

The McGilvary Faculty of Theology (MFT), Payap University, is hosting a week-long seminar-workshop on "Ministry in Thai Context," sponsored by the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA) in cooperation with MFT and the Bangkok Institute of Theology. The purpose of these meetings is to encourage original theological thinking by younger church leaders, using "Asian resources for theological reflection." The meetings began yesterday, Monday, October 13th. For the few HeRDs I'd like to share with you what I'm seeing and learning at this seminar-workshop.

Dr. Archie C. C. Lee of the PTCA, a Chinese theology professor from Hong Kong, delivered the opening address on "doing theology in Asia." His purpose was to provide a general orientation to the purposes of the week and some suggestions about how Asian churches can go about using Asian cultural, social, and religious resources for theological reflection. In his presentation, Archie articulated the central need for the meeting by sharing a vivid personal memory of his family's conversion to Christianity. The pastor and some members of the local congregation marched to his home and demanded, in Archies' words, that the family give over anything and everything that had a dragon on it. The dragon is a symbol of prosperity, which the church took to be satanic. Archie argued that Western missionaries had taught the Chinese Christians this interpretation based on Western and biblical antipathies to dragons or draconian-like figures. So, the family hauled out bowls, chop sticks, pillows, items of clothing, and whatever else had dragons on it. These were heaped in a pile and burned. Archie remembers this event as a painful experience in "de-culturalization." He and his family were robbed of an image, a symbol for thinking about their own faith in a Chinese way. For Archie, then, Asian Christianity's negative experience with Western missions is a central reason for the PTCA process. There's a sense in which PTCA seeks to bring creative theological reflection home to Asia, not as an import but as something home-grown.

It's striking that within 5 minutes or less of the first presentation we were thrust into the presence of the history of missions in Asia. Archie symbolized the Asian experience of that past with a concrete event filled with symbolic meaning, the burning of the dragons of prosperity. Instead of welcoming and affirming Asian ways of thinking and feeling, Missionary Christianity burned Asian dragons. That moment has, in a real sense, defined for Dr. Archie Lee his experience of Christianity and set for him the goal of seeking to resurrect the dragon.

HeRD #460 - Ministry II: Home Coming

In his address to the meeting of young Christian Thai scholars meeting on the subject "Ministry in Thai Context," Dr. Archie Lee [see HeRD #459] provided his audience with a concrete example of how one "does theology" in Asia today. Archie is from Hong Kong. For several years now, that city state-colony has been preparing for its return to China, an event that he felt was much like returning home after a long absence. The return has been filled with anxieties and uncertainties. Returning home hasn't been easy. Archie indicated that for him, as a biblical scholar, this major event has given him a new perspective on certain parts of the Bible. He cited the specific example of the Jewish exiles who returned home from Babylon. What kind of a reception could they have expected from those not sent off in exile? What tensions would there be? The Exile lasted for 50 years. What about those born in exile? How would they have felt about a place they'd never seen? Or, again, those who were forced to leave their homes as young people and returned in their old age...how would they have felt? He cited various indications that the returning exiles felt many anxieties and experienced tensions, just as the people of Hong King have felt anxieties and tensions. The Hong Kong experience, thus, has helped Archie to see more clearly the uncertainties and realities in human situations that is at the heart of biblical events. The biblical message becomes more alive and real as a result. For Archie, then, theology is a constant "crossing over" between one's own situation and the biblical text. Each informs and gives meaning to the other.

HeRD #461 - Ministry III: The Problematic Bible

Dr. Archie Lee told the meeting on "Ministry in Thai Context" that the Asian context is as important for Asian Christian theology as is the Bible. He seems to feel that the Bible's Middle Eastern spirituality isn't always appropriate to Far Eastern needs. Another one of the "outside" speakers, Brother Chumpol Deesutchit, a Chiang Mai Catholic instructor in spiritual discipline, reinforced that point. He urged his hearers to practice Christian forms of meditation, arguing that the Christians are to "lift their hearts" to God. His presentation triggered objections from two participants who both quoted biblical passages that seemed to counter one or another of Brother Chumpol's points. Brother Chumpol responded in a kindly way, but if one cut through the politeness, he virtually accused these respondents of using the Bible to hide from God.

Both of these speakers raise the significant issue of the role of the Bible for Thai Protestants. Missionary Protestantism imported an infallible Bible that is the single ultimate standard for faith and practice, and Thai Protestantism has largely accepted that Bible. It's very difficult, thus, for many of the participants to accept the views of Bro. Chumpol and Dr. Archie Lee. Yet, each has a point. Culture is such a formative element in the human experience that, however much Protestants argue the point, "dialogue" inevitably takes place. The Bible, I suspect, is usually the junior partner in that largely unconscious, unarticulated process. It is, furthermore, the particular "genius" of Protestants to turn their theologies into ideologies and their ideologies into idols. Bibliolatry is a wide spread sin among Protestants. Thus, the role of the Bible is an important issue for theological reflection in Asian contexts.

HeRD #462 - Ministry IV: Catholic Indigenization

Brother Chumpol Deesutchit's address to the PTCA-sponsored seminar-workshop on "Ministry in Thai Context" left many of his auditors feeling uncomfortable. Bro. Chumpol teaches spiritual disciplines to Catholic seminarians, and he called upon us to practice Christian ways of lifting our hearts ("yok chit") to God. He argued that we give too much attention to our bodies and the physical world, and he showed a series of pictures of decomposing bodies and skeletons to make his point. Without the spirit ("chit") the body is dead. He also argued that God is in each person. God created us good. So, we should focus on re-discovering God and dispense with worrying about the physical world. He outlined in some detail various elements in human behavior and levels of spiritual attainment.

Although clearly Christian, his presentation sounded very Buddhist. It shared with Buddhism a sense that the physical world is unreal and unworthy of attachment. It was much like Thai Buddhism in its detailed, layered, and textured analysis of the human condition. Bro. Chumpol seemed convinced that through meditation/prayer the believer can lift her or his heart to God. Even in the manner of his delivery and his emphasis on the rotting human body, Bro. Chumpol called to mind the sermonic style and message of Buddhist monks. It seemed to me that, consciously or not, he represented a form of indigenization. His style and message fit very well with various elements in Thai religious culture.

More on this one in the next HeRD.

HeRD #463 - HeRD #463 - Ministry V: Uneasy Protestants

Although a few in his Protestant audience were quite taken with Bro. Chumpol Deesutchit's presentation to the meetings on "Ministry in Thai Context," [see HeRD #462] most were vaguely (or not so vaguely) uneasy. Some objected to his negative view of the created world. Some felt that he'd gone over "the line" in terms of what humans can do to attain their own salvation. Those who felt uneasy seemed to agree that whatever we might mean by "indigenization," this wasn't it. One of the participants, in a group report presented the last day of the conference, indicated that his group discussed Bro. Chumpol's presentation at some length. His personal response was that the spiritual practices Bro. Chumpol advocates are fine and good, but they need to be brought back into a Protestant theological frame.

As indicated in the last HeRD, Bro. Chumpol "felt" very Buddhist in his manner and his contents. For the large majority of the participants in the seminar-workshop, that was the central point of uneasiness. Another participant, one the last day, articulated a clear framework for indigenization that consciously rejected the inclusion of any clearly Buddhist or animist elements. This is a central issue for the life of the church in Thailand today. There is a feeling in many quarters that the church should be "more Thai," but there is also an absolute rejection of indigenous religious expressions. One can only observe that it seems unlikely that an imported religion premised on the rejection of local, deeply ingrained religiosity can in and of itself speak meaningfully to the life needs of local people.

HeRD #464 - Ministry VI: Enslaved

One purpose of the seminar-workshop on "Ministry in Thai Context," was to encourage "young Thai theologians" to sharpen their theological skills. To that end six of the participants presented papers on the conference theme. In her paper Ach. Benjaphorn Mokchai, from Isarn (Northeast Thailand), described her experience as a woman of the older Isarn culture. In rural Isarn, she remembers with some pain, villagers traditionally celebrated the birth of a boy while the birth of girls was greeted with silence. Girls grew up under a strict regime of discipline, training, and duties, while boys had great freedom and few responsibilities. Women, she

remembers, lived in a narrowly circumscribed context based on dependence on their husbands. They were trained from girlhood to that dependence. She summarized the experience of Isarn woman as being that of servitude and slavery. And, she noted, that experience doesn't end in the village. Who, she asks, benefits most from national policies of development? Even in the church, at every level, women are given little opportunity to lead.

Ach. Benjaphorn urged that this system of male domination has to end and women have to be lifted up. She noted 3 specific points at which the role of women in Isarn has to change. First, women themselves have to change the way they raise boys. Boys have to be given duties, responsibilities, and some sense of discipline. Second, women have to be freed from the heavy duties they have to bear alone. She recalled with some bitterness the fact that while her father worked hard in the fields, her mother had to carry out all of her domestic chores AND work hard in the fields. Men came home in the evening to rest. Women came home to cook and clean. Third, women have to be given the power to make decisions in society and in the church.

For her, ministry meant working for liberation and searching for justice.

HeRD #465 - Ministry VII: Equality vs. Justice

Ach. Benjaphorn Mokchai's feminist presentation [see HeRD #464] at the seminar-workshop on "Ministry in Thai Context" evoked a number of male responses, mostly rather nervous. Some rushed to support and encouragement. One man, however, raised the question of New Testament injunctions ordering women to silence and wanted to know what Ach. Benjaphorn thought about them. And another asked, bluntly, "How much do you want? When will you feel you've achieved equality?" Another male participant followed with comments that indicated that he too saw the issue at stake as one of equality.

The last question is particularly important and enlightening. Although Ach. Benjaphorn did at points seem to be calling for greater equality for women, she denied that her concern was equality in and of itself. Although she used neither terms, she was clearly calling for liberation and justice. What's interesting here is that while the woman's issue was liberation and justice, the men's issue was equality. Ach. Benjaphorn was pleading for release from oppression, but to some of her auditors that plea came across as a demand for greater access to social goodies. Ach. Benjaphorn's concerns aren't ones that all will accede to readily, which is why it is so vital that she, as a "young theologian," attain the skills this seminar-workshop sought to encourage, namely the ability to express important ideas theologically. It does make a difference, after all, whether the issue at stake is one of justice or equality.

HeRD #466 - Ministry VIII: Chinese Churches & Biblical Ritual

Dr. Saree Logunphai, an instructor in Old Testament at the Bangkok Institute of Theology, presented an address on ritual in the Bible that, on the face of it, gave little attention to Thai contexts. He made what appears to be an obvious point, namely that the Bible takes a largely positive attitude towards ritual. A later discussion with Dr. Saree garnered further insights into the Thai-Chinese Christian context of Bangkok, which in turn suggested that his message was much more "forward thinking" than it appeared on the surface. In talking with Ach. Saree, one could feel the weight and the burden of the past that CCT's Thai-Chinese churches labor under. That past makes even the theoretical discussion of possible change towards opening the churches up to their cultural context difficult and dangerous. This is because the Thai-Chinese churches are largely conservative, traditionalist Protestant bodies that take a very dim view of ritual and ceremony. They associate anything beyond plain Protestant worship with Buddhism and Catholicism, and any attempts to introduce more indigenous Thai elements into worship are

largely rejected out of hand as being ritualistic. Ach. Saree feels, thus, that it is a matter of some boldness to suggest that the Bible takes a positive view towards ritual, and, in that sense, gives Thai churches permission to experiment with more indigenous forms of worship.

HeRD #467 - Ministry IX: Pentecostal Westernization

Khun Viewilai Sangsawan, one of the "young scholar" participants in the "Ministry in Thai Context" seminar-workshop held at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, presented a paper on the evangelistic ministry of the Nua Klao Church in Chiang Mai. This Pentecostal congregation is growing rapidly, and Khun Viewilai wanted to discover why. In the course of her research, she found what appeared to her to be a contradiction. Although it is growing and its services are well-attended, the church holds a more Western conception of conversion, one that emphasizes that all people are sinners and in need of divine forgiveness. The church accepts new members only as they profess personal remorse for their sins and declare a desire to repent. Khun Viewilai commented that this Western approach to conversion seemed quite out of keeping with the idea of indigenization and contradicted the "common wisdom" that churches have to become "more Thai" in order to grow.

These preliminary findings do pose a potential challenge to the idea that the church must "be more Thai" in order to prosper in Thailand (however one wants to define the concept of "prosper"). It's likely, however, that this emphasis on personal sin is only one element in the church's socialization of its new members and not one that attracts or keeps them. Khun Viewilai herself noted that the church places strong emphasis on community and on caring relationships. It's at that point that the congregation almost certainly puts forward a more "Thai face" and is what brings in new members. It is also probable that once the church's current enthusiasm and excitement begins to wear thin, as it will one day, the Nua Klao Church will find itself as socially marginalized and spiritually irrelevant as other churches do now. That may, however, be dismissing the matter too lightly, and it would be very helpful to have further, deeper research done into the life of this congregation.

HeRD #468 - Ministry X: Making Disciples

The papers of two participants in the seminar-workshop on "Ministry in Thai Context" presented papers on "discipling" either new converts or young Christians who are trying to gain a deeper understanding of their faith. From their papers emerged serious questions about the biblical concept of disciple-making in the Thai social context. The Thai term for making disciples, "sang sawok," carries connotations of patron-client relationships to the extent that both papers warned that discipling should be to Jesus, not to the person doing the discipling. Their concern about the concept of discipling raises some profound questions for pastoral ministry in Thailand.

In HeRDs #453 and #454, we touched on these issues, but what is interesting here is the role of the Thai translation of the Bible itself. Both papers naturally cited Matthew 28:19-20 as the biblical locus for their discussion of discipling. Upon reflection in the general sessions, however, it became clear that the idea of discipling was a difficult one. It's difficult to separate concepts of patronage from the concept. It may well be that the Thai concept doesn't adequately translate the New Testament concept of discipling at all and that the Thai church should find new ways to express the nurturing of faith, esp. with new Christians. This is yet another issue in Thai theological practice that requires much more thought and reflection than it has ever been given.

HeRD #469 - Chiang Mai Catholicism

After a number of false starts, the Catholic Church finally established a permanent mission in Chiang Mai in 1931. Within a short time, that mission began construction of a church building, established two schools, and took up evangelistic work. According to the research of Ach. [PC], an M.Div. student at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, the results of that evangelism suggest that even Catholicism participates, to an extent, in a single Christian culture in Thailand. Although the Catholic mission in Chiang Mai began work with every intention of converting Buddhists, its initial evangelistic successes were among Protestants. Ach. [P] documents particularly the "conversion" of Simon Loetrat and his family, a Christian family with deep roots in the old Presbyterian Laos Mission. As she tells the story, Simon was living in Sarapi when he learned from friends that a foreign priest was evangelizing a new form of Christianity in Chiang Mai. He was immediately interested because he'd previously heard that a new and very strict Christian group might come to Chiang Mai. He hurried into the city to investigate and was soon baptized a Catholic. He began to share his new faith with his relatives including some who were living in Nong Prateep, a mostly Christian satellite community of Chiang Mai. Virtually all of his extended family entered Catholicism. His granddaughter was moved from Dara Academy, the Protestant girls' school, to take up studies in the newly founded Catholic church school.

In recent HeRDs, we've noted that both the Assemblies of God Missions and Lutheran Mission in Thailand founded their work with leaders who were originally associated with the CCT. Although the Catholic mission work in Chiang Mai began just before the founding of the CCT (1934), the pattern is even more striking. It created its church mostly from former "Presbyterians" (CCT). It was among them that Catholic evangelism struck up an interest. One wants to know more about why they joined the Catholic congregation. What did they find there that was missing in their former churches? One also wonders how being "Presbyterian" shaped their Catholicism. What carried over? Did (Dose) the Chiang Mai church have a Protestant "flavor" to it?

Is it possible, in sum, that northern Thai Catholicism also participates in a larger common Thai Christian community, all of which is influenced to varying degrees by the old Presbyterian, Disciples, and Baptist missions and churches?

HeRD #470 - Circulating Saints or Mainline Migrants?

An article in the March issue of the JOURNAL FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION (pp. 71-80) reports on the findings of a series of surveys done with three "New Evangelical Movements" (so-called NEMs) conducted between 1987 and 1992. The purpose of the study was to discover the sources of new membership for these rapidly growing groups. They are the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, Calvary Chapel, and Hope Chapel. The studies indicate that large numbers of these three groups' new members come from other evangelical groups. They are so-called "circulating saints." The fact is, however, that large numbers of these circulating saints were raised in mainline churches, so that ultimately they're migrants from the mainline who've been circulating in evangelicalism. Thus, between those who join the NEMs directly from the mainline, not a large group, and those who were raised mainline, "...the majority of new recruits in all three movements came from liberal Protestant or Catholic churches." (p. 78)

I don't know if anyone has systematically studied these same trends in Thai churches, but I would suspect that the situation is similar here in Thailand. We saw that Thai Pentecostalism is marked by fluid boundaries between denominational groups. [HeRDs #444 and #448]. The "circulating saints" phenomenon, termed "church tourists" by some here, is one known to Thailand's newer church groups. It is harder to guess what percentage of these might have

originated in the CCT, Thailand's equivalent of the mainline. It is clear that historically a substantial portion of the newer church movements' leadership came out of the CCT.

It would be fascinating and valuable to learn more about the "circulating saints" in Thailand. I suspect that they are significant carriers of a common Thai-Protestant church culture. They circulate not only because they're seeking a "better" church to attend but also for reasons of employment and patronage. There must be other reasons as well. There are cases, for example, where one family member moves to a new church and others in the family soon follow. The circulating saints, in any event, move across the artificial boundaries of mission and sect, taking with them both old ideas and new. We need to know more about them.

HeRD #471 - Hope of Bangkok I: Friends & Relatives Revisited

Edwin Zehner at Northern Illinois University has shared with me his observations from his work with the Hope of Bangkok Church, 1984-1988. The Hope Church is a Pentecostal congregation created by Dr. Kriengsak Chareonwongsak that has become the best known church in Thailand. At one time it claimed phenomenal growth statistics, and has in later years become an international enterprise. Ed's observations in the next five HeRDs open an important window on the development of Thai Pentecostalism. I'd like to thank Ed for sharing his insights with us.

In HeRDs #439 and #445, we looked at the so-called "friends and relatives" evangelism. My interviews with pastors of the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) indicated that some of TAG's more successful pastor-evangelists rely heavily on this approach. Zehner notes,

"At Hope of Bangkok leaders for a time took the importance of the 'friends and relatives' style of evangelism very seriously. Visitors to the Sunday services had to fill out a questionnaire which included an item on how they had becoming interested in visiting; the overwhelming majority (90%, according to church leaders) said they had been invited by 'friends,' though I think the term 'friends' was defined very loosely in practice. It might refer, for example, to somebody met just once on the street. Taking this seriously, in combination with his readings of materials from the "church growth" school which similarly emphasized growth along networks of friends and relatives, Kriengsak for a time focused heavily on trying to accelerate growth through these networks (while not stopping the other efforts at evangelism). The results showed the limits of friendship evangelism. Quite simply, it is a slow process that cannot be hurried. Some of the church leaders must have become very frustrated during this period, because many of them came from non-Christian families, and in most cases their parents and siblings were showing little or no inclination to convert."

It appears that Hope Church became a victim of it's own success. It created the image of a dynamic, rapidly growing congregation whose evangelistic success was based on its deep faith. Any slackening in growth would throw doubt on the image, esp. the sense that Hope Church was "truly Christian" in a way slower growing or non-growing churches weren't. One could do a very credible theological study on Thai church history under the theme of "Turning Visions into Idols" or "Idolatrous Visionaries" or some such subject.

HeRD #472 - Hope of Bangkok II: The Pentecostal Worship Trap

In response to HeRD #443 on the problems of using Pentecostal worship in smaller churches, Edwin Zehner writes of the Hope of Bangkok Church in the 1980s,

"I think much of this note [HeRD #443] is right on target. By the time I left Hope of Bangkok [1988] I had developed an impression that there was an almost magical attitude towards

the worship style, as if doing the worship in the correct style (heavily influenced by contemporary Western idioms) would unleash miraculous power in the churches. Of course the worship style, supported by a team of competent musicians, worked very well for the young Bangkok residents who formed the bulk of the church's membership. Being in an idiom they understood and liked, I suppose it really was "magic" for them. Unfortunately, the urban leadership was uninterested in allowing regional variations to develop. They were personally uninterested in regional folk idioms, and they assumed their tastes reflected those of all Thai people (at least this was the gist of the message I received from one middle-rank leader when I commented favorably on a picture of a folk performance which had been taken at Hope of Phayao in 1985).

"Reading your note reminded me vividly of a cell group meeting I attended at Hope of Bangkok around 1987 or so which was attended by several North easterners (including a couple of pastors, I think) who had begun attending the church's Bible school and had been assigned to our cell group. The first part of the service is normally up-tempo songs, and when we got to the part of the service where everybody sings their own way, the North easterners (who were the majority of the group) kept on in the same vein (making the music sound rather Northeastern as they did so), and the guitarist was skilled and savvy enough to support it. I thought it was all quite exciting, and I was getting interested in seeing how the rest of the meeting would develop, when the cell group leader put a halt to it. We were violating the format, she said. We were now approaching the time for "worship" songs, which meant use of the slower selections. Well, from there it was kind of boring, because the visitors had trouble with the musical idiom. Now, this leader's actions did not necessarily reflect church policy, but the whole time I was at Hope of Bangkok I rarely saw interest in development of a more indigenous feel to the worship services of the upcountry satellite churches."

Zehner concluded his remarks with the observation that other styles of worship also face their own problems, and he asked me, "What worship styles that you have observed seemed to resonate best with their users, Pentecostal or otherwise?" Good question.

HeRD #473 - Hope of Bangkok III: Notes on Leadership Training

The following is a historical sketch of Hope of Bangkok's leadership training strategies in the 1980s provided by Edwin Zehner. Although more than twice as long as the usual HeRD, I think it may be of interest to many of you.

"On the matter of leadership training and evangelism, the following aspects of Hope of Bangkok's history may be useful. It only applies to the period through 1988, both because the system itself was constantly being revised, and because I understand that Dr. Kriengsak is no longer formally leader of the denomination.

"The Hope of Bangkok Church is an independent Pentecostal congregation (now an international denomination) that was founded in 1981 by Dr. Kriengsak Chareonwongsak. Kriengsak had converted to Christianity while a freshman at Monash University in Australia. While finishing his undergraduate studies and a Ph.D. in economics at Monash University, he also became involved in the ministry of the Waverly Christian Fellowship, an independent Pentecostal congregation in the Melbourne area, where he became leader of the ministry to the Asian community. He also started a Pentecostal student ministry on campus.

"So by the time he started the Hope of Bangkok Church, Dr. Kriengsak had formed a strong preference for discipleship and leadership training, along with evangelism and strongly Pentecostal doctrine and practice, as essential elements in church growth, and he brought to his

new church also a personal interest in intensive organization (expressed in frequent administrative reorganizations).

"At Hope of Bangkok, Kriengsak focused heavily on follow-up and leadership training from the very beginning. In the early years, when many of the people doing the follow-up were actually somewhat experienced and knowledgeable, it seemed to be working (though Kriengsak himself seemed to be the best at it). In the earliest years (1984/85 and earlier) follow-up of new believers used a combination of personal visits to the convert for individual Bible study, involvement cell group meetings, and invitations to other activities at the church.

"As of 1984, leadership training used a combination of formal classes, involvement in leading cell group meetings, and experience in leading a regional set of cell groups in the city (as of 1984 there were still only a few of these). In 1984 the cell group meetings themselves consisted of worship, prayer, discussion of the previous Sunday's sermon, and discussion of personal problems. Hope of Bangkok had the same retention problems that other churches face in Bangkok, but they were able to retain and train a significant number of their converts. Attendance of the annual week-long church camp and of weekend retreats organized on the district and sub-district level were sometimes also important. Usually it took a combination of methods and contacts to get a convert involved long enough to be trained for leadership.

"As the church grew, the training system was simplified and formalized. A Bible school was opened in 1985, and by 1987 the church had designed a short-term course specifically for new believers. By this time the church also developed and printed a series of follow-up lessons for new believers (based closely on a syllabus that had been developed by a New Zealand congregation). Cell group lessons had also been simplified. Kriengsak had determined that some of the cell group leaders now lacked the skills to lead an effective discussion of the sermon, and so he replaced the discussion with a series of lessons written by one of the church leaders.

"By the late 1980s Hope of Bangkok was also opening satellite churches upcountry. Some of these congregations were brand new, and others were reaffiliating with Hope of Bangkok. In either case, the leaders of the congregations were expected to undergo several months formal training and service at Hope of Bangkok's school and in its cell groups and other ministries before they were considered ready to lead churches upcountry. Administration of regional home missions was handled by the same people who had risen to the top of the cell group administrative structure. By the late 1980s there was a schedule of quarterly regional pastoral retreats, a rotating schedule of visits to the daughter churches by a representative of the mother church, and regional retreats to supplement the annual church retreat sponsored by Hope of Bangkok itself.

"As for cell group administration in Bangkok, it had proliferated by 1988 into at least five levels of coordination, all the way from 2 or 4 city administrators at the top down to "mini-cells" of 4-5 people each at the bottom. The cell group structure was now the primary means of follow-up and training of new converts. For a time the church attempted to institute a separate structure of "phi liang," or discipling relationships, alongside the cell group structure, but I had the impression that it didn't work too well (probably because the lay leaders were becoming overworked), and was quickly allowed to lapse.

"In the mid-1980s these methods of leadership training seemed to be working very well. The combination of formal training, in-service experience in a growing church, and personal input from church leaders seemed to be producing usable leaders. In 1987/88 I had the impression that Kriengsak felt that cell group meetings and conversion follow-up were not working as well as they had earlier. He may have been having trouble adapting to a larger

audience the training methods that had been working with the relatively educated congregation that had initially been attracted to the church. I also had the impression that the church's attempt to duplicate upcountry the methods that had worked in Bangkok might limit its appeal to potential rural converts. I have not had recent opportunities to investigate these questions.

"I would be happy to entertain any questions and comments from you or others."

HeRD #474 - Hope of Bangkok IV: About Pentecostal Migration

HeRD #444 discussed the issue of the apparently "fluid boundaries" between Pentecostal groups in Thailand. Edwin Zehner comments,

"Being at Hope of Bangkok in the 1980s I heard a lot of talk about this fluidity first hand. Kriengsak told me in 1985 or 1986 that a lot of pastors from other Pentecostal denominations had been approaching him and asking him to start a new denomination immediately. Despite his reputation for stealing churches from other groups in this period, he actually held most of them off at arms' length, and made entry to his new denomination difficult by requiring stringent retraining. Late in the decade I received a letter from a non-Pentecostal missionary who complained of the many churches in her denomination in their denomination who were talking of joining Hope of Bangkok. The missionary outlined a list of additional services that the churches were demanding from the mission and the denomination as a condition of staying.

"So I think the fluidity is an important feature of church-denomination relations in Thailand, and it may be central to understanding how many denominations work. Though I haven't published anything on the issue yet, I have lately been trying to articulate an approach to this "fluid boundaries" issue by suggesting that this fluidity stems from an underlying (unconscious) approach to denominations in terms of relationships and resource exchanges. The institution as an organization is less important than the resources that it provides.

"The idea was inspired by the awareness that before the Thai government placed all Buddhist monasteries in a single, nationally regulated hierarchy, there were a wide array of what might be called "mother-daughter" relations among monasteries. The shape of these networks changed as the fortunes of the mother monastery changed (usually due to variations in the abilities of its abbots over the years). The notion was influenced as well by the old patron-client analyses of Thai social interaction. It was influenced, thirdly, by observing the fluid and personalistic nature of Thai political parties. And it was inspired, of course, by all the denomination-switching by leaders and entire congregations, which seems much more common in Thailand than in North America."

HeRD #475 - Hope of Bangkok V: Competitive Counting

In an exchange with Edwin Zehner on church statistics in Thailand, he noted that Pentecostal statistics are, in fact, suspect. He writes,

"I think some of the Bangkok churches got into competitive inflation in the 1980s, and then didn't know how to back down (some of them also competed in the ambitious goal-setting department, and copied each others' publicity materials). At Hope of Bangkok it was easy to see the numbers inflation happening. Somehow our 950-seat auditorium kept getting described as a 1500 capacity auditorium (even with closed-circuit TV, I don't think it could make it). More to the point, the church considerably eased the definition of membership as the decade progressed. In the early years there were stringent pre-membership interviews that tried to press home the commitment that would be expected of the members. When I joined in 1985 there was still the

notion that membership meant a significant commitment to the church and its vision. Up through this point membership trended fairly closely with attendance. Then around 1986 or 1987 it suddenly became important to get the membership statistics up. Prescreening dropped away almost entirely. And membership rolls went 2 or 3 years without being pared down. The discrepancy between the attendance people could see and the membership reported in the services was explained by saying that some members were sick or otherwise unable to attend.

"For a while I was able to keep a sense of how big the church was by estimating attendance at Sunday services. But when the church outgrew its auditorium it went to multiple services. Members of each district were supposed to attend a different main service, yet at the same time there was pressure to attend as many services possible. So it became difficult to tell how many different individuals actually attended the church on each Sunday. As hyperorganized as the church was, it should have been very easy to devise a way to find out. But the leaders did not consider that in their best interest. Instead, they began reporting the combined attendance of all the services as if each service were comprised of different sets of individuals."

Zehner went on to note that other religious groups in Thailand frequently play the numbers game as well so that it wouldn't be fair to judge Pentecostals as being distinctively inflationary. What his comments point to, in any event, is the serious difficulties in getting any reliable church statistics in Thailand.

HeRD #476 - Migration and the CCT

Following on Zehner's comments concerning Pentecostal migration in HeRD #474, it's important to note that institutional and historical factors may be as important as cultural ones. Zehner may well be correct in suggesting that Thai cultural issues such as patron-client social patterns and personality politics are at work. These can be expressed, however, in different ways. The Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) experiences some migration both into and out of its structures, but the impression is that migration is significantly less an issue for it than for smaller, newer groups. Most of its pastors are trained in CCT seminaries and Bible schools. It has lost churches and members over the years, but it seems to have gained more from large in-migrations (esp. from tribal churches) than it has lost to other groups. It would seem to have a deeper sense of identity and self-consciousness than many of the newer groups, and it may well be unique in that its core identity is with a Thai denomination rather than an overseas one. It's true that among the newer additions to the CCT, mostly from a Baptist background, there's still a strong identification with a foreign Protestant denomination. The old Presbyterian "core identity," however, has all but disappeared. Third and fourth generation CCT members generally take no sense of identity from their missionary heritage, the Twelfth District (Bangkok-centered, Chinese Baptist) being the notable exception.

Since there's been no study of all of this, so far as I know, in terms of the CCT, it's hard to know just why the CCT's experience of migration is less pronounced than that of other Protestant groups. Size and history most certainly are factors.

HeRD #477 - Pa Malai

The following story comes to us from the Northeast by way of the Rev. Pekka Hiltunen of the Lutheran Mission in Thailand. It has to do with Pa (Aunt) Malai of the village of Si Khiu. Pekka was himself witness to some of the events involved and learned the full story from several different informants. I've taken the liberty of slightly editing Pekka's account. He writes:

"Pah (Aunt) Malay is a strong woman. People in her village come to her home for counseling and encouragement, even today, the same way they used to depend on her before the events that made her a Christian. The first time she learned about Christ was through a leaflet she found on a street as a teenager (already with 3 children!) over 20 years ago. She had never met a Christian and thought that the leaflet must have fallen from the Thevada (Deva, spirits) above. "I was a young fool (ngoh) like that!" She kept the leaflet and thought about it until it finally vanished out of her thoughts.

"In her village she became a famous medium. People used to come for her to seek advice in crucial every day needs. She would fall into a trance and the spirit (phee or winyan) would enter her and speak through her mouth. She herself has no memory of these events. The people present would tell her afterwards the message she delivered. She received a certain payment or gifts for her mediumship, and sometimes the spirits expressed their needs directly to the customer. The spirits did get more and more demanding. They soon claimed her room to dwell in, and Pah Mahlay had to move to the terrace outside of the house. The feeding (liang) of the spirits gave her fame but no money in the end. Pah Mahlay also become moodier, and every now and then the mood fell upon her in an irresistible way. Sometimes she couldn't control her behaviour.

Pastor Anand of the Si Khiu Blessing Lutheran Congregation was paying regular home visitations to homes in the neighborhood, and Pah Mahlay wanted to be involved. Her curious look was interpreted as unpolite staring, and she couldn't make closer acquaintance. This situation changed when Ms Anita Chang, a missionary from Hong Kong, came to Pastor Anand's place for six months. During that time Pah Mahlay was baptized. But her house was still full of statues and idols for the spirits to dwell around. When Acharn Anand returned, the paraphernalia was destroyed and the spirits were ordered to leave. At the moment of his prayer, a theological student fell down on the floor, and strange sounds were heard like footsteps on the roof, which were taken to be signs that the spirits were removing themselves from the house. The statues were burned. The male members of the family, seeing the power of God, decided to convert as well. Some ten of her relatives and friends have become Christians after seeing her and the change in her life. The family has also been able to buy a red Toyota pick up for their business."

We'll follow up on Pa Malai of Si Khiu in the next two HeRDs. My thanks to Pekka, a HeRD recipient, for sharing her story with us.

HeRD #478 - Pa Malai's Pillow

Pekka Y. Hiltunen shares with us the following story about Pa Malai of Si Khiu (see HeRD #477), a Christian convert and former spirit medium. He writes:

"Pah Mahlay and her family receive her income by collecting trash and selling from it whatever had some value. One night she woke up with her attention fixed upon a pillow she had picked up the day before, and she couldn't sleep anymore. To her eyes the pillow was glowing. She thought immediately that somebody had hidden money in it, and she tore it open. There was no money but, instead, two dolls, the figures of a man and a woman. That particular kind of doll is used in putting a curse on a couple. Pah Malay recognized the common story behind these dolls: either a "mia noy" (minor wife) or a real wife was dissatisfied with her man's sex affairs and used this means to put an end to it. Pah Mahlay, as a Christian, burned the dolls. The next night, however, the lights in her home were witched on and off all night and a howling sound was heard going around the house. Next day Pah Mahlay had the pastor come and chase the spirit of the curse away. The pastor anointed the poles of the house with oil as a symbol of Holy

Spirit's presence, and he walked around the house praying in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The disturbances ceased."

Pekka will share some reflections on Pa Malai's experiences in HeRD #479. What is striking in his tales about this Christian convert is the way in which they confirm the continued existence of Christian animism. Just because Christians burn the paraphernalia of animism and stop involving themselves in animistic practices doesn't mean they cease to live in a world inhabited by spirits. It's just that their relationship to that world changes as does their interpretation of it. Christian animists would certainly argue that their new faith gives them improved resources for coping with that world.

HeRD #479 - From Thai Buddhism to Thai Christianity?

Pekka Hiltunen offers us the following commentary on Pa Malai of Si Khiu (HeRDs #478 & 479):

The Thai Buddhism can be separated into 5 circles with one and the same center (Acharn Saeng, Chiang Mai) The farther one moves from the orthodox center the more syncretistic the belief system becomes. These 5 circles are: 1. The innermost circle would be the Enlightenment oriented Buddhism. Acharn Saeng from Chiang Mai says that appr. 5% of Thai Buddhists fall into this category. My feeling is that the 5% is too large a figure. 2. The second circle would be the Philosophical Buddhism, like Buddhadasa of Suan Mok. He could also be named within the innermost circle, too. 3. The third would be the Ethical Buddhism, for example Sulak Siwaraksa, and even Santi Asoke. 4. The fourth circle would be the Folk Buddhism with various magical, occult, and animistic practices that make up with a national and regional culture much of the Thai way of life . 5. The outer circle would be the State Buddhism or the Political Buddhism. The state seems to tolerate and even utilize a wide variety of religious practices.

Thai Buddhism is a rich religious market place: There is a special offer for a sincere searcher, mystic, philosopher, state man, merchant, farmer, house wife, prostitute, and a criminal. This wide range of religious phenomena called in Thailand "the Buddhism" touches all aspects of life and culture.

In Si Khiu Lutheran congregation the members come from the out skirt of the society, and from the 4th, the largest, circle of Folk Buddhists in Thailand. The members seem to be people who have lost their hope for the religious-ethical-cultural-political system in their sight to meet with their needs. When I asked them, why they have become Christians I received four kinds of answers: 1. Christianity was the answer to my fear of the spirit world; 2. I experienced, or I am anticipating a physical healing; 3. Christianity gives me hope for a better living standard; 4. No other system can help me.

Christianity has a say in the needs as expressed in the language of Folk Buddhism. There is a need for direction in the world inhabited by malevolent spirits and where the ever-going fight for daily rice is still going on.

The Si Khiu congregation has a strong emphasis on mutual and social care as well as on Christ's victory over the demonic and sicknesses, and His ability to take care of the daily needs and even bless His children in material ways. Some question remain, however: How many of these needs would have been met with the Folk-Religiosity of Thailand if wisely administered? What would be a genuine Christian message in Si Khiu? What is the good news about Christ for these people? Should I, as a western missionary, whose duty is to assist the local pastor, be content with the way the Good News is heard here and now?

Yours

Pekka Y. Hiltunen

HeRD #480 - Protestant Animism

Edwin Zehner's article in the JOURNAL OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES (September 1996) on "Thai Protestants and Local Supernaturalism" raises important points concerning Thai Protestant animistic thinking. Zehner argues that Thai Protestants have re-configured their animistic beliefs in a more Western dualistic frame work. Protestants, that is, have simplified the Thai understanding of the spirits by demonizing them. Thai animism traditionally recognizes good as well as evil spirits, but for the Christians there are no good spiritual beings apart from God and God's angels. All spirits, be they "phi," "winyan," "thewada," or "pret" are malevolent. Thai Protestants, furthermore, use this radically dualistic framework to reinterpret Christian concepts. They experience God's grace, for example, as being divine protection from spirits.

Zehner's arguments suggests a paradigm that is well worth exploring. Thai Protestants according to this paradigm, have appropriated Western dualism for interpreting and dealing with their animistic world. That seems quite possible. There is a problem. Zehner's data base is small, discrete, and impressionistic. It is also limited, apparently, to Bangkok Pentecostals. Which is to say, his data is solid enough to raise important issues but not substantial enough to prove his case. It seems likely that other Thai Protestant traditions handle these issues somewhat differently. Northern Thai CCT members, in many instances, seem to have little active involvement with animistic phenomena. Exorcisms are less common. There is a deep sense among most that God protects Christians from the spirits and thus the whole spirit-world is irrelevant. At the same time, however, northern Thai Christians seem to believe in positive spirits, specifically "winyan". Winyan are the spirits of their dead relatives or friends and sometimes come back to visit Christians, either through para-normal experiences (strange sounds, for example) or in dreams. These visits are wanted and welcomed. There isn't, thus, the radical dualization argued for by Zehner.

Zehner, nonetheless, has a good point. It needs to be fleshed out by further research in different contexts. And while his paradigm is almost certainly too neat, it's still a potentially useful analytical tool for the study of Thai Protestant animism.

HeRD #481 - Off the Wall

The early church had to decide whether or not Jesus was fully human. The church's docetists and gnostics argued from a Platonic world view that looks on the sensible world as being a false, evil world. The world of the spirit alone is real. They disallowed a human Jesus, because the divine Christ couldn't possibly have anything to do with the false world of the senses. The "catholic" church, however, rejected this denigration of the created world. It accepted the Jewish/Old Testament view that God created the world and created it good. Therefore, Jesus could be both human and divine. The point is that the early church's divergent views on reality led to divergent understandings of the person and role of Jesus. The church had to decide what is real in order to decide who Jesus is/was.

Now, if it be true that the Thai church strongly emphasizes Jesus' divinity and ignores (shies away from?) his humanity, then we have to ask what this suggests about the church's view of reality. Does the Thai church hold the sensible world to be a false, evil world? Overtly, I don't think so. The problem is that Thai theological thought is largely covert. It isn't a self-consciously articulated, systematic response to the Christian message contained in theology

books, at least not yet. It's expressed in sermons, in projects, in popular articles, in styles of and approaches to ministry, and in numerous other daily ways. It, thus, doesn't deal overtly with the issue of what is real. We're left with the question of how the emphasis on the divine Jesus is related to the churches' understanding(s) of reality.

Two hypotheses. ONE, a deeper strata of Thai Buddhist thinking about reality is at work here. Buddhism overtly sees the world as unreal, as changing, as unworthy of attention or concern. Thai Christian thinking about Jesus, by this hypothesis, reflects a perspective on reality covertly "borrowed" from its larger culture. The heavy admixture of animism in Thai Buddhism would only serve to reinforce the sense that the world of the spirits is the more real one. Or, TWO, Thai Protestantism doesn't like the "outside" world very much. It has a strong ghetto mentality. The human Jesus, on the other hand, was the suffering servant who lived in and died for the world. The Thai church isn't very enthusiastic about having much to do with that world, and in a sense rejects it. Hence, the spiritualized, not-really-human Jesus is more in keeping with how it views the world.

It could even be both of these are involved. Or, again, it could be that neither is correct.

HeRD #482 - The Prototypical Conversion

Last semester at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, one B.A. student turned in a paper on the history of the Suriya Rangsi Church of the First District, CCT. The paper is based largely on historical notes written years ago by a member now in his late 80s. The note book tell the story of the founding member's conversion to Christianity. There's no telling how accurate the story is, but as an example of the genre of conversion stories it's a classic.

The story, as told in the student's paper, is that Nan Panya Kungrangsi was a resident of the village of Ban Pong. ("Nan" is a northern Thai honorific for someone who has completed certain high levels of temple studies). It happened that his (nameless) wife contracted an (unspecified) illness, and nothing that Nan Panya did for her helped her get better. One day, quite by coincidence, Nan Panya met a friend of his, Nai (Mr.) Mo, who was known to him to have farang (Western) medicines that he got from the missionaries. He asked for some, and when he took the three pills home to his wife she quickly recovered. After further discussions with Nai Mo, they both decided to become Christians. This was in 1930. The story doesn't stop there. The paper continues, "Nan Panya and his wife thus went into Chiang Mai, and they both met 'The Great Father Teacher' [Dr. Daniel McGilvary]. From his preaching about God to them, they both believed in Jesus Christ. And they also received a Bible."

The story may even be a true one, or have some kernel of truth to it. Who knows? Variations on it appear again and again in the living memory of the northern Thai church as well as in the records of the old Presbyterian Laos Mission. The convert is an educated Buddhist. Someone gets ill and they can't find a cure. A Christian friend introduces them to missionary medicine and then to the Christian religion. This one is made doubly a classic by the insertion of a visit to Dr. McGilvary, the premier missionary of the North. [Nan Panya and his wife were supposed to have visited McGilvary in 1930. He died in 1911.] The value of these reports is that they represent the perspective of the church itself, and that's a perspective for which we have relatively little historical documentation.

A bit of interpretation follows in the next HeRD.

HeRD #483 - Interpreting the Convert's Story

The story of the conversion of Nan Panya and his wife, as recounted in a note book from the Suriya Rangsi Church, remembers the past from a distinctively northern Thai Christian perspective. In that past, indigenous religious and medical resources failed to meet the needs of the prospective convert. The convert turned, as something of a last resort, to a Christian friend and asked for farang medicine. The role of the missionary, thus, was mediated through northern Thai converts. The medium for both care and for conversion came through a faithful Christian, who both healed the body and evangelized the soul. The experience in healing brought a new, different religious perspective to the prospective convert, a perspective that opened them up to the possibility of taking up the Jesus Religion. Note, however, that Nan Panya and his wife converted twice, once with the northern Thai friend and again with the (long dead) premier missionary of the North. They received both the faith and a Bible from Dr. McGilvary. And the conversion story was complete.

That's just how things actually happened. Missionary medicine, historically, was the most effective agency for conversion. The convert community, rather than the missionaries, was the main medium for evangelism and conversion. Healing experiences did cause people to re-evaluate their religious loyalties. And, in earlier years, most converts received their baptisms (their confirmation in faith) at the hands of a missionary because of the dearth of northern Thai clergy. Even the visit paid to the city, recalls the fact that the Laos Mission centralized its work in its urban-based mission stations. The story also remembers how deeply the northern Thai church revered Dr. McGilvary.

The story is a gem. It's also a gold mine.

HeRD #484 - Small Window on a Wide World

Another student paper from last term at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology presented the a history of Christian education at the Huey Kao Church, First District of the CCT. One historical fact in the paper particularly caught my attention. In the late 1940s, before this congregation was established as a church, it had to send its few students to the neighboring Siritwattana Church. One elderly Huey Kao member remembers, "When I was a child I went to Sunday school with two or three other students. The regular teacher was Pa (Aunt) Bua Keo. There we sang Dr. Song's revivalistic hymns, and she taught us the Bible by telling us bible stories."

The fact I find intriguing is that the Siritwattana Sunday school was using revivalistic tunes from the John Song revivals a decade later in its Sunday school. John Song, a well-known Chinese evangelist, held a series of revival meetings in nearly every major (Protestant) Christian center in Thailand in 1939. His revivals had a major impact on the churches, inspiring them to the most exciting revivalistic outpouring in the history of the Thai church. The Song revivals are one of the most important events in 20th century Thai church history. They're important because they provided the post-War church with its major strategy for restoration and renewal. The Rev. Puang Akkapin, Moderator of the CCT, and a number of others, notably the Rev. Tongkham Puntupongse, traveled the country in the 1940s and 1950s holding Song-style revivals. The Song revivals also deeply influenced the Rev. Boonmark Kittisarn, who later played an important role in introducing Pentecostalism into Thailand.

What is fascinating is that in the late 1940s the Siritwattana Church Sunday school played its role in passing on the experience of the Song revivals. It taught it's children to sing the Song tunes. In this small way, it also passed on the Thai church's revivalistic legacy to the younger generation. And in this small way we gain a bit more insight into the significance of the Song revivals for the post-War Thai church.

HeRD #485 - The Pauline Struggle

E. P. Sanders in his book, *PAUL, THE LAW, AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE*, argues that the Apostle Paul, in the light of Jesus Christ, had to rethink the place of the Law in God's scheme of things. Paul, as a Jew, retained his firm belief that God gave the Law to Israel and that the Law was in accordance with God's "plan of salvation." But Paul, as a Christian, could no longer believe that the Law led to salvation, because salvation was only in Christ. What, then, of the Law? Sanders points out that Paul never arrived at one, final answer to that question, and he diagrams three distinct views expressed by Paul in passages in Galatians (3:22-24) and Romans (5:20f; 7:7-13; and 7:14-25) (Sanders, p. 75). At times, Paul identifies sin and the Law with each other, the Law being a negative agent in God's plan. At times, he argues that Law is a tool of sin and thus is outside of God's plan for salvation. And, at other times, he sees the Law as being a positive element in that plan. Sanders summarizes, "[Paul] was in a situation which required him to cast off, to deny, God' principal redemptive activities in the past: the election and the law. That he desperately wanted to find room for them is clear, for example, in Rom. 9:4-6; but it is equally clear that he could not have them still count for salvation. Here was a theological problem of the first order of magnitude: What was God up to before Christ? What was the point of the law? How can one hold together the history of Israel (including the law) with God's intention to save all by Christ?" (pp. 78-79) Paul, in sum, didn't reject his previous religious understandings out of hand. He continued to value them, but he kept changing his mind as to what their value actually was. He tried to work through them from the new perspectives he gained as a Christian, sometimes nearly rejecting them and sometimes nearly affirming them.

Missionary Protestantism taught its converts that there was no good whatsoever in their former faith. Those churches, thus, have yet to wrestle in an articulate, overt way with how they might be able to hold together the history of Thai Buddhism-animism with "God's intention to save all by Christ." It is difficult to see how the churches can attain theologies culturally relevant to Thai peoples apart from some such process.

HeRD #486 - The Third Entity

The idea of "the church" didn't just appear magically at Pentecost. Indeed, at Pentecost and for decades after there was no such thing as "the church" at all. Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus didn't, originally, belong to an identifiable entity independent of Judaism. The invention of the church only came after some period of time and was, in part, a sociological event. As Jewish Christians withdrew from the synagogue and Gentile Christians from other religions joined the Jesus faith, they increasingly associated exclusively with each other. The religious-social "entity" they belonged to was neither Jewish nor "Pagan", but something new and distinct. This new social entity, however, went for some time without a name of its own.

E. P. Sanders in *PAUL, THE LAW, AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE* provides some insights into how the Apostle Paul understood the invention of the church. Sanders argues that Paul believed that the emerging community of believers was the "New Israel," based exclusively on faith in Christ. Gentiles as well as Jews belonged to the New Israel. Paul wrote, for example, that, "...we are the people [God] called, not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles." (Romans 8:24, TEV) Sanders puts considerable weight on the pronoun, "we". Who is "we"? (p. 175) He observes that "we" was a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles, both of which had to renounce certain previous religious beliefs and practices in order to become "we". Gentiles, admittedly, had to divest themselves of the larger burden of their former religions. They had to change religions in a way that Jewish Gentiles didn't; but, according to Paul, Jews as well had to give up a number of Jewish legal practices when they joined this new community. They, most particularly, couldn't maintain Jewish dietary laws because they had to take part in

the Lord's Supper (a real meal, not just a ceremony) with Gentile Christians. Gentile and Jewish converts alike had to modify their relationship with their former religion and with their larger society. Paul, according to Sanders, never articulated this process clearly, but it is implicit in his correspondence, such as Romans' passage quoted above.

The formation of the church, then, was a complex sociological and theological event. Gentile Christians had to adopt substantial amounts of Jewish thought and practice. Jewish Christians had to adapt themselves to Gentile social customs. They had to learn to eat as Gentiles, for example. I'd like to come back to all of this in HeRD #487.

HeRD #487 - The Third Entity in Thailand

HeRD #486 described the formation of the early church as being a complex social and theological event. In the process, both Jewish and Gentile Christians had to adapt themselves to their new faith and to their shared life in a new, nameless social entity. Both had to give up aspects of their former lives to do so. It's as if the early community of faith carried out an ongoing intra-faith dialogue between Jewish and Gentile believers that, over the course of some decades, led to the church. One has to assume that the actual "diaological process" varied in form and in content from region to region and even from local group to local group. Wholly Jewish congregations would have hardly participated at all and some probably resisted it. The picture that emerges from all of this, however, is a complex, rich, and stimulating social process that must have enriched many participants intellectually as well as spiritually. It would be fascinating to know how conscious the early Christians were of the process itself.

It seems to me that Thai churches have inevitably participated in a parallel process, in some ways, in spite of the vast differences in historical and socio-cultural context. We saw something of this in HeRD #480 concerning the ways in which Thai Christians have adapted Western dualistic thinking to their own animistic world view. It is possible, however, that the process here has been spiritually and intellectually stultifying rather than enriching.

HeRD #488 - Sins & Sin

A couple of months ago, an M.Div. student came to me asking for some advice on a paper concerning "baab" (sin). She had a lot of material, but it wasn't coming together. She was particularly puzzled over the relationship between "kwam chua" (evil) and "baab" and how to distinguish the two concepts. I've never felt it wise to try to tell native language speakers of Thai how to make distinctions between Thai concepts, esp. ones such as this. As we talked, however, the distinctions she was trying to make didn't sound right, esp. after we consulted a dictionary as to the meanings of each concept. Finally, it became clear. She was using "kwam chua" to translate "Sin" (the concept) and "baab" to mean "sins" (the individual acts). She got this distinction between sin and sins from her research, which necessarily relied almost exclusively on English-language materials. She also explained that she didn't trust the Thai concept of "baab" because it didn't really mean "sin". But she also couldn't seem to fit the English concepts into a meaningful paper written in Thai.

This student's confusion points to the obstacles involved in Thai-language Christian theological reflection. The resources most trusted and relied upon are nearly all in English. Those resources reflect issues and approaches that are frequently difficult to apply to Thai situations. As in this case, they can become a trap, not only because they aren't particularly relevant but also because they are seen as representing "real" Christian thinking. Thus, English is relied upon as the medium for "doing" Thai theology. Culturally relevant Thai concepts are rejected as being inadequate for Christian theology. The result is found in this Thai seminarian's

floundering in the subtleties of English-language distinctions (Thai handles singulars and plurals in a different way so that the sins-sin distinction doesn't make sense in Thai). She ended up "doing theology" quite outside the context of her own cultural and linguistic world.

HeRD #489 - Remembering the Crucifixion

Gerard S. Sloyan's book, *THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS: HISTORY, MYTH, FAITH*, reflects on our knowledge of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. How do we know, that is, what actually happened in the events related to Jesus' crucifixion? One source of information for his reconstruction rests on our general knowledge of Roman practices of crucifixion. There seems to be surprisingly little detailed information on those practices, and it's not even certain where this particularly cruel form of execution originated. Our main source of information about Jesus' crucifixion comes, of course, from the four Gospels. But, where did the Gospel writers get THEIR information? That question involves us in all sorts of complexities. First, did the incipient Christian community consciously set out to gather information on Jesus' crucifixion after the resurrection? How widely, if so, did they search out information? Did they talk with other participants in events? Who? Some historians think that the Jesus Community actively sought such information while other scholars scoff at the idea. Supposing there was a body of information concerning the crucifixion, how was it "stored"? In what form was it when the Gospel writers availed themselves of it? It's clear, furthermore, that the four Gospel narratives differ in many ways. How much of this is due to differing traditions and how much to their own differing perspectives and interpretations?

There really aren't any answers possible now to these questions, and it's striking that one of the core events of the Christian faith should be, at one and the same time, so empirically difficult to get at and so spiritually meaningful. Christian empiricists have tried to deny the inherent tension between our lack of data about biblical events and the importance of those events to our faith. They insist that the data is perfect so there's no tension. Christian mystics, uninterested in empirical data, don't worry about the supposed tension. Those Christians who are neither mystics nor fundamentalists are left to work through as best we can how Jesus' crucifixion can be both empirically obscure and a central element in our faith.

HeRD #490 - Heil Schicklgruber!

On 7 June 1837 Maria Anna Schicklgruber, an unwed servant girl living in the Austrian Empire village of Strones, gave birth to a son, Alois Schicklgruber. Years later Alois was able to have his family name changed to that of his presumed father, and from June 1877 onwards, Alois Schicklgruber became Alois Hitler. On 20 April 1889, Alois Hitler's son was born and given the name of Adolf. (Joachim C. Fest, *HITLER*, pp. 15-17). It's been speculated that if Alois Schicklgruber had never changed his last name, the whole vast edifice of Nazism could never have come about. For who, after all, could have said, "Heil Schicklgruber!" with a stern and straight face?

This seemingly frivolous speculation about Hitler's last name has a point. Great historical events emerge out of a chaos of seemingly inconsequential, fortuitous, and coincidental every day happenings generally hidden away from the historian. History books make neat and tidy things that aren't neat and tidy at all. They conjure up profound insights into what is really quite mundane. It's not that the writing of history is entirely vain, so much as that historiography is always a tentative enterprise. Conclusions are never absolutely now and forever. The past isn't as rationale or well-organized as the chapters of history books make it appear. It's a vast, chaotic mish-mash of mostly just every day happenings like Maria Anna Schicklgruber getting pregnant out of wedlock in 1837 and her son changing his last name in 1877. Every "great event," that is,

is comprised of huge numbers of these every day happenings mixed together in a way that leads to unusual consequences.

Special Series

by Dr. Philip Hughes

HeRD #S1 - Introduction

May I thank Herb for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you. My knowledge of the Thai culture and context is not as deep as Herb's, but I hope to raise some stimulating issues over the next month by making some cross-cultural comparisons and by using the research methodology I am most familiar with - sociological. Next week, I will be raising a variety of theoretical issues about church life in society. The following week, I will share some preliminary results of a project on social change and religion which Herb and Ach. Pradit have helped me to develop in Chiang Mai. I look forward to receiving any feedback you may have. If you would like to see more of my research background and my current research work, please visit the Christian Research Association home page - www.ozemail.com.au/~cramel. If you have problems receiving this, please let me know.

HeRD #S2 - Social Change and Values

I returned to Chiang Mai last August (1996), only the third time since I completed my doctoral studies there in 1982. This time I had six weeks to do some teaching, look around, and conduct some research. The changes in Chiang Mai that have occurred since 1982 were dramatic. For example, the few shelves of Dtantrapun, the only department store in 1982, had been complemented by two huge department stores five floors high. A very extensive range of goods filled the shops. People living in Chiang Mai have access to a much wider range of goods than they did in 1982. I remember making a special visit to Bangkok to buy a programmable calculator in 1982. That would be not necessary today. So much more is available in Chiang Mai itself.

What do such changes mean for religious faith, however? Shalom Schwartz, a Jewish scholar, has been continuing the research on religion and values that Milton Rokeach conducted in the 1970s. In a recent paper, written by Schwartz in conjunction with Sipke Huismans, published in 1995 in the *Social Psychological Quarterly* (vo.58, no.2, pp.88-107), entitled "Value Priorities and Religiosity in Four Western Religions", the authors note that religion correlates negatively with hedonistic values, with one's comfort and pleasure. (The four religions they examined were Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Judaism.) Does the increased availability of goods, then, encourage hedonistic values related to possession and pleasure? And do these values tend to mask or replace religious values which emphasize living for the sake of others and compassion? Or, does the availability of goods have little impact in its own right? Do the shops provide only for those who are pre-disposed to buy? The speed at which change is happening in Chiang Mai allows us to look at some of the influences which may be occurring over a much longer time in other places. Next week, I will give you some preliminary results from the research I set up last year.

HeRD #S3 - Decline in Interest in Religion

Decline in interest in religion is a popular theme in contemporary popular culture. Every time someone from the secular press contacts me, they assume that church attendance has diminished, that people are no longer interested in religion. The question is usually the same:

how much has interest in religion diminished according to your latest figures? However, the academics working in sociology of religion are not nearly as convinced about secularisation as a unidirectional trend as they were. The sociologist, Peter Berger, for example, has admitted this change in his own attitudes in a recent book, *A FAR GLORY*.

Nevertheless, there do seem to be some trends which need explaining. The Census in Australia includes a question "What is your religion?" It provides a snap-shot, every five years, of who identifies with what religious group. As a question which has been asked of Australians for nearly 200 years, on a very regular basis, the changes in it are very informative - even though the responses bear little relationship to those people who are actually involved in a religious group.

In 1971, the census first invited people to describe themselves as "no religion" if they had no religion. 6.7% of Australians responded to that option. In 1981, it had increased to 10.8%. In 1986, there was a further increase to 12.7%. Then it appeared to level out. In 1991, 12.9% described themselves as having "no religion".

Many of us thought that the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s may be having less effect in the late 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps people were beginning to take a greater interest in religion. Church attendance has not declined greatly since the mid-1980s, for example. There is a lot of talk about interest in spirituality. However, the 1996 census produced another rise, from 12.9% to 16.8%. Nearly 3 million Australians (out of total of nearly 18 million) described themselves as having "no religion". (We often add to this the numbers of people who fail to answer the question, which is stated as optional in the census - another 8% in 1996 and 10% in 1991.)

There are many theories to account for such changes - and many theories about the nature of secularisation itself. International comparisons can be very useful, however, in checking the validity of theories. It would be most interesting to know if there is currently an increase in people who would describe themselves as having "no religion" in Thailand. I suspect not. Being Buddhist is still seen as part of being Thai. Yet, I suspect that the significance of Buddhism for many Thai people has diminished.

HeRD #S4 - Change in Community Life

Last August, Herb and I were talking with some of the people who live in his village about the changes they had experienced. They suggested that the changes could be summarised in terms of transport available. They remembered, not that long ago, when the only way to market was to go on foot. It meant a very long walk and an early start, perhaps once a week. Chiang Mai, in those days, was more than a day's journey. The people from the village rarely went to the big city. Then came the bicycle, and the journey to market did not take nearly so long. It was still a long way to Chiang Mai, but a healthy individual could ride to Chiang Mai and back in a day. Sometime after that came the motorbike. (15 years ago, everyone seemed to have a 70cc Honda family edition.) Chiang Mai was now a lot closer, and the effort of getting there had diminished substantially. Just in the last five years, however, the day of the car has arrived for many villagers. Indeed, quite a few have sold their land so that they commute daily to Chiang Mai. They are now able to replace their work on the land with employment on building sites or other labour-intensive projects in the city.

The effects on local community life may be considerable. Villages have become, for some, dormitory suburbs. Villagers no longer work together in their fields. They no longer spend time with each other in the village streets. We have yet to see what this will mean for village life. In

Australia, the time spent in the local area (within walking distance) diminished substantially in the 1960s. Prior to that time, many married women spent much of their time in the local area. Few were involved in the paid work-force. Few had access to a car during the day. They went frequently to the shops. They talked with others they met down the streets. They saw other mothers at the school gate when they went to pick up their children.

As mothers moved into the work force (9% in 1947, 25% in 1965 and 50% in 1971), and many families purchased their second car, so interest in the local community declined considerably. So also, I believe, did interest in the church which was a major centre for local community life. People did not give up on belief. Rather, they gave up on the church as a local community organisation. They no longer needed or wanted the social contact that the church provided. It will be interesting to see if this now happens in the villages around Chiang Mai.

HeRD #S5 - Social Capital

Everywhere I go in Australia, people seem to be talking about the work of Robert Putnam. Robert Putnam is professor of International Affairs at Harvard, and has been involved in the development of the idea of "social capital".

In an article entitled "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" published in 1995 in the JOURNAL OF DEMOCRACY (vol 6, no.1, pp.65-78), Putnam has argued that the levels of social trust in America have declined very considerably. He sees the decline partly in terms of people feeling anxious about the neighbourhoods and not willing to trust the people among whom they live. He also sees it in decline in trust in the major institutions of society, in government and business. He argues that, ultimately, the levels of distrust can harm the working of democracy itself. Democracy depends on people's willingness to trust the vote of the other person, and trust the institutions of government and people who work in them.

Putnam sees the decline of participation in voluntary organisations like Scouts and Red Cross, in labour unions and civic groups like Lions as evidence for this lack of social trust - or perhaps also a cause of it. Today, as many Americans as ever go to Ten-Pin Bowling alleys. However, unlike the past, they now play alone, and bowling in organised leagues has plummeted. He suggests that decline in church involvement may also be a symptom (and perhaps a cause) of this lack of social trust. The basic cause of this decline in social trust is that people are no longer associated with each other in inter-dependent ways. Neighbours do not get to meet each other. They are no longer engaged with each other in projects for the sake of the local area. Shopping is now done in an impersonal way in large shopping centres rather than at local shops. He notes four major trends in American society that he thinks have contributed. These are: 1. Movement of women into the labour force. 2. Increased mobility of people - with less residential stability. 3. Fewer stable marriages, more divorces and fewer children - decrease stability. 4. The technological transformation of leisure, so that it becomes a private matter with television or computers, VCRs, etc. rather than communal.

I believe that there has been a similar decrease in "social capital" in Australia. Some people are suggesting here that it is related to the decline is inversely proportional to the emphasis on "economic capital" and rationalistic economics which pay no attention to the needs or interests of real people - only profits.

Is there also a decline in "social capital" in Thailand. Surely its levels would be very different in major cities such as Bangkok and in more stable village areas. On the other hand, there may be important cultural differences in the West which mitigate the effects of social changes. I am thinking of the importance of doing things with one's friends in Thailand, while so

much of life in the West is lived in a very individual way. It is another example where cross-cultural research can shed more light on changes that are happening around the world.

HeRD #S6 - Religious Pluralism

The Russian Orthodox churches have recently been seeking for other religious groups to be excluded from Russia. If recent work by two Americans working in the sociology of religion, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, is correct, the Russian Orthodox churches are signing their own death warrants. Finke and Stark have recently reviewed and re-written the history of religious groups in America. They have argued that religious groups have prospered to the extent there has been religious pluralism in America, and the extent to which groups have freely entered into this. They argue that the religious revivals have occurred when new groups have engaged the "religious market" with well-planned and executed religious campaigns. Denominations have grown as they have responded to the needs and interests of religious market.

The Episcopalians and the Congregationalists, who were quite strong in the mid-18th century, failed to respond to the needs and interests of the people. They were too interested in maintaining their structures. They educated their clergy too well, and paid them too highly. They lost out to the Baptists and the Methodists who grew very substantially between 1776 and 1850. They themselves changed in due course. Rather than having circuit riders supervising large numbers of local people who led the Methodist chapels, highly trained clergy were installed and guaranteed a certain standard of living. They were no longer as responsive to the religious market forces. They argue that ecumenism, even in the joining of tiny rural churches, generally leads to a decline religious vitality. Where there is competition, there is greater religious interest and churches thrive.

The work of Finke and Stark has raised a lot of interest in the journals in the sociology of religion and people are continuing to refine what are relevant dynamics which encourage religious vitality. However, some of the suggestions make sense and fit with other work. For example, the British sociologist David Martin noted some years ago that religious vitality seemed to correlate negatively to the degree to which there was a "state church" recognised and supported by government.

HeRD #S7 - Social Change for University Students

The survey of religion and social change that I developed asked 1200 Payap University and other tertiary students about what they had in their home when they were in primary school and what they had now. Eleven options were put before them. In every one of those options there had been an increase in the percentage having them. The following list gives the percent who said they had them in the home when in primary school and percent who had them in the home now.

	Primary School	Now
Electricity	83.5	87.5
TV	78.5	86.3
Radio	74.8	81.4
Telephone	30.1	65.6
Motorbike	69.9	81.8
Car	46.8	60.3
Bank account	70.3	83.7

Refrigerator	68.8	81.3
Computer	4.8	20.8
VCR	35.3	53.8
Fax	4.3	9.9

The changes are most apparent in relation to phones and computers, VCRs and cars. The changes were not quite as large as I expected. However, for many of the students we may be looking at only seven or eight years since they were in primary school. I wonder if this information is also telling us that the university students tend to come from the highest social levels in the society.

At the same time, attendance at services at temples, mosques or primary schools had decreased. Some 31 percent of the students said that when they were in primary school they attended a service at least once a month. Now, only 19 percent did so. There may be many reasons for the change. In the West, people in their twenties are usually the poorest attendees of church, and perhaps this is part of the process of "growing up". On the other hand, it may also indicate changes in society and social values. I will be analysing the data more carefully over the next few weeks to see if there are relationships between "possession" and religious involvement and interest.

HeRD #S8 -The Values of Thai Tertiary Students

In order to measure the values of Thai students and to look at how those had changed over time I used a scale originally developed by the American social psychologist Milton Rokeach. One of the books in which Rokeach developed his thinking about values was THE NATURE OF HUMAN VALUES, published in 1973. Rokeach proposed two scales each containing 18 items. The first scale was of "terminal values" which were seen as valued in their own right. The second scale was of "instrumental values", considered important because of their significance for other end states. For example, "good friends" might be seen as a terminal value, and "politeness" valuable as part of the path towards having good friends. This instrument for measuring values was used widely around the world. In Australia, it was used for measuring the assimilation of immigrants into Australian culture. In Thailand, it was used by a lecturer at NIDA, Dr Suntaree Komin for examining the nature of Thai culture. Dr Suntaree's work was very important for me, for she had not only translated the scale into Thai, but had done quite a lot of work to construct it in a way which reflected the Thai language and ways of thinking of life.

Shalom Schwartz, who is based at Jerusalem University, has made extensive use of Rokeach's scale in recent years. He has argued that the distinction between terminal and instrumental values cannot be maintained empirically. Very often, values which may be considered as "instrumental" become "terminal" for people. For example, "cleanliness" may start out as a means to health, but can easily become an end in itself. Schwartz uses one scale containing 56 items.

In my survey of students this year, I wanted to repeat the measurement of terminal values I made in 1981 so that I could make direct comparisons. (I never made any measurements of the instrumental scale.) However, I added a few items from the instrumental scale to the original 20 terminal values devised by Dr Suntaree Komin, giving a total of 26.

In looking at these results, one has to take account that these are values are what students say are important to them. If we were able to measure values in terms of how people spend their

time or money, we might come up with some different results. Nevertheless, these results are important in their own right as a statement of what the respondents consider important.

The questionnaire asked each student to score each value on a scale from -1 to 5. (-1 meant that the item was "opposed to their values"). The following is the list of the mean scores for each value, in order of their affirmation:

Value	Mean Score	Value	Mean Score
Happiness in family life	4.67	Love of freedom	3.98
Success in life	4.55	Obedient - respectful	3.98
National security	4.54	Helping others	3.88
Good friends	4.47	Wisdom and learning	3.85
Responsible	4.41	Imaginative, creative	3.71
Peace in the world	4.41	Loving relationship	3.53
Calm contentment	4.33	Comfortable life	3.51
Self-esteem	4.19	Beauty of nature and arts	3.44
Equality	4.19	Being well-known in society	3.36
Forgiving	4.12	Wealth in money & possessions	2.80
Broad-minded, open-minded	4.08	pleasure Happiness and	2.80
Inter-dependent	4.08	Being honoured	2.42
Principles for life & religion	3.99	Exciting life	2.21

Tomorrow we will start the process of interpreting these results.

HeRD #S9 -Interpreting Thai Student Values

Across the sample of 1200 tertiary students, the value which received the highest affirmation was "happiness in family life". This was followed closely by "success in life" and then by "national security". These three values were all affirmed as "extremely important" by over 70 percent of the students.

After students had filled in their responses to each item, we asked them to look back over their answers and to choose the ONE value which they considered of greatest importance. Some students found this rather difficult to do, and 17 percent of the sample did not answer this question. Of those that did, 23 percent chose "success in life". 16 percent chose "happiness in family life", and 14.3 percent chose "calm contentment". Only 2.4 percent said the value of greatest importance was "national security". The comparison of the two sets of results raises the question how one should interpret these scores. One of the reasons why people chose something as valuable is that they do not have it! In other words, to some extent the scores reflect Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. People who need the basics of life, such as food, water, and shelter, place these at the top of their lists. Those people who take them for granted will place greater importance on the psychological values of well-being such as self-esteem.

This scale does not only reflect that hierarchy of needs however. People answer it in different ways because they value different things in life. The scale reflects some of those differences. At one level, they may be differences of personality and personal value. The aggregation of the results reflects something of the values that are widely affirmed in the culture.

I suggest that "national security" is one of those concerns that relates to the basic human need for security. It reflects widespread feelings that the nation is not very secure. The problems may be as much internal as external, but are considered to be a threat. (It has been found that Australians cite "crime" as their number one concern - probably for similar reasons.) It would appear that concern for "national security" has risen. In 1980 it was sixth in the list of 20 values. Now it is second. In 1980, "Peace in the world" was affirmed with greater strength than "national security". Now it is the other way round.

I would be most interested in any ideas exactly why the level of concern for national security might have risen, or whether there might have been special factors earlier this year which might have brought this to people's attention.

HeRD #S10 - Good Friends and Other People

Overall, the value of "having good friends" comes into the list at number 5 out of the 26 values. 62 percent of the students affirmed "having good friends" as extremely important to them, although only 4.7 percent actually said this was number one in their list. However, the relative importance of friendships seems to have decreased since 1980. In my survey, it was second out of the list of 20 values. Now, it has dropped to 5th place in terms of the percentage of students affirming it as very important or extremely important.

Several other values relating to people also appear to have decreased in importance. Being well-known in society has dropped from 15th place to 17th place. Being honoured in society has dropped from 18th place to a comparable 20th place. It would appear that one's position in society matters a little less to these students than it did fifteen or so years ago. The importance of "helping other people" has also dropped. It used to be 10th on the list of 20 values. Just taking the values which are comparable with the 1980 survey, it is now 13th on the list. Thai society has never made so much of "having a loving relationship" as have Western societies. The "Romantic ideal" of the West has never been as prominent in Thailand. It was 14th out of the 20 values in 1980 and has remained at that level.

Have Thai students become more individualistic in their values? Have they become more focused on themselves and what they as individuals can get out of life? Have they lost a little of the sense that they find their own value through their relationships to others, or even through the ways that others see them? Are they tending to measure achievement and success more in terms of their personal state of mind (calm contentment and self-esteem, for example) or in terms of possession or wealth? If this is so, it could well be a result of the fragmentation of society occurring through modernization, in which villages which used to depend on inter-dependence have become dormitory suburbs of employees. I remember one of the Thai church leaders I met while there last year lamenting to me that people do not work together as they used to. Perhaps the changing social structures are encouraging people to see life in terms of their individual needs and aspirations rather than as in terms of those of the collective of the village, or even family.

HeRD #S11 - Success in Life

One of the most highly affirmed value was "success in life". It was affirmed as the most important value more often (by 23 percent of respondents) than any other in the list of 26 presented to the students. It came second in the list of values measured in terms of the mean of each item. But what does "success in life" mean? A critic of the Rokeach scale in Australia has argued that the values in Rokeach's scales mean such different things to different people that the scale does not measure anything. I think the point should be heeded. Each of the values does

mean different things to different people, despite the fact that the language gives some commonality to the conceptions contained in it.

One way of looking at what success might mean is looking at the other values which correlate with it, and the values which do not do so. There are in fact strong correlations between most of the values in the scale. Rokeach's preferred way of administering the scale was to use sticky labels and let people put the values into a hierarchy. That is not practical in the sort of survey we have used, and thus we have to let people evaluate each value independently, assigning a place on a scale from -1 to 5. The result is that some people tend to score all values higher than other people scale them. We have to return to look at the order of the values to discover the relative importance rather than taking too seriously the number on the scale.

"Success in life" correlates most strongly with "happiness in family life" ($r=.63$). Other strong correlations are with "Responsible" ($r=.45$), Equality ($r=.43$), "Calm contentment" ($R=.43$), and "Having Good Friends" ($R=.37$). Thus, the people who are scoring "success in life" high are also scoring "family life" and these other values high. Perhaps then success is pictured in terms of having a happy family life, of being calmly content and having good friends. My guess is that "responsibility" is largely an instrumental value, valued because it is seen as important in achieving success in these terms. Equality is valued as the social conditions in which success can be achieved.

It is interesting to note that success does not correlate particularly highly with "being honoured in society", "happiness and pleasure", "wealth and possessions" or "having an exciting life". It would appear, then, that success is not seen primarily in hedonistic terms as it is often seen in Western societies. It is not primarily seen as amassing a financial fortune, or having a life full of excitement and pleasure. Success is seen partly in terms of having a comfortable life, but one in which relationships with family and friends are good, in which one achieves calm contentment.

HeRD #S12 - Middle Order Values

We have looked at the most highly affirmed values of success, happiness in family life, national security, good friends and calm contentment. I want to consider today some of the middle order values - important but not as strongly so as this first five.

Self-esteem is quite high as it was in 1980. Certainly in the West self-esteem has become an important measure of one's well-being. Schools explicitly talk about developing self-esteem as one of their aims. I believe they see it primarily as the individual valuing themselves, and from that self evaluation flows psychological well-being and the ability to face life with confidence.

Next come a series of values which seem to me to be primarily about how one operates in society, or how people believe society should operate. These values include equality, forgiving, broad-minded and open-minded, inter-dependent and mutually helpful, obedient and respectful. I see this as suggesting that the students want a society in which there is some equality of opportunity, some chance for all individuals to achieve. They want a society in which there is forgiveness and broad-mindedness. They see it as necessary that people have the opportunity to make mistakes and have another chance. They believe that a certain degree of cooperation with each other, where people are mutually helpful, and where elders are respected all makes for smooth social interactions and a better society in which to live.

HeRD #S13 - Religion and Calm Contentment

In her survey of a random sample of Thai people around 1980, Dr Suntaree Komin found that the affirmation of the importance of the religious or spiritual dimension of life varied considerably with age. For those under 30 years of age, it was 13 out of 20 terminal values. For those 30-39, it rose to 6th place. For those 40 to 59, it was second only to national security, and for Thai people over 60 it became the primary value. (See Suntaree Komin, *PSYCHOLOGY OF THE THAI PEOPLE: VALUES AND THE BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS*, published by NIDA, Bangkok, 1991.)

There are two major types of explanations for age related differences. The first has to do with one's place in the life-cycle. The second has to do with historical changes. The affects of the two are very different. The first assumes that people will change: as they get older their values will alter. The second suggests that people will not change. People of one era are different from another.

In Australia young people are conspicuous for their absence in the churches. There have been on-going discussions as to whether these young people will go back to church as they grow older. There is some slight evidence that as they settle and have children, some return to church. On the other hand, it looks as if most will not return, that the church-going habits of the older generation have not been transferred to the younger generation.

In Thailand, as I understand it (please correct me if I am wrong), it has long been the expectation that the elderly will take much more interest in religious things than younger people. As death approaches, many older people look to religion for comfort and strength. However, there is anecdotal evidence that interest levels among many young people in religion, particularly Buddhism, but perhaps also Christianity and Islam, have been declining. I remember reading (although I don't remember where) the idea that the university has become a secular substitute for the monkhood, a way of climbing the social ladder, a pathway to success. More people are now taking this route than traveling the route of becoming a monk.

"Calm contentment" is one of the primary virtues of Buddhism, the state in which desire is extinguished, and the strength of the karma diminished. I imagine that perfect "calm contentment" would be seen as foretaste of nirvana. I find it interesting, however, that calm contentment does not correlate particularly highly with religion. It actually correlates most highly with equality ($r=.54$), followed by family life (.47), peace in the world (.46), success (.43), national security (.41), and religion (.34). "Calm contentment" has connotations far beyond its religious roots. Perhaps we can say that these other values with which it correlates are the conditions in which many believe it can be found. People will find calm contentment where there is equality, happiness in family life, peace in the world, and national security. In other words, there must be peace in the world, in the nation, in the community and in the family in order for calm contentment to be found.

HeRD #S14 - The Importance of Religion

Apart from the scale of values which included an item on the importance of a religion to depend on. Another set of questions asked why religion was important to them. A list of 10 options were given to the students, and they were asked to indicate whether religion was important to them in each of the following aspects.

Item	% Very Important	% Extremely Important
Forgiveness of sin	27.1	13.5
Opportunity to help others	30.4	20.0
Teaching about how to live	31.3	34.1
Solution to problem of suffering	27.7	19.4
Relationship with high spiritual powers which can help us	8.1	6.0
Showing us the meaning of life	23.4	18.9
Makes us feel happy	29.4	39.9
Makes our country a better place	25.4	29.8
An institution where we can find people who can help us	21.7	13.1
Gives us hope that the next life will be better than this	11.8	12.6

HeRD #S15 - Why Religion is Important to Thai Students

Yesterday I circulated the raw results of a question on why religion is important. The results suggest something of what religion means within the Thai culture. At the very top is the response that religion is important because it makes us feel happy. For most students religion is about this life and not the next. The benefits are seen primarily in personal rather than group terms. It is about finding a sense of contentment, or making merit and feeling good about doing so.

Religion is also about "dharma", teaching about life. It provides a basis for values, particularly moral values. Incidentally, the same is true in Australia. One Australian sociologist has suggested that religion here is primarily about "deism and decency". I think that the "decency" actually comes first. In Australian surveys, when we have asked people why religion is important to them, around 70% say that it provides them with values for life. (That answer also correlates very strongly with people dropping out of church life. Those who say that religion is about a relationship with God or sharing faith with others have not dropped out of church life.)

Another two items provide variations of this theme: giving meaning for life and, in more traditional Buddhist terms, providing a solution to the problem of the "unsatisfactoriness" of the world. Another important dimension of religion for most Thai students is its social significance. Religion benefits the whole country. It encourages people and provides opportunities for people to help each other.

The question asked here about the institutional dimension of religion does not allow for the variety of ways in which the institution may be important to people. However, the responses may be an indication that, for most students, this dimension is not high on the agenda. Attendance patterns at religious institutions would tend to reflect that.

I find it interesting to reflect on the fact that many missionaries have tried to "sell" Christianity in terms of providing "forgiveness of sin". Again, this is not something that is of great importance to the average Thai tertiary student. They do not see this as an important part of Buddhism.

It is also interesting to find that "relationship with high spiritual powers" is not rated very highly. This item was designed to tap what the anthropologists would see as the "animistic" dimension of religion. There are two possible explanations of its low rating. One is that the

students do not see this as part of "religion" in that they would distinguish recognition of spirits, or using spiritual powers through amulets or whatever, as not being part of religion. The other explanation would suggest that this dimension of religion is something in which they may participate, but which they do not take very seriously.

HeRD #S16 - Differences between Christians and Buddhists

Unfortunately, the sample of Christian tertiary students was small. Out of 1200 who completed the survey, 1039 answered the question about their religion. Some 960 said they were Buddhists, 13 were Christians associated with the CCT, 39 were Catholics, and 8 were Pentecostals. Two others were Christians, but did not identify with either of the above three groups.

There was a tendency for the Christians to rate all the items about the "importance of religion" higher than the Buddhists. This reflects their status as a "minority group". People for whom religion is not important at all are likely to fade back into the Buddhist majority. In general, the Christians identified similar patterns in their understanding of what was important in religion to the Buddhists. For both groups, religion was primarily about what "makes us feel happy" and secondarily "teaching about how to live". Catholics and Pentecostals both put the importance of "showing the meaning of life" alongside these first two. For Catholics and Pentecostals, the idea of religion providing opportunities to help others was rated higher than religion "making our country a better place". For the CCT Christians, these two items were scored as equally important. They were scored at a similar level by the Buddhists, but the idea of religion making the country a better place had a slight edge.

The most significant differences in the religious groups was the rating of the items at the bottom end of the scale. The Christians rated religion as providing "forgiveness of sin" as much more important than did the Buddhists. Nearly half the Christians said it was extremely important or very important, compared with only 13% of the Buddhists. However, the difference in position in the list of 10 items paints the picture a little differently. It is 9th on the Buddhist list, 7th on the CCT, 8th on the Catholic and 8th on the Pentecostal lists. "Relationship with spiritual powers" was also affirmed much more highly by the Christians than the Buddhists. Nearly half the Christians said it was very or extremely important, compared with only 11% of the Buddhists. It was 10th on the Buddhist list of 10 items why religion was important, 6th on the CCT list, 7th for the Catholics, and, surprisingly, 9th for the Pentecostals.

In general, as far as we can generalise from this small sample, it would appear that religion is seen to play similar functions in life for Buddhists and for Christians. For both groups it is primarily about "making us feel happy", about how to live and the meaning of life. Religion is secondarily about social values: about helping others and providing a moral base for society. Christians and Buddhists both affirm strongly this social dimension of the importance of religious faith. Few students, either Christian or Buddhist, put much emphasis on life beyond this. They see religion primarily to life in this world, and what it can contribute personally and socially, to this present life. Nor is the institutional dimension of religion of very great importance. Christianity adds two dimensions, however, which appear to play a very small role for the Buddhists: forgiveness of sin and, possibly, access to spiritual power. The caveat in relation to the second is because we may find "access to spiritual power" is important for the Buddhists but not thought of as part of their religion.

HeRD #S17 - Religion and Social Change

The primary objective of the survey I have been discussing with you was to examine the relationship between social change and religion. In this last of my HeRDs (for a while), I want to return to that topic and put before you some preliminary findings.

I measured the experience of "social change" in a rough way by asking about the technology in their home when at primary school and the technology in their home now. The measure of social change was the measure of the difference. (One might argue that this is not a measure of "social change" at all, but of technological change.) Correlations between the experience of technological change and between a variety of measures of religious interest and practice showed very little to be significant. The only thing that was significant was a weak but statistically significant correlation (of .09, significant at .05 level) between the experience of change and the frequency of making special offerings to the spirits. Those who had experienced greater change reported having made more special offerings.

However, the amount of technology in the home correlated significantly with a range of measures of religious interest and practice. Those students with higher amounts of technology were less likely to have engaged in meditation, and slightly less likely to have attended a religious service. They reported significantly lower levels of interest in religion (correlation of -.14, significant at .001 level). On the other hand, they were more likely to have worn an amulet, a pra or a cross in the last 12 months (correlations of .09, .13 and .13 respectively, significant at the .001 level).

It would appear that the new world of technology encourages "animistic" forms of religion, and discourages the "dharma" types of religion. I suspect most students think of "religion" in terms of Buddhist beliefs and practices, and would not count wearing of amulets under that heading. Animistic forms are focused strongly on this world. In a sense, they are another form of (non-scientific) technology in that they usually consist of doing certain actions in order to achieve certain ends, while "religion" is seen as embodying principles which are worthwhile in their own right. Perhaps the modern world of technology encourages an "instrumental" view of the world. Perhaps it focuses people on the present world rather than on the past.

Another issue is what this means for the Christians. Are those who live in a more technologically sophisticated world treating faith differently? Are they expressing less interest? Or are they thinking of faith more in "instrumental" terms of what it can do for them? I have wondered if such ideas might explain something of the attraction of Pentecostalism among young people. Pentecostalism is about God's involvement in every-day life in this world, rather than the older mainstream traditions of God creating and sustaining the physical and social order of the world.

There is a lot more work to be done. Hopefully, when I next do some more HeRDs, I will be able to share analysis that has been undertaken with more care and sophistication. Meanwhile, thank you to Herb for the chance to throw some ideas around with you. And thank you to all of you who have written comments. Any further comments would be greatly appreciated. Philip Hughes

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