

HeRD 1996

Herb's Research Diary

HeRD #106 - New Year Request

Happy New Year! You will have noticed that our numbers are quietly growing. We've been adding about one person a month, and after January 8th there will be two more joining us. I would like to have a small selection of "bests" to send to new readers--HeRDs that will help them get oriented as quickly as possible. I'd like to ask all of you to help by selecting one HeRD that you remember as the best of '95. Most of you don't keep the HeRDs, so you may only remember a theme. That'll be enough. Any other evaluation or suggestions you might have will be appreciated. Your responses will also help by giving me an idea about what you find interesting & helpful. PLEASE HELP ME OUT - AND THANKS.

Here's wishing you and yours the very best for 1996. Peace, Herb

HeRD #107 - Weight Reduction Scheme

Mrs. C. W. Mason, a trained missionary nurse, related the following story in the LAOS NEWS: The missionary doctor at the Chiang Mai mission hospital diagnosed a 46 year old, 150 pound woman as having an ovarian cyst. "But when the operation was performed a large amount of fluid was found in the free abdominal cavity (dropsy). After most of this fluid had escaped the ovarian cyst was brought into view; it was about 12 inches in diameter and consisted of a large mass of smaller cysts. All was successfully removed, and the patient was a very small woman when taken out of the operating room. Fluid and tumor together weighed 75 pounds. The patient made a fine recovery with no complications whatever." (p. 130)

HeRD #108 - Historical Situations & Missions

The longer we delve into the lives and records of the "old-time" missionaries, the more we appreciate the complexity of their lives. They lived in a world as full, as detailed, as rich as our own. And like us, they had their perception of their own historical situation in northern Thailand. Eula Van Vranken, writing in the January 1907 issue of the LAOS NEWS opens a small window on that perception. She wrote that the northern Thai, "...had been characterized to me as a 'loving, childlike teachable people,' and so they seem. They are childish and childlike: the trait is very marked in their Christian faith and zeal. One feels that they must be in the very childhood of civilization with possibilities before them. This impression grows when I learn that for generations they have lived in political bondage to a conquering nation, many in abject slavery, while at the same time there has been a worse bondage to ignorance and superstition." (p. 18)

From our perspective, these words seem naive. Northern Thai culture was in no wise in the "childhood of civilization." Chiang Mai, one-time capital of the Lan Na Kingdom, was founded more than 400 years before the American colonies. That kingdom reached several peaks of high culture from the 14th through the 16th centuries. Van Vranken was writing, however, at a time when the Lan Na Kingdom's rich history was still little known and the devastation of 200 years of chaotic Burmese rule in the 17th and 18th centuries was still well-remembered. In 1907, northern Thai culture was but a shadow of its former greatness, and the penetration of central Thai political, economic, social, and cultural domination was increasing rapidly. It wasn't difficult for Van Vranken and her colleagues to feel an unconscious paternalism about the northern Thai. They perceived only the tragedy and none of the triumph of Lan Na history. From

the perspective of church history, the missionaries' interpretation of northern Thai history is important. The missionaries viewed the church, in its social and historical context, as both childish and child-like. And they treated it accordingly. The lesson: how we understand the past matters---it matters a great deal.

HeRD #109 - Power of the Past

It is often difficult for those of us living in the present to appreciate the vast diversity of the past. Early church history provides an example. Protestants have long looked at the early church as being a unified entity. We have engaged in a centuries' long struggle to "return" to the golden age of the early church. Koester in his HISTORY AND LITERATURE OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY, however, reminds us that such an understanding of the early church is entirely incorrect. In describing the rapid expansion of the early church, he writes, "However fragmentary the total picture may be, it is nevertheless obvious that the mission and expansion of Christianity in the first years and decades after the death of Jesus was a phenomenon that utterly lacked unity. On the contrary, great variety resulted from these early missions." (p. 94).

Images concerning the past are themselves powerful historical factors. These images frequently have little to do with what actually happened in that past, yet they profoundly influence later behavior. The Protestant attempts to recapture a mythical unified early church is one important example. To repeat the lesson from #108: how we understand the past matters---it matters a great deal.

HeRD #110 - Medical Achievements

Dr. James McKean, reviewing the progress of Laos Mission medical work in the 40 years between 1867 and 1907, summed matters up with the following comments: When McGilvary first introduced quinine to the North, people were afraid to try the strange medicine. "Today," McKean wrote, "quinine is widely sold and used throughout the country. It may be found in most of the small shops and country stores. There is no doubt that the use of quinine alone has not only greatly reduced the death rate but has prevented a vast amount of suffering." McGilvary also introduced small pox vaccination. McKean observed, "Today every one believes in vaccination and the numbers vaccinated are growing year by year, recently reaching ten thousand persons in a single vaccinating season of six months." McKean concluded, "The work of our medical missionaries in hospitals and dispensaries and in the homes of the people has appealed strongly not only to the common people but to the princes and rulers as well and has done much to soften prejudice and secure a hearing for the Gospel." [from LAOS NEWS, October 1907, pp. 115-16]

HeRD #111 - Paul's Methods & Northern Thai Church History

Koester in his book HISTORY AND LITERATURE OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY, page 110, describes Paul's missionary method in this way: "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."

At first glance, the Presbyterian missionaries in northern Thailand appear to have used the same missionary strategy, that is of starting in the provincial centers and then working outwards. There were at least two differences. First, Paul's movement remained a largely urban movement whereas the northern Thai church was predominantly rural. Second, Paul put strong emphasis on the nurture and pastoral care of new churches. The Laos Mission did provide some nurture and care, but it emphasized other forms of work, esp. educational and medical work. These two points, taken together, are important. In Thailand, generally, urban churches have shown an ability to care for themselves much more quickly than have rural churches. Thus, a predominantly rural northern Thai Christian movement requires more pastoral care and nurture. The Laos Mission, however, did not provide that level of care and nurture. It is my contention that the failure to provide adequate nurture and care has had and continues to have a profoundly negative impact on the life and ministry of the northern church.

HeRD #112 - History & Providence

In HeRDs #68 and #70, I argued that the historian can't deal with God as a factor in human history. The eminent church historian, Georges Florovsky, has made the same point more succinctly. He wrote, "...the Christian historian will attempt to reveal the actual course of events in the light of his Christian knowledge of man, but will be slow and cautious about detecting the 'providential' structure of actual history, in any detail. Even in the history of the Church 'the hand of Providence' is emphatically hidden, though it would be blasphemous to deny that this Hand does exist or that God is truly the Lord of History. Actually, the purpose of a historical understanding is not so much to detect the Divine action in history as to understand the human action, that is, human activities, in the bewildering variety and confusion in which they appear to a human observer." [from "The Predicament of the Christian Historian," in Leibrecht, RELIGION & CULTURE, 1959, p. 166.]

HeRD #113 - Bible & Evangelism

For Protestants everything begins and ends with the Bible. In theory, we construct our faith from it. I would like to suggest that as often as not we bring preconceived personal and cultural ideas to the Bible and "discover" confirmation of them there. An example of this process is provided by the Rev. J. H. Freeman. At the time of Daniel McGilvary's death in 1911, Freeman wrote an article in the LAOS NEWS (October 1911) in honor of that great missionary. He stated that McGilvary's greatest service to the cause of Christ was his vision of the "sheep without a shepherd" and "the fields white to the harvest." The image of the shepherd-less sheep (taken from Zechariah 10:2, 5 and Ezekiel 34: 2, 5, 8) is particularly interesting in this context. Freeman used it to describe the northern Thai people, a people lacking the Great Shepherd, Christ. As he used it, the image is an evangelistic one--that is, it encouraged McGilvary to devote his life to evangelizing the northern Thai. The biblical image itself, however, in its Old Testament context has quite a different meaning. The people of Israel, that is the people of God, were the sheep without shepherds. The missing shepherds were the religious-political leaders of the nation, who have proven faithless. The verses in Zechariah are not evangelistic. They are prophetic. They were a prophetic judgment on certain conditions within the community of the faithful.

The missionaries are hardly unique in their approach to the Bible. From a historical perspective, however, the transformation of this prophetic image into an evangelistic one is important. It exemplifies the missionary approach to Scripture, one that regularly interpreted the Bible out of an evangelistic framework. This approach to the Bible, in turn, had a direct impact on the northern Thai church. On the one hand, it encouraged a massive emphasis on evangelism

that still marks the CCT's rhetoric and values today. On the other hand, it failed to furnish the church with the self-critical analysis of the biblical prophetic literature.

Source: J.H. Freeman, "Dr. McGilvary The Man of Vision. The Explorer." Laos News 8, 4(October 1911): 124.

HeRD #114 - Bible & Evangelism Again

HeRD #113 argued that the Presbyterian missionaries brought an evangelistic interpretation of the Bible to it and then, not surprisingly, found support for evangelism in it. Faye Kilpatrick, an educational missionary working in Chiang Mai, provides us another example. In an October 1936 article in SIAM OUTLOOK, she explained why the mission wanted to convert the students of its schools to Christianity. She cited Isaiah 61:3. The mission, she urged, wanted to give its students a garland for ashes and garments of praise for a spirit of heaviness so they can be called trees of righteousness, etc. The passage itself was written to give hope to the exiled people of Israel. It proclaimed their liberty even in the midst of their captivity. It was directed, that is, towards the suffering people of God. Kilpatrick's use of the passage is entirely unrelated to its original, biblical intent. But she still found in it images and content that helped her understand her own educational work.

In HeRD #113, we considered briefly the historical ramifications of this use of Scripture. If we look at this same data from a theological perspective, I would argue that the transformation of the Bible into a manual for the support of evangelism is a wrong-headed enterprise. It is an ideological approach that binds Scripture to only certain ways of speaking, ways convenient to the beliefs and pre-judgments of the "believer". This use of the Bible has potentially dire consequences for the church. Among them are the failures to engage in social ministries, to nurture of local church life, and to encourage the church to live under continuing prophetic judgment.

Source: Faye Kilpatrick, "Thanksgiving in Siam," Siam Outlook 12, 4(October 1936): 166.

HeRD #115 - The Model Missionary

In the Nan Station annual report for 1901, the Rev. Dr. S. C. Peoples closed the report with a list of station needs. Among them were a new mission residence, a good dispensary building, a school building, and a new missionary family. Regarding that family, he wrote, "We want a consecrated, sensible, refined, cultured, strong and loving man, with a wife that is better than himself." Living in an isolated station where missionaries could and did sometimes get on each other's nerves quite possibly encouraged Dr. Peoples to wish for a model family.

Source: S.C. Peoples, "Annual Report of Nan Station From November 1st. 1900 to November 1st. 1901," v. 281, BFM."

HeRD #116 - The Presbyterian Life

A full and fair estimation of the work of Presbyterian missions in Thailand (and around the world) must necessarily take into account the Presbyterian experience itself. The following brief ditty does that far better than any weighty tome I know of.

We know the Presbyterians are tough

because their way of life is rough;

they know that sin and death are fated

and all their acts predestinated.

Need one look any further for a credible explanation as to why among Protestant mission groups only the Presbyterians established a permanent, lasting presence in Thailand?

HeRD #117 - Missionary Residences: Another View

HeRD #64 painted a rather rosy picture of 19th century missionary life in C'Mai. Missionaries serving in Nan at the turn of the century would have objected to that picture. In their new station, founded in 1895, life was considerably more difficult. Robert Irwin made the following observation in the Nan Station annual report for 1900: "Our temporary residences afford the poorest kind of accommodations. All have thatched roofs and no ceiling, and one has woven bamboo walls and floor, part of which is covered with loose boards. Two of these houses are infested with white, black, and red ants, and two with rats." He went on to say that a teak shortage prevented the station from doing anything about these housing conditions.

Source: Robert Irwin, "Nan," in "Station Reports of the Laos Mission for the Year Closing November 30th, 1900," pp. 1315v. 281, BFM.

HeRD #118 - Laos Mission Priorities - 1903

The Laos Mission list of missionary assignments for 1903 provides one gauge of the its priorities. In one sense it is difficult to measure those priorities precisely since nearly every missionary on the list had several assignments. On the other hand, however, most of them had primary assignments. An analysis of those assignments indicates that the Laos Mission invested most of its time and energy to general oversight activities and to institutional work (hospitals & schools). In 1903, 12 missionaries (27%) gave their time to general station work. This work involved everything from pastoral care and evangelism to educational work to book keeping. Another 12 (27%) were primarily involved in educational (7 missionaries) or medical work (5 missionaries). Still another 9 missionaries (20%) had language study as their first assignment. Four members of the mission (9%) were primarily engaged in translation, literary work, and oversight of the mission press. There remained another 7 missionaries (16%). Two of these 7 had evangelism as their primary assignment. Only one took his first assignment as pastoral care. One engaged in women's work and one in home visitation. The list does not clarify the primary work of three other missionaries, all women.

General mission administration, including oversight of building construction, consumed large amounts of missionary time. Institutional work was, by 1903, a key priority that also took up large amounts of time. The nurture of the church was a secondary activity and, as such, received relatively less missionary time and attention.

Source: No author, "Laos Missionaries and their work," *Laos News* 1, 1(April 1904): 28-29.

HeRD #119 - Difficult Personalities

Over the years the mission had to contend with a series of "difficult personalities." These were individuals who made life hard for other missionaries, esp. in the smaller stations where living conditions were frequently close. One such individual was Sarah Peoples in Nan. She was a high-strung individual who suffered from nervous breakdowns and was not easy to live with. In June 1902 Dr. William Briggs wrote a personal letter to the Board of Foreign Missions secretary,

Arthur J. Brown, in which he discussed the difficulties facing the Park family, esp. Mrs. Park, in Nan as they tried to get along with Peoples in a two-family station. The Parks were younger missionaries.

Briggs wrote, "The Parks are enduring the situation in Nan, by the Grace of God; and I trust they will endure it until another family comes to smooth matters a bit. Nothing but the Grace of God is sufficient to brace up such a nervous high strung temperament as Mrs. Parks. She has a happy bright spirit, that is so much salvation to her. But there is an end to such endurance I am afraid, and I doubt if the Parks will consent to go back to Nan another year, unless there is a third family there. In this case I think there is just cause for feeling as the Parks do. But I, who know all the parties concerned, feel very sorry for the one who is the cause of the difficulty. She is to be pitied, I believe because I am not certain that she is altogether responsible. The fact remains however that no one woman has been able to endure it so far. Outside of that one case I do not think anyone is justified in complaining about their associates in this mission."

Any balanced evaluation of mission work in the North should keep in mind that working conditions were sometimes difficult in the extreme. Mrs. Park eventually had a nervous break down and the Parks had to leave the mission permanently.

Source: W. A. Briggs to Brown, 20 June 1902, no. 5, v. 271, BFM.

HeRD #120 - Educational Success

The Laos Mission always aimed for an educated Christian constituency. Considering the problems involved in the introduction of Western-style education into the North, they made remarkable progress towards that end. The LAOS NEWS issue of October 1907 noted, "There are many evidences of increasing interest in Christian education and the influence of our educational institutions is being rapidly felt. Among 49 persons who recently met with the Session of the First Church of Chiang Mai for the purpose of making a public profession of their faith in Christ, 36 were students of our educational institutions." (p. 105). It is quite possible that the turn-of-the-century Christian community comprised something of an educational elite.

HeRD #121 - The Search for Sincere & Pure Conversions

One of the most difficult, troublesome issues facing missions is the question of "true conversion." What is a valid conversion? How can one tell when a person is sincere in their conversion? The Presbyterians in the North, from time to time, struggled with this issue and went to some lengths to try to assure the purity of conversion. A motion from the 1917 minutes of the North Laos Presbytery reflects that concern. It states, "Candidates for baptism shall make confession of Christ with the mouth, placing the hand on the Bible, in the presence of the church, promising to truly study and strive to learn the truth until he understands sufficiently to receive the sacraments; all candidates to be left until 6 months or until the session is assured that the candidate is ready to receive the sacraments." The whole point here was to slow down the conversion process in order to make sure that the candidate for conversion was sincere.

HeRD #122 - TR in Siam

If ever a quotation reflected an age and social mentality, the following one does. It reads like something right out of Teddy Roosevelt, the slam-banging, rambunctious American progressive President from early in this century. In an article in the LAOS NEWS of January 1911, the Rev. Henry White wrote, "Christianity has no sympathy whatever with indolence or

industrial stagnation. It pulses with ambition, activity, conviction, enthusiasm, and the spirit of progress...The Christian missionary not only seeks to make men clearer thinkers but better wage earners, better industrial producers." This is one of my favorite quotations in all of northern Thailand missionary literature. The vision. The dynamic spirit. The sincerity. Even the naive world view of the pre-World War I era. The quotation serves to remind us, furthermore, how entirely American the Presbyterians in the North were. A firm grounding in American social and religious history is absolutely necessary to understanding the birth and growth of the northern Thai church.

Source: Henry White, "The Aim and Value of Mission Enterprise," *Laos News* 8, 1(January 1911): 17.

HeRD #123 - A Maverick

Dr. Carl C. Hansen of the Lampang Station deserves our attention. He eventually was not invited to return to the Laos Mission after complaints were lodged against him with the Board. His colleagues on the field felt that Hansen lacked "proper" missionary spirit. An article he wrote in the Laos Mission's quarterly newsletter for April 1900 provides a hint as to why they looked on him this way. In it he argues that doctors should not take too aggressive a stand against spirit doctors and the like. They should, instead, more gently gain access to the people's homes and hearts. This, he argued, would allow them to see that the missionaries' method of healing is better and "truer". The mission would then be able to rejoice not only in healed bodies but also in saved souls. Hansen, in other words, advocated a "soft" approach--a non-adversarial approach--to evangelism. Mission thinking, however, held that medical mission work was a key to evangelizing the northern Thai. It required an openly, aggressively evangelistic approach. Hansen's milder views, thus, weren't acceptable to the mission generally. The mission leadership must have felt that it was not wise to retain a doctor such as Hansen. He was a danger to their evangelistic program rather than an asset.

Source: Hansen, quoted in "The Laos Mission Letter for the Quarter Ending April 30, 1900," v. 16, BFM

HeRD #124 - Persian Persecution

Let's take a day off from Thai church history. Moffet, in the 1st volume of his *A HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN ASIA*, describes the "Great Persecution" of the Persian church in the 4th century [pp. 137-145]. The persecution began in about 340 and didn't slack off until nearly 370. Persia had long been Rome's bitter enemy, and the persecution began when Constantine initiated the process that eventually made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. Persia had previously been a refuge for Christians fleeing Roman persecution, but when Christianity became an "ally" of Rome, the Persian government became suspicious. It suspected Christians of secretly favoring Rome and of acting as fifth columnists. The persecutions exceeded anything ever experienced in the Roman Empire. Several general massacres took place, and estimates of the total number killed run as high as 190,000 martyrs. The persecution virtually destroyed the Persian church's organized life. Moffet notes, however, that while the number of victims was much higher than in the Roman Empire, there were far fewer Persian apostasies.

HeRD #125 - The Northern Thai Woman

While the members of the Laos Mission objected to many elements of northern Thai society, they were generally impressed with the place of women in it. The following is taken

from an anonymously written article in the January 1908 number of the LAOS NEWS entitled "Laos Women." Among several subjects, the author describes the position of women in northern Thailand with these words: "Probably among no other people of similar civilization is woman held in greater respect. Instead of a young groomsman preparing a home for his bride he makes his home with her people. All earnings are brought to her and only with her consent are they spent. Women have secured divorces because of husbands violating this right. If the husband is not all the wife desires she may drive him from the house and disclaim relationship. Marriage contracts are equally binding upon each." [pp. 24-25]

HeRD #126 - - Geography, Math, & Apologetics

In its annual report for 1891, The Laos Mission's Training School (for evangelists) reported that among its courses were ones on geography and arithmetic. The report justified the teaching of these two course by observing, "These last may properly find a place in such a school because of their apologetic value. A little knowledge of Geography is sufficient to dispose the entire Buddhist theory of the universe; while a bright man can soon learn to calculate more readily in our school than the most learned Buddhist priest can do with his cumbersome Pali formulae."

We see here yet again a central dynamic of the Laos Mission's thinking and work in northern Thailand. It's primary mission was evangelism. An important method for conducting evangelism was modernization. The ultimate concern was to not only convert individuals to Christ but to also transform all of northern Thai culture including its cosmology.

Source: "Report of the North Laos Mission Training School for the Year 1891," 23 February 1892, v. 9, BFM. #2. [the date on the calendar is Feb. '91 but it has to be Feb. '92]]

HeRD #127 - Benevolence

Among evangelical Protestants in Ante-bellum* America, the idea of "benevolence" was an important concept for understanding how evangelicals related to others. Although it included a definite humanitarian flavor, at heart benevolence meant concern for the spiritual health and eternal destiny of those who were not evangelical Protestants. Griffin in a 1957 article in the MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW describes it as "...an infinite concern for other people's souls." Ante-bellum American evangelicals created out of this infinite concern a "benevolent empire" of voluntary societies devoted to the conversion of the whole of American society to true Christian faith. The American Presbyterian missionaries in Thailand brought the idea of benevolence to their work here. Indeed, it is not wrong to look on the Siam and Laos Missions as American evangelical voluntary benevolent societies. In their work they showed the same mix of "spiritual" and "humanitarian" concerns as did American evangelicals. Benevolence, thus, forms another one of the strands of the missionary web of thought and behavior. It is particularly useful for understanding missionary motivation.

*For those not familiar with American history, the term "Ante-bellum" refers to 19th century American history prior to the American Civil War (1861-1865). It is most generally used to refer to the 1820s through the 1850s.

Source: Griffin, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860." *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44(December 1957): 426.

HeRD #128 - Evangelism as Benevolence

HeRD #127 described the evangelical sense of benevolence the Presbyterian missionaries brought to their work in Thailand. Dr. William A Briggs, as a young missionary working in northern Thailand, gave particular voice to that concern in a July 1893 article in *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN*. He wrote, "No words can tell the darkness, the depth of sinfulness that lies thickly around us; and no words can tell the joy, when, by God's grace, the blind receive sight, the deaf hear, and the heart, once so low in sin, is changed and begins reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and the tongue once used in the hypocritical worship of wood and stone is singing praises to the King of kings, Jehovah Jesus." (p. 189). The sense of joy Briggs felt at the conversion of "the lost" reflects the deep benevolent concern for the souls of the northern Thai that he and most of his colleagues felt. It was that concern and that joy that impelled the missionaries to conduct evangelism.

Source: W.A. Briggs, "Outfit for Laos Land, *Woman's Work for Woman* 8, 7(July 1893):189.

HeRD #129 - Humanitarian Benevolence

In HeRDs #127 and in #128, we looked at the idea of benevolence as it was worked out in Presbyterian missions in Thailand. While there was a strong evangelistic content to it, it also contained decided humanitarian feelings as well. The Rev. J. H. Freeman, stationed in Lamphun, stated in his book *ORIENTAL LAND OF THE FREE* that if missionary medical work had done nothing else but show Christ's love by relieving suffering it was still worth all of the time and effort invested in it. He cited the example of quinine, which had relieved a great deal of human pain, as an example. He argued that missionary medicine had added years to the life span of the northern Thai people. Freeman, however, also claimed that these humanitarian benefits had an evangelistic value, that is this Christ-like relief of pain and suffering won a hearing for the message of Christ's love. [pp. 138-140]

Freeman, as well as other humanitarian statements by missionaries, provides an important corrective to the criticism of the missionaries that they only helped people in order to win converts. Their benevolent concern to "win the souls" of the northern Thai was, it is true, seldom far from their thinking. And not all of them would have agreed with Freeman's statement that relieving suffering was sufficient justification for missionary medicine. Yet, none would have denied the spirit of his remarks--that is, that the mission's humanitarian ministry was an important part of its total mission. Dr. James W. McKean, put it well when he wrote in an 1894 letter to the Board of Foreign Missions that missionary physicians, "...can make their lives of untold benefit to this people, both in the relief of suffering and in the bringing them to the light of the Gospel."

Source: James W. McKean to Speer, 22 January 1894, v. 11, BFM.

HeRD #130 - Adapting the Gospel

More thoughts on Paul and northern Thailand (see HeRD #111). Chadwick, in his book *THE EARLY CHURCH*, makes the following observation: "Perhaps the chief reason for Paul's success was his extraordinary versatility and capacity for adapting himself to the situation of his audience: he had the power to translate the Palestinian Gospel into language intelligible to the Greek world, and thereby became the first Christian apologist." One of the themes that we've been working on in previous HeRDs is that the Laos Mission was not particularly adaptable and gave much of its efforts over to changing northern Thai society to fit Western religious and social patterns. What, then, is a Pauline approach to northern Thai culture and society? Paul participated in a radical re-formation of Jewish Christianity in order to make the Gospel available to the Greeks. Should the old-time missionaries have engaged in an equally radical re-

formation of Christianity to make it available to Thai culture and society? Paul's faith, evidently, allowed him to engage in significantly reshaping Jewish Christianity, but Protestant missions in Thailand have eschewed that SPIRIT while struggling to import the (Westernized) FORMS of Pauline & New Testament Christianity into Thailand. It's almost as if we've adhered to the spirit of Paul's opponents, who wanted to preserve Christianity as an essentially Jewish religion. I would argue, in fact, that the missionaries' attitudes and actions were much more in line with those of the Judaizers than of Paul.

HeRD #131 - Ecumenical Warfare

The Rev. Daniel McGilvary, the most important single missionary to serve in northern Thailand perhaps ever, held an interesting mixture of ideas. On the one hand he was a classical Old School Presbyterian conservative. On the other hand he sometimes showed an inclination to openness not usually associated with the Old School. In particular, he was far more accepting of other Protestants than many of his compatriots. In an 1859 article in the NORTH CAROLINA PRESBYTERIAN, he expressed his pleasure that the North Carolina Methodists were sending a missionary to China. He hoped that the Baptists and the Episcopalians of North Carolina would also send out missionaries. He avowed, "Here is one common cause where the hearts of all people of God may be one. Here they may throw down their weapons of warfare and unite in one common cause, in one glorious onset on the powers of darkness...The cry of the exulting enemy from without, should hush the contentions of the church within, and lead her under all her ensigns to rally around the peaceable standard of the cross in these eastern nations so long ruled over by the prince of the powers of darkness." Once again, if we can work around the 19th century rhetoric a bit, McGilvary's words could be taken to still be quite relevant to the life and mission of the church in Thailand today. It might depend mostly on who or what we take to be the "powers of darkness."

HeRD #132 - Parallels

Earlier HeRDs have already made the point that the study of early church history provides data for the comparative study of the church in Thailand. The following, taken from Chadwick's THE EARLY CHURCH, is particularly informative. In writing about issues facing the church he states, "The determination of which moral faults did or did not involve exclusion, and for how long, was a pastoral problem that deeply exercised the minds of the Church's leaders well into the third century. Not less difficult was the thorny question whether and at what point intellectual deviation should lead to censure." Chadwick observes that the necessity of translating Christianity into the social and intellectual world of the Greeks made these issues esp. difficult. (pp. 32-33) The missionaries faced precisely these same problems, that is, what constituted proper moral behavior, what were the limits of that behavior, and how to deal with transgressors. They also had to give the church a "proper" theology and decide what constituted the limits of that theology. The Presbyterians in Thailand, however, differed in their approach to translating their faith into the Thai cultural setting. They, in fact, made relatively little attempt to "translate" at all.

HeRD #133 - The Jewish Church

The very first churches were Jewish. They included the Jerusalem Church, churches in the surrounding countryside, and probably churches in Galilee. Very little is known about any of these churches, including the Jerusalem Church itself. After a brief period, it came under the leadership of James, the brother of Jesus. His "rule" may have included the country churches as well. These churches eventually suffered persecution, and James was martyred in 62. Up until that time, Jerusalem had retained its position as first among all churches, but then continuing

persecution forced it to migrate to Pella where it was led by a cousin of Jesus and then descendants of his family. One church historian writes, "This later community is tied to the earlier one by the fact that kinsmen of Jesus and James held the leadership. But this new community has no more significance for the church as a whole. It is no longer the 'original community.'" [Conzelman, HISTORY OF PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY, p. 111] The Jerusalem church and its satellite then passed out of the history of the church. We know nothing about their fate.

Jewish Christianity persisted, but in Syria rather than Palestine. It encompassed an active missionary program that attempted to counter the influence of Paul and other "Gentile-friendly" movements. The Syrian Jewish churches had no older or special connection to the Jerusalem and Palestinian churches and were created out of the general Christian missionary movement. They separated from other churches over the issue among Jewish Christians concerning accepting uncircumcised Gentiles into the church. These churches also persisted for a time, and there were still small Jewish churches in Syria in the 4th century. They eventually, however, became an anachronism unacceptable to the vast gentile Christian majority who distrusted and disliked their adherence to Jewish religious practices. [see Chadwick, THE EARLY CHURCH, p. 22] Gentile Christianity came to treat them as a heretical sect, named "Ebionites" after the Hebrew word for "poor." After the 4th century, Jewish Christianity passed entirely out of history.

What is the connection of all of this to Thai church history? Church historians make it clear that the world-wide Church is the legacy of the Jewish church. The decision to open the church to the Gentiles was taken by Jewish Christians, acting it seems in the spirit of Jesus himself. In whatever country we live, including Thailand, the church is lives because the Jewish church transcended the prejudices of its religious and cultural heritage.

HeRD #134 - Satan & Dualism

One of the central ideas in 19th century Presbyterian missionary thinking was that human reality is divided into two great kingdoms, those of God and of Satan. This conception powerfully shaped missionary attitudes about Thailand, which they considered to be under the sway of Satan. Satan was, for them, as real and as personal, though not as powerful, as God. One of the clearest statements of the this view point comes not from Charles Hodge. Hodge, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, was the premier American Presbyterian theologian and during his long career at Princeton taught several of the Thailand missionaries. In his book THE WAY OF LIFE, Hodge wrote, "Disregard of [God's] authority is the greatest crime of which a creature is capable. It is rebellion against a being whose right to command is founded on his infinite superiority, his infinite goodness, and his absolute propriety in us as his creatures. It is apostasy from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of Satan. There is no middle ground between the two. Every one is either the servant of God, or the servant of the devil. Holiness is the evidence of our allegiance to our maker, sin is the service of Satan." [II.II]

We should take particular note of the concept of "no middle ground." Missionary Protestantism has largely adhered to this dualistic concept in its approach to Thailand. It is not too much to say that one can't understand the Thai Protestant church apart from its dualistic heritage.

HeRD #135 - Satan the Reaper

Missionary literature contains a variety of names for Satan including "the enemy of souls," "the adversary," "the tempter," the prince of cunning," and the "father of lies." We are hardly surprised at these conceptions of Satan. One we might not expect, however, is the image of Satan

as the reaper. Mary L. Cort, working in the Siam Mission's Phet Buri Station, central Thailand, expressed this idea in an 1875 article in *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN*. She wrote, "I had no idea how many reapers were needed in these Eastern lands till I looked out over the harvest fields myself, and saw everywhere Satan busy with his myriad reapers, while here and there a few faithful souls GLEANING a little for Christ." She went on to assert that, "WE should be the myriad reapers."

HeRD #136 - Satan & Alienation

Altha Eakin, a veteran Presbyterian missionary of the Phet Buri Station, felt the power of Satan with clear force. In a May 1912 article in *WOMAN'S WORK* she wrote that evangelistic touring brought her, "...face to face with the lowest type of heathenism among the Siamese women. It is impossible to put into words the appalling nature of the situation: How to bring high, holy thoughts of Christ down to the level of the mind that has never had a high thought; how to find some common ground to begin to teach; how to really love these almost naked, shaven-headed women, with their mouths overflowing with betel and their minds saturated with superstitions, and with obscene thoughts reigning that we would not harbor for a moment. This is the kind of woman produced by centuries of servitude UNDER THE RULE OF SATAN." (p. 106, emphasis in the original).

Perhaps what is most striking in Eakin's statement was her profound sense of alienation from Thai women. She struggled to find a common ground with them. She felt there were serious impediments to meaningful communication on religious subjects. She found Thai woman difficult to love. They were black-mouthed and foul-minded. They were trapped under the rule of Satan. Eakin was not alone in her sense of being alienated from Thai-ness, and these images of alienation are found frequently in Presbyterian missionary literature.

Source: Altha L. Eakin, "Ups and Downs of Touring in Siam," *Woman's Work* 27, 5(May 1912): 106-107.

◆HeRD #137 - The Missing Generation

Helmut Koester in his *INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT*, vol. 2, makes the following observation about the early church's second Christian generation: "We do not know the name of a single Christian from the decades that followed the deaths of the apostles of the first Christian generation, from the period of about 60-90 CE. The second Christian generation has thus become completely anonymous for us. All the Christian writings extant from this period were either anonymous or written under the pseudonym of an apostle from the first generation..." (p. 279). Koester notes that for major segments of the early church, such as Syria (except Antioch) and Egypt, this situation continues well into the 2nd century. It's strange to think that we know far more about the early life of the northern Thai church than is known about a whole generation of the early church. It is striking, in fact, how much more conjectural is our knowledge of first-century Christian history in general than is our knowledge of 19th century Thai church history.

HeRD #138 - District 11

District Eleven, Nakon Pathom, is one of the smallest districts in the Church of Christ in Thailand. Historically, however, it may be one of the more important. In recent years, it has contributed a CCT Vice-Moderator, Ach. Samrit Wongsan (1979-1986), Moderator, Ach. Arun Tongdonmuan (1983-1990), and the current General Secretary, Dr. Sint Kimhachan. Ach. Arun is now serving as Vice-Moderator and Ach. Samrit in the important position of Director of the

CCT's Pastoral Ministry Unit. In a larger sense, it is the only C.C.T. district whose missionary origins are entirely European rather than North American. The British Disciples' of Christ first began work in the Nakon Pathom area in 1904 and eventually founded a small Christian community that formed the core of today's District Eleven. The British Disciples brought with them an intense ecumenical commitment. They participated fully in the formation of the Church of Christ in Thailand in 1934. After World War II, the Disciples' Mission--by then largely comprised of American missionaries--and the American Presbyterian Mission were the only two missions to integrate their work fully into the C.C.T. and place their missionaries under the authority of the C.C.T. The Disciples-District Eleven story, thus, is important to the larger history of the C.C.T.

HeRD #139 -The Alien Church: Questions

Church historians generally identify two major wings of the early church, namely the churches in Palestine and those beyond Palestine. The first wing is sometimes styled the "Jesus movement" and the second the "Christian movement". Evidently a major issue among historians of the early church is how these are to be clearly distinguished. Fiorenza, in her book *IN MEMORY OF HER*, makes the distinction in this way: "Whereas the Jesus movement in Palestine was an alternative prophetic renewal movement within Israel, the Christian movement was a religious missionary movement within the Greco-Roman world, preaching an alternative religious vision and practicing a countercultural communal lifestyle. Both movements created tensions and conflicts with respect to the dominant cultural ethos. But where the Jesus movement could appeal to Israel's tradition as its very own religious tradition over and against certain practices within Israel, the Christian movement as a new religious group intruded as an alien element into the dominant cultural-religious ethos of the Greco-Roman worlds." (p. 100)

It is intriguing that the Jesus movement was apparently entirely suited to its cultural setting while the Christian movement was not. Yet, the Jesus movement soon came to an end while the Christian movement continues down to the present. The indigenous church died and the alien church prospered. This raises some central issues for church life in Thailand. Is it possible that the question of indigenization is NOT a major issue for the Thai church? Or, is it that in both the Christian movement and the Thai church the need to deal with indigenization issues was/is an important aspect of church life? Is the alien nature of the Thai church largely irrelevant? Or is the church's life found in its search to adapt that nature to Thailand cultures?

HeRD #140 - The Persistence of Renewal

Fiorenza in *IN MEMORY OF HER*, page 113, makes the point that virtually every party and faction in first century Judaism was committed to preserving the existence of Israel, the elected people of God. They all sought God's intervention, which they believed would lead to Israel's freedom from Rome and the eventual establishment of God's rule over the world. Fiorenza writes, "All these diverse Jewish renewal movements of the time were strongly concerned with how to realize in every aspect of life the obligations and hopes of Israel as the kingly and priestly people of God. They sought to hasten God's intervention on behalf of Israel by scrupulously doing the will of God as revealed in Temple and Torah." She goes on to note, "The proclamation of the *BASILEIA* [kingdom] by Jesus and his movement shared this central theological concern for the renewal of the people of Israel as God's holy elect in the midst of the nations. However, the Jesus movement refused to define the holiness of God's elected people in cultic terms, redefining it instead as the wholeness intended in creation."

It is striking that the early church began as a renewal movement. The search for renewal has continued throughout the history of the church; and it emerged as a central concern yet again

in the time of the Reformation. The significance of all of this for the Thai church is that the concept of renewal has been a key theme here as well, especially since the mid-1920s. From that time through the 1970s the churches employed revivalism as their chief means of renewal. In the last 15 years, as I've mentioned in pervious HeRDs, the CCT has shifted its focus from revivalism to employed pastoral care as the best way to attain local church renewal.

HeRD #141 - "On Bended Knee"

HeRD #140 described the importance of the theme of renewal for the early church and the Thai church. The contemporary singing group, Boyz II Men, in a love song entitled "On Bended Knee" capture that theme aptly.

"Can we go back to the days our love was strong?

Can you tell me how a perfect love goes wrong?

Can somebody tell me how to get things back the way they used to be?

Oh, God, give me the reason. I'm down on bended knee.

I'll never walk again until you come back to me.

I'm down on bended knee."

The Boyz song, of course, is seeking reconciliation with a girl friend--even so, one senses the kernel of a hymn in their lyrics.

HeRD #142 - The Persistence of Healing

The study of early church history is important for Thai church history in at least two ways. On the one hand, it provides new perspectives and subjects for studying the Christian movement in Thailand. On the other hand, the early church constitutes one of the chief sources of the Thai church's past. HeRD #140 suggested that the subject of church renewal began with Jesus and his movement and has persisted through time to become a key theme in Thai church life. This is also true of Jesus' emphasis on healing and wholeness. Fiorenza in *IN MEMORY OF HER* observes of Jesus' miracles, "While there is much discussion as to whether miracles are scientifically possible and whether the miracle stories are historically 'authentic,' there is insufficient attention paid to the vision of being human that is realized by the power of God active in Jesus. The *basileia* [kingdom] vision of Jesus makes people whole, healthy, cleansed, and strong. It restores people's humanity and life. The salvation of the *basileia* is not confined to the soul but spells wholeness for the total person in her/his social relations." (p. 123) The "old-time" Presbyterian missionaries viewed their own mission very much in these terms--it was a mission aimed at the whole of human life. In HeRD #129 we saw that missionary "benevolence" included a humanitarian as well as spiritual component. This is to say that the church down to the present and down to Thailand has retained something of Jesus' way of thinking and methods of working .

HeRD #143 - Charity

Just couldn't pass this one up. Chadwick in *THE EARLY CHURCH* appraises the rapid growth of the early church with the claim that, "The practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success. The pagan comment 'See how these

Christians love one another' (reported by Tertullian) was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prison or condemned to the living death of labour in the mines, and in social action in time of calamity like famine, earthquake, pestilence, or war." (p. 56) Worth a thought or two.

HeRD #144 - Chiang Mai Christmas

We probably should save this for December, but perhaps we could all use a bit of Christmas cheer in February! Christmas, 1888. The Cheeks, Sarah and Dr. Marion, hosted a grand social function that lasted from December 23rd through Christmas Day. Cheek, a former member of the Laos Mission, was a timber merchant. Sarah, also a former member of the mission, belonged to the famous Bradley family and was the sister of Sophia McGilvary. In her memoirs, Sarah reported that it took months to plan the event. They had to have gifts for 300 employees made and food and entertainment arranged. On the 23rd, they entertained all of the teak people. For the evening of 24th they invited Chinese merchants and "native friends" to "dine in European fashion." They feasted on a Chinese meal and watched a variety of entertainment including "war dances." Sarah noted that the people entertained on the 24th, were merchants and other people used to having the best. The festivities climaxed on the 25th when the Cheeks hosted the Prince and Princess of Chiang Mai, their retinue of over 50 retainers, the English Consul, the Siamese Commissioner, the missionaries, and still more merchants. The Prince's dancing girls provided the entertainment. Sarah Cheek's memoirs conclude her description of this Christmas by noting, "This was the last public demonstration the Cheeks gave."

Source: Sarah Cheek, "Memoirs of Mrs. Sarah Cheek," n.d., pp. 7-11, in McGilvary Family Papers.

HeRD #145 - Mae Dok Daeng Christmas

HeRD #144 described one of the grandest Christmas celebrations ever held in "old" Chiang Mai--Christmas, 1888. The Mae Dok Daeng Church celebrated the previous Christmas, 1887, in its own royal fashion--as reported by McGilvary in a letter dated 3 January 1888. Three missionaries, including Dr. McGilvary, attended the festivities. On Christmas Sunday they baptized three new Christians, and in the ensuing week they joined with the church in a week of prayer that would have included daily services, probably several times a day. They met with the session to conduct church business and to examine applicants for baptism, and they also visited around in the homes of the members. Although we don't have a record of it for this occasion, missionary visits of this kind frequently involved the roasting of a cow or of pigs, which required special permission from the authorities. The missionaries stayed through to New Year's Day.

It is worth noting, that from the perspective of the history of pastoral care in the northern Thai church, this was an important occasion. It was a "pastorally intense" moment in which the sacraments were celebrated, homes visited, services held, and church business conducted. The church seems to have burst into unusually active life in the presence of the missionaries. This was hardly strange as only they could, at that time, conduct the sacraments or moderate a session. We should also note that there had been Christians in Mae Dok Daeng for about 12 years so that celebrating the Christian "high festival" of Christmas was still a relatively new experience there.

Source: McGilvary to Cornelia, 3 January 1888, McGilvary Family Papers.

HeRD #146 - Chalmers Martin

Some missionaries just didn't make it in the North. One of the saddest of these tales concerns the Rev. Chalmers Martin. He arrived in 1884 and proved to be an outstanding missionary. He was deeply motivated, picked up the language quickly, performed capably, and got on well with the northern Thai. He and Dr. McGilvary became fast friends. It turned out, however, that Martin couldn't stand the climate. After a courageous struggle, he and his family left Chiang Mai in September 1886. Not long before they left, McGilvary wrote, "Mr. Martin is a man in a thousand. I shall never cease to be grateful that he came and shall always, I trust, feel the impetus that he has given me. I never had an associate that so impressed me for his disinterested single devotion to the cause of Christ. His piety is calm and unobtrusive but deep." McGilvary continued, "It is our prayer that he may be spared to return. But what of poor me! How am I to get along without him? With work that a half dozen could not do to fall on one." He concluded, "Nan Ta, our best assistant and elder, just heard of Mr. Martin leaving and has been in to console me and be consoled by it. We talked over it and then prayed together over it and took counsel of how we could best utilize our native workers. He is feeling as bad as I am and says we will not find such another man soon." McGilvary years later wrote in his autobiography, "I never had felt so thoroughly crushed as I was at his departure. During three whole years [sic.] we had lived in the same house, and worked together hand in hand in the evangelistic work, of which he was very fond." (p. 283) One can't help but speculate on the impact Martin, had he stayed, might have had on the Laos Mission and the northern Thai church.

Source: McGilvary to Margaret McGilvary, 17 August 1886, McGilvary Family Papers.

HeRD #147 - It's like Going Home

The Rev. Robert Irwin served the Laos Mission from 1890 until 1906, when ill-health forced him to leave the mission. In 1911 the Irwins returned to Bangkok where he took up work with the American Bible Society. The following year, the Bible Society Agent in Bangkok, Dr. Carington, died, and Irwin took his place. In a chatty, friendly letter dated 15 October 1912, Irwin affirmed his deep interest in the work of the Laos Mission and offered all the assistance he could give in providing and distributing Bibles in the North. Having visited that field twice just prior to assuming his duties as Agent, he avowed "I remember my former two visits with keen pleasure and am eager to get back again. It is like going home." Not a few other missionaries in the North have felt the same way when they returned from furloughs or other extended absences. It was just as though they were going home. [Also see HeRD #38]

Source: Robert Irwin to Laos Mission, 15 October 1912, Records of the American Presbyterian Mission.

HeRD #148 - Culture & Pastoral Care

This past semester, it's been my privilege to teach a class in the history of CCT pastoral care at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, Payap University. Most of the students in the course have pastoral experience. About a month ago, one of the students asked in class, "What does Thai culture have to do with pastoral care?" When I threw the question back to the whole class, three answers came out. First, we can't use Thai Buddhist styles and forms in the church because the members won't accept them. Second, as pastors we don't get the respect and honor accorded Buddhist monks or to Korean Protestant pastors. Third, some people praise the church's more democratic processes and esp. its openness to women because these are so different from Buddhism. In other words, Thai culture is a "problem" or it is something they consider as being apart from themselves. I asked then, "How is it of benefit to us in a positive sense? What's its POSITIVE role in pastoral work?" A long silence followed. The feelings of distance from Thai culture were painfully real in that moment. Pastoral care, as practiced in the CCT, is a social role

alien to its own culture; and pastors experience this alienness as a confusion, an inability to articulate, and as a question mark without any hints of an answer.

HeRD #149 - Sex, Trinity, & Missions

Here's a new direction. In his *A SHORT HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT*, Urban observes that in the struggle to define the unity of the Trinity, the early church came to view the three Persons of the Trinity as sharing a common "material" substratum that they identified with the Father. Urban then explains why the church used "father" rather than "mother" to name this unifying substratum. He writes, "The choice represents a shift in the understanding of reproduction. In very early times, the material source symbol was the mother. Hence there were mother goddesses, closely associated with birth and fertility. The baby coming out of the mother was an apt example of 'material causation,' with the mother 'that from which something is made.' But later, when more about reproduction became known and the indispensable role of the father became clear, the analogy shifted to plant reproduction. the father was thought to plant a seed in the ground. This shift had already taken place in the Hebrew Scriptures, where the male secretion is called 'seed.' In this view, the women did not provide the substance of the child. That came with the seed. The mother provided only the food for the seed to grow and the womb in which it was housed." Urban concludes that, given this view of sexual reproduction, it was impossible for the early church to view the unifying "material" of the Trinity as anything but male/father. (pp. 60-61)

The Presbyterians in Thailand frequently drew on biblical images of planting and reaping to describe their own work. They sowed the seed so that one day there would be a grand harvest of conversions. They referred to various aspects of their work, especially the distribution of tracts and portions, as "seed-planting." There's food for thought here. ONE, the biblical view of sexual reproduction is wrong, yet that view was central to missionary self-understanding. TWO, evidently the heart of missionary thinking about their work and identity was profoundly, if unknowingly, male-oriented. THREE, and following on One, the biblical view proposes an active and passive agent in planting and reaping. This parallels the missionary approach to the "Siam" and "Laos" fields. They were the active, change agent and the "natives" were the passive, changed ground. It's as though they took the "active" male role and the northern Thai played the "passive" female role.

An aside: it is striking how strongly influenced all of our thinking is by our physical natures. In this case, human sexuality encompassed the very conception of God.

HeRD #150 - Timescape

In justifying a historical approach to the study of theology, Linwood Urban makes the following comment: "Every great movement is a developing phenomenon." [*A SHORT HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT*, p. 3]. Our study of such movements, then, is not done at rest. Even as we study it, our subject is changing, receding, taking new form. And we, too, are changing. At the moment, I'm in the process of writing a new history of northern Thai Christianity. The one I wrote over a decade ago is now inadequate, partly because we have far more documentary and secondary material than I had access to in the early 1980s. Equally important, however, is the fact that the northern Thai church's situation has changed a great deal even in a decade. We literally see its longer past through altered lenses, and the issues we focus on have shifted (from the role of CCT institutions to the emergence of pastoral care, for example). At the same time, I've changed too. All of this motion affords the opportunity of studying northern Thai church history anew. "Lay people" frequently seem to think that our knowledge of the past should be fixed and unchanging, when in fact all human knowledge is in

motion. Even our knowledge of those closest to us, those persons we love most, changes over time--as they change and as we change and as our relationships change. While it is true, thus, that we STUDY the past, the real subject of our research, inevitably, is the present. We look from our moving point on the stream of time out and back across the timescape of the past. Our ultimate goal is to make sense of that moving point by understanding where it came from and how it came to be moving in just the direction and speed it is now moving.

HeRD #151 - Indigenous Missionary Medicine

Ach. Prasit Pongudom, a colleague at the Office of History, is working on a paper on the relationship of missionary medicine to "traditional" medical ways. About a month ago he interviewed Dr. Boonchom Ariwong, an 86 year-old Christian doctor who started practicing medicine in Chiang Mai in 1937. Dr. Boonchom provided Ach. Prasit a new, more complex picture of the development of Western medicine, long dominated by missionary medicine, in relationship to northern Thai culture.

Dr. Boonchom claims that as a young physician he learned how to "do" medicine in the North from Dr. Edwin C. Cort, the director of McCormick Hospital in Chiang Mai. Dr. Cort's style emphasized hard-work and a sacrificial approach that, among other things, required the McCormick doctors to travel far out into the country-side when calls came in for help. In those days, most of their patients were the desperately ill. The village doctors with their traditional methods had given up and the choice was between calling in the missionary doctor or dying. Dr. Boonchom emphasized that Dr. Cort's method was a person-centered, deeply caring approach. As practiced in Chiang Mai today, "modern" medical techniques are generally disease-centered rather than person-centered. Doctors treat diseases not people. Ach. Prasit had been viewing the introduction of Western medicine by the missionaries as the initiation of the process that has introduced disease-centered medicine to the North. Dr. Boonchom provided him with a different picture--one in which the Western doctor's philosophy of medical care actually fit very well with northern Thai values of generosity and compassion. There is no question but that the well-spring of Dr. Cort's approach was his Christian faith, so that what we have here is an example in the indigenization of Christian faith and theology. It appears that missionary medicine was philosophically closer to "traditional" northern Thai medicine than it is to current medical attitudes.

HeRD #152 - Teddy Rides Again!

In HeRD #122, we heard echoes of the Teddy Roosevelt Era of American progressivism. The Rev. Newell Preston offers us another example of how that vibrant political ideology influenced missionary thinking in Thailand. Writing in 1919, Preston noted that Siamese were physically well-endowed, comely, and graceful people. They had quick minds. He went on to state, however, that they were debilitated because of disease and an unhealthy social environment. He argued that if they were given the "proper advantages,"--including a religion that teaches the Fatherhood of God, the essential unity of humanity, convicts the people of sin, makes the truth sacred, and offers a perfect moral idea--then Siam would become a great power in the world. Preston contended that the Siamese had yet to achieve anything because Buddhism lacked a dynamic to impel them upward and onward. He wrote, "A nation without spiritual powers is mere floating deadwood." Power, he contended, comes only from a great, living faith which meant that the Siamese would only attain a powerful position when they caught a vision of the living God. Only with this power could they solve the problems of ignorance, disease, illiteracy, and a lack of education. He urged that "the heart of Siam" must undergo a new birth, and he hoped that the American people would help the Siamese on the "Road of Achievement."

HeRD #153 - Converts & Modernization

Dr. Vachara Sindhauprama in his Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Change in Northern Thailand" states, "The urban elite, the princes and high officials at the upper echelon of [northern Thai] society, were the first group to encounter the external forces coming into Lan Na since the second half of the nineteenth century." (p. 112). In a strictly chronological sense, Vachara is correct since those changes began before there was a Christian convert community. The church emerged in the mid-1870s, however, and a strong case could be made that from that point onwards it experienced modernization more intensely and directly than any other social group in the North. In the 1870s, the political elite had been subjected to modernizing influences for only a decade or so, and a strong anti-Western and anti-modernization faction dominated the political scene in Chiang Mai. The Christian community, meanwhile, significantly encountered the West through the missionaries. Their daughters and sons were educated in a Western setting. They received Western medical care. The structures of the church were Western in form as was its worship. A number of Christians became proficient in English. The first northern Thai to study in the West, See Mo, was a Christian. Christians entered the capitalist money economy well ahead of northern Thai society generally. The list goes on and even includes the importation of Western building and construction skills. Any relatively complete study of the beginnings of modern social change in the North would have to give prominent attention to the Christian community.

HeRD #154 - Mike I: Karen Beginnings

In order to provide a bit of variety to HeRD, I've asked Dr. Mike Leming to guest HeRD the next three HeRDs. Mike is Professor of Sociology & Anthropology at St. Olaf College and visits Chiang Mai frequently. Thank you, Mike.

The Karen Baptist churches of Thailand have, from their beginning, been relatively independent from direct American spiritual influences. While their Burmese brothers and sisters were initially evangelized by the American Baptist missionaries in the 19th century, the Thai Karen received the gospel from Burmese Karen missionaries. The reason for this was that Thai borders were relatively closed to influence from white "farang" due to fears regarding colonialism. Therefore Karen churches from Burma sent Maw Klo, Shwe Mya, and Saw Kay as lay missionaries to Thailand.

The following statement in 1881 by Justus Vinton (American Baptist missionary leader) clearly indicates the American missionary "respect" accorded to the indigenous Burmese Karen church and its lay preachers. "Native preachers are brave when bravely lead but we must remember that they are to be used as the English government uses sepoy--under white officers. 49 good Karen preachers led by a wide awake aggressive missionary are worth more than 50 missionaries...but 50 native preachers alone would do little without guidance."

Despite this "support" given to the first three Karen missionaries sent to Thailand, more than 500 Thai Karen converted to Christianity in Lampang within a matter of a few days. A few weeks later the missionaries (none of whom were ordained) were forced to return to Burma in order to seek help in building the new Karen Christian community in Thailand. Significant in this story is the continuity that exists within the contemporary Thailand Karen Baptist churches. Even after 100 years, the Karen churches in Thailand remain self-directed, evangelistically-oriented, and strongly influenced by non-ordained leadership.

Source: Anders P. Hovemyr. *In Search of the Karen King*. University of Uppsala Press, 1989.

HeRD #155 - Mike II: Maung Htwe

When the first three Karen missionaries were sent to Thailand from the Burmese Karen Baptist churches they were lead by Maung Htwe, a "quack doctor, indulged in the black arts, charms, magic and in just about everything that caters to the needs of the superstitious" (U Zan, Karen historian, n.d.). Maung Htwe lead the Burmese churchmen because he knew well the area to which the missionaries would be traveling. Justus Vinton (American Baptist missionary leader) described Maung Htwe as "too vile for description but of consummate ability" and ordered that the Karen missionary party "not to allow him to remain an hour in their company." The Karen preachers disobeyed these orders because they viewed Maung Htwe's presence as more of a challenge than a problem and decided to work with and share their faith with Maung Htwe before preaching to the Karen of Thailand. As providence would have it, Maung Htwe became their first convert in Thailand.

Aware of Vinton's disapproval, Maung Htwe promised not to return to Burma until "by hosts of converts he shows God's seal of approval." After more than 500 Thai Karen converted to Christianity in Lampang, the missionaries were forced to return to Burma to seek pastoral help in building the new Karen Christian community in Thailand. Maung Htwe was left to care for the new converts. Justus Vinton lamented: "Worst of all they left the reprobate (Maung Htwe) in charge of Christ's tender lambs. Shame fills me when I think that the devil's man stuck to his post while Christ's men flinched at the moment of victory." But history redeemed Maung Htwe as the Karen of Thailand were experiencing their own Christian redemption. The Karen historian, U Zan (n.d.), describes the work of Maung Htwe in Lampang with these words: "Maung Htwe carried on his work of caring for the new converts as best as his lack of any training would permit. It was said that the services he conducted were just one long session of Bible reading. He just read verse after verse from chapter to chapter which ran into hours of back-breaking and sleepy duration. His flock told him to preach instead of going on the way he did. He said, 'Look here folks, I don't have the training and the qualifications of those teachers. I wouldn't know how to preach even if I had wanted to. I know how you feel, but let me tell you this, -- I'm just like any one of you here. All I know is read a little, and that's just what I'm trying to do, banking heavily on your simple faith. I want to hold you all together only through your faith and not through any skill of mine.'"

A year later when six Karen pastors came to Lampang as reinforcements to continue the work among the Thai Karen, they found the Christian community had survived under the enduring care of Maung Htwe. Maung Htwe served and provided continuity for the Christian Karen community in Lampang for another 25 years until, in 1906, he finally returned to Burma and died--never having been fully recognized by the American Baptist Missionary Union in Burma.

Source: Anders P. Hovemyr. *In Search of the Karen King* . University of Uppsala Press, 1989.

HeRD #156 - Mike III: The Burma Rules & Karen Ordination

Burmese Baptist churches and their "daughter" churches in Thailand have long been governed by a set of rule widely known as the "Burma Rules." Among its regulations, are a set of stringent rules governing ordination. By these rules, only ordained pastors can serve communion and baptize believers. For the Karen churches pastors must be proven to be worthy of ordination. For this reason they often serve for many years before they are offered ordination and perhaps even longer before they accept this honor and responsibility. Furthermore, a church must be in need of an ordained pastor before ordination is offered to one serving as the pastor. Therefore if

a "retired pastor" lives in the village and is able to serve communion and baptize believers, ordination is not a pressing need for a congregation and therefore will not be offered.

In my research on the Christian Karen of Musikee area (Chiang Mai Province, Amphur Mae Chaem), I discovered that in 1931 three families became converted to Christianity under the preaching of Thra (pastor) Baw Ney. These families became the nucleus for the first church which later spread to become the Musikee Area Association of Churches of the Karen Baptist Convention.

Pastor Baw Ney evangelized the entire area by foot preaching to the Karen of Musikee while the first church in Teemeagala was cared for in his absence by his first converts and his wife. Due to the stringent "Burma Rules" that required a church to be self-sufficient and the pastor to be married, the Teemeagala church did not become an official church until 1940 (a month after Baw Ney was married and officially appointed as pastor). Because Thra Baw Ney was not ordained until 1954, whenever there was a baptism or communion, an ordained minister had to be called from Chiang Rai--more than 200 Kilometers away. The first time a scheduled baptism was held in the Teemeagala church, and an ordained pastor from Chiang Rai was in attendance, 40 people were baptized in the river Musi Klor (or Mae Chaem River).

Pastor Baw Ney only consented to be ordained because he was strongly influenced by the American Baptist missionary A. Q. Van Benschoten, Jr. During a three week visit to the Musikee area, Van Benschoten insisted that Baw Ney receive ordination for the benefit of the Christians in the Musikee area. With the assistance of an ordained Karen Baptist pastor from Chiang Rai, Rev. Van Benschoten ordained Baw New in the Teemeagala church in 1954--23 years after he first came to Musikee as evangelist and pastor.

Today Rev. Baw Ney is 86 years old, the Teemeagala church has more than 300 members, and there are 31 Karen Baptist churches and hundreds of baptized Christians in the villages where Pastor Baw Ney preached during those early years. The present and second pastor of the Teemeagala church is Thra Baw Ney's son, Timothy. He has served since 1980 when his father "retired," but to this date he has yet to be ordained. In April of this year, Thra Timothy will receive ordination at the annual meeting of the Thailand Karen Baptist Convention.

HeRD #157 - A Sea of Missions

Fiorenza's IN MEMORY OF HER, page 168, asserts that early Christian missions moved in a context marked by the "remarkable expansion of oriental mystery religions" in the western Mediterranean. Many of them reached Greece and Rome ahead of Christian missionaries "thereby creating the climate in which a new Eastern cult such as Christianity could be propagated." She goes on to state, "the wandering preachers of that day manifest a whole range of missionary propagandists, from philosophers, prophets, itinerant preachers, mendicants, and sorcerers to the traveling merchants, state officials, immigrants, slaves, and soldiers. Common to all were mobility and dedication to their philosophy or religion."

In Thailand, historically, the very concept of "missionary" was experienced as an alien intrusion, welcomed in some ways and resisted in others. In the time of the early church, however, the Christian missionary movement swam in a vast sea of missions. Missionaries were common and accepted as a part of life. Two questions. FIRST, what does it mean for Protestant missions to be an alien intrusion instead of working in a "missions-rich" context? SECOND, does the significant difference between early church and Thai contexts render the New Testament useless as a source for missionary methods in Thailand? It would seem possible, perhaps likely, that using a Pauline approach in Thailand, for example, would be wrong-headed.

HeRD #158 - Urban Christianity

Meeks, *THE FIRST URBAN CHRISTIANS*, insists that early Christianity was primarily an urban movement. He states, "Antioch, center of political, military, and commercial communication between Rome and the Persian frontier and between Palestine and Asia Minor, was one of the three or four most important cities of the empire and the home of a large and vigorous Jewish community. There developed the form of missionary practice and organization which we call Pauline Christianity, but which was probably characteristic of most of the urban expansion of the movement." (p. 10) He goes on to write, "In those early years, within a decade of the crucifixion of Jesus, the village culture of Palestine had been left behind, and the Greco-Roman city became the dominant environment of the Christian movement. So it remained, from the dispersion of the 'Hellenists' from Jerusalem until well after the time of Constantine. The movement had crossed the most fundamental division in the society of the Roman Empire, that between rural people and city dwellers, and the results were to prove momentous." (p. 11)

I'm not sure just how Meeks' observations relate to the church's historical situation in Thailand. At the very least, we should note that while the CCT has been a largely rural church, its city churches have been more successful in attaining a balanced, well-financed congregational life. At the same time, old-time missions were generally less successful in evangelizing the cities. It is certain that urban Thai church history should receive more attention than it has to date.

HeRD #159 - Urban & Rural Christianity

One central issue in the study of northern Thai church history is the relationship of rural Christian communities to the urban-based mission stations. By-and-large, the stations dominated the rural groups. They not only determined policy and ran things, but they also provided most of the religious resources local Christian groups relied upon. The sacraments were performed only when the missionaries or urban-based clergy appeared. They also did much of the evangelism and Christian education that was conducted in rural areas. There has been some reason, from the context of northern Thai culture, to see that relationship as "unnatural"--that is, imposed from outside. Prior to the full centralization of the North into the Siamese nation-state, villages and towns enjoyed a great deal of local autonomy. It was only with the "colonialization" of the North by Bangkok that the social and political center dominated the rural hinterland.

In light of this, Chadwick's brief description of Christian expansion in his *THE EARLY CHURCH* is interesting. He writes, "It was a natural missionary strategy for the Church to make the towns its first objective, and it became normal to serve the rural congregations, in the region under civil administration of the city (which might be very large), by sending out deacons." It was only by the 4th century that rural congregations were "served by a resident presbyter." (p. 48) In other words, the early church followed the same pattern as the northern Thai church. The church was urban-based and urban-administered until, eventually, local churches obtained their own clergy. Does this suggest that the "natural" pattern of Christian expansion is urban to rural? Or are the northern Thai and early church experiences entirely unrelated and it is mere happenstance that they share certain traits?

HeRD #160 - A Christian Siam

Many of the 19th-century Presbyterian missionaries who came to Thailand shared a profound, sweeping vision of their mission. They came to achieve nothing less than the creation of a Christian Siam. The Rev. Robert Irwin, writing to the Board of Foreign Missions in 1891 cried out, "I long for the dawn of that day that shall release this land from its cruel superstitions

and heathen bondage and when life and immortality shall be brought to light through the gospel." His words echoed those of the Rev. William Buell, one of the Presbyterian Church's first two missionaries to Thailand. In an 1843 letter to the Board, he called on Christ, "Oh blessed Saviour! may a brighter and happier day soon dawn on this benighted land!" He prayed that the Gospel would spread rapidly until no one in Thailand was ignorant of salvation or estranged from God, "...the fountain of all life the Source of every good!"

If we allow for forms of expression that now sound strange to us, Irwin and Buell are perhaps not so alien or distant from our "modern" situation as we might think (or wish). Many feel that Thailand today is a "benighted land" living in bondage to cruel superstitions. Most of those superstitions, as we've said in earlier HeRDs, are now imported from the West, Japan, and Korea! We still affirm God as the fountain of life and source of good, and I suspect most of us agree that Thailand's hope is in knowing God. On the question of how, where, and in what guise we can know God in Thai contexts, however, there would be profound disagreements among HeRD's readers.

HeRD #161 - A Christian Siam Again

The missionary longing for a Christian Siam (see HeRD #160) is a recurrent theme in Presbyterian missionary records. The Rev. J. S. and Amy Thomas, writing from Phrae in 1897, wrote regarding the Chinese residents in that city, "Their souls are as precious in God's sight as are the souls of the most intelligent white people. Christianity will make this people what it has made Europeans, Americans, Canadians. God help us that we may be instruments in His hands in lifting this people upward, and in lifting our Saviour up before them." Nearly forty years later, the Rev. Gaylord Knox, also a missionary in Phrae, preached a sermon before the 1935 meeting of the American Presbyterian Mission's annual meeting. He avowed, "Should we address ourselves to this harvest with the self sacrificing, complete abandonment of the Christ then can we hope. The rich harvest will be presented to the Lord of the harvest. The Kingdom of Siam will become the Kingdom of Our Lord and of His Christ."

Sources: J. S. and Amy Thomas to Dear Friends, 27 October 1897, v. 13, BFM; Gaylord Knox, "The Harvest is Rich but the Labourers are Few," typescript [1935?]. Maen Research Papers.

HeRD #162 - And A Christian America

HeRDs #160 and #161 described the Presbyterian missionaries' visionary goal of creating "A Christian Siam." It wasn't a dream that they suddenly discovered on the docks of Bangkok or the rivers of the North. As is true of all of their key ideas, the longing for a Christian Siam had its roots in the missionaries' own culture. Handy in A CHRISTIAN AMERICA states, "From the beginning American Protestants entertained a lively hope that some day the civilization of the country would be fully Christian. The ways in which the hope was expressed and the activities it engendered varied somewhat from generation to generation, but for more than three centuries Protestants drew direction and inspiration from the vision of a Christian America. It provided a common orientation that cut across denominational differences and furnished goals toward which all could work in their own style and manner." (pp. ix-x). The missionary translation of the search for a Christian America into a vision of a Christian Siam profoundly influenced the activities they engaged in and the strategies they pursued in planting the Christian religion in Thailand. That vision encouraged them to invest themselves in the "civilization" of Thailand on the premise that social and religious change were but two sides of the same coin. Both led to the Christianization of Siam.

Source: Robert Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford, 1984): ix-x.

HeRD #163 - Dr. Vrooman's Mysterious Toothache

In honor of Leap Year Day, here's a long one. It was originally written with publication elsewhere in mind. It is a fun piece and worth the read for those who have the time especially if you are a fan of detective novels or like puzzles of any kind.

A quarter of a century ago Robin Winks edited a delightful volume of essays entitled, *THE HISTORIAN AS DETECTIVE: ESSAYS ON EVIDENCE*. His thesis was that historians and detectives engage in the same venture. They assembled and order evidence to discover whodunit and why. In the Winksian spirit I offer you, "The Mysterious Case of Dr. Vrooman's Toothache." How much did it REALLY hurt, Charlie?

The case begins with a statement in McGilvary's autobiography, page 159. From April through July 1872 McGilvary and Dr. Charles W. Vrooman, mission physician, took the Laos Mission's first extended tour of exploration. McGilvary states that they had to cut trip short and hurriedly return to Chiang Mai because Vrooman got an excruciating toothache. It was so painful, in fact, that Vrooman begged McGilvary to pull the tooth. The reluctant McGilvary only managed to break it, and Vrooman then had to go to Bangkok to have the tooth attended to professionally. McGilvary is explicit, clear, and detailed in presenting these facts. Although he was writing nearly forty years after the event, one would hardly expect him to disremember the events surrounding the toothache. There is a slight problem. Missionary records from the 1870s make no mention whatsoever of Vrooman's toothache. They aren't just silent. They are silent in a way that contradicts McGilvary's account of the good doctor's toothache.

The relevant evidence is as follows. **FIRST**, in his account of the tour, Vrooman stated that they had traveled through heavy rains, rains that hindered their progress and made the tour difficult. He concluded that their, "Health was little affected by these unpleasant experiences. We escaped with less sickness than did the natives who accompanied us." [Vrooman, undated letter, in *FOREIGN MISSIONARY* 32, 4 (September 1873): 119-122.] Admittedly a toothache is not a "sickness," but would a man who had been through the intense pain of an aching tooth have written such a cheery conclusion? He also makes no mention of having to cut the trip short for any reason. **SECOND**, in a letter dated 7 November 1872, Vrooman explained that he went to Bangkok because of poor health due to nervousness and the ill affects of the climate's "malarial influences." In April 1874, he remembered that during July 1872 he was unwell and received permission to visit a seaport. The minutes of the Laos Mission state that, "Permission was given Dr. Vrooman to visit Maulmain on account of his health." [Minutes of the Laos Mission, 17 July 1872; Vrooman to Irving, 7 November 1872, and Vrooman to Irving, 15 April 1874, v. 3, Records of the Board of Foreign Missions] He doesn't attribute his trip to a tooth ache, but to a general physical condition. And going to a seaport for a toothache just doesn't make sense. Going to a seaport was, however, one way 19th century missionaries coped with general physical debilitation. **THIRD**, missionary records from both Chiang Mai and Bangkok for the years 1872 or 1873 contain no mention of Vrooman's toothache. They are silent concerning an event that we would expect to have been mentioned, even if only in passing.

In the strictest sense, this evidence doesn't contradict McGilvary's account of the Vrooman toothache since no reliable source states that Vrooman did not have a toothache. But we could hardly expect such. If he had a toothache no one would state he didn't. If he didn't, why in the world would anyone say he didn't? The silence of our records, technically, proves nothing. But it should make us at least suspicious. Vrooman's toothache was not a minor matter. It was

important enough that McGilvary remembered it after nearly four decades. He cited it to account for having to cut short a very important trip . It was unpleasant, furthermore, for him to have inadvertently broken his colleague's tooth. On the other hand, if Vrooman went to Bangkok to have a broken tooth pulled, why doesn't the mission's official minute state as much? Why did Vrooman originally plan to go to Maulmein BECAUSE it was a seaport? Why didn't Vrooman himself give the toothache as the cause of his trip? This silence is particularly perplexing because at no point does the alleged toothache explain anything about Vrooman's actions during the period June-October 1872. The toothache, in fact, complicates matters. Some of Vrooman's actions and statements make less sense if he had the toothache than if he didn't. There is reason, furthermore, to doubt McGilvary's tale. He wrote it long after the fact, and he could have disremembered the event. His autobiography, furthermore, sometimes confuses dates and events rather seriously.

Where does this leave us? Did Vrooman have a toothache or not? We don't know for sure. The weight of the evidence suggests that he probably didn't. We still don't have, unfortunately, a clear question to our original question. "How much did it REALLY hurt, Dr. V?"

HeRD #164 - Missionary Records & Northern Thai History

Dr. Vachara Sindhuprama's thesis on "Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Change in Northern Thailand, 1898-1942" (Hawaii, 1988) provides us with an insight into the importance of missionary records for the general study of northern Thai history. In presenting the several reasons for his study, Vachara states, "In addition, as far as the methodology of this project is concerned, mission records show [the missionaries'] response to government educational policy and display the responses of the people to modern education in general. At a time when writing tradition was not so widespread among the people, source materials which reveal the interaction between education and society are not easy to find. Hence, northern Thailand is one of the most appropriate regions of study as far as this type of sources is concerned." (p. 5) Over the last decade, an increasing number of scholars have utilized Laos Mission records for the study of northern Thai history, precisely because there are so few other records available esp. for social historians.

HeRD #165 - Women & Church History

Chadwick in EARLY CHURCH HISTORY observes, "Christianity seems to have been especially successful among women. It was often through the wives that it penetrated the upper classes of society in the first instance. Christians believed in the equality of men and women before God, and found in the New Testament commands that husbands should treat their wives with such consideration and love as Christ manifested for his church." (pp. 58-59). He claims, however, that the doctrine that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28) "◆ was not taken to mean a programme of political emancipation, which in antiquity would have been unthinkable. The social role of women remained that of the home-maker and wife. At the same time, Christianity cut across ordinary social patterns more deeply than any other religion, and encouraged the notion of the responsibility of individual moral choice in a way that was quite exceptional." (p. 59).

Chadwick holds that IN THEORY the church recognized the equality of the sexes, but IN PRACTICE it remained sexist. Yet, he and other historians emphasize the loving nature of early church society. Fiorenza, in IN MEMORY OF HER, finds considerable evidence showing that women were equal in the earliest church. They exercised all of the offices of the church and frequently were wealthy patronesses of local congregations. She argues that the early church met in homes, precisely where women played the largest social role and had the most authority.

Two thoughts. First, Fiorenza is likely correct in charging that most early church historians have agreed with Chadwick that women never had actual equality in the church when there is evidence to the contrary. Second, we should consider the possibility that the early church was in significant part a woman's movement. As we look around Thailand's churches today, we find women, on the whole, far more active in the faith than men.

HeRD #166 - Teaching English

Dr. Vachara in his thesis on education and socio-cultural change in the North, observes of missionary schools that "The great attraction of the mission schools was the teaching of English. As the British and their subjects became increasingly involved in this region, English became a language of frequent official use. Parents who expected their children to become government officials could see that it was advantageous to have them learn English." Even after the founding of government schools, the upper class continued to send their children to mission schools. Vachara supposes, "The ruling elite probably had no other reason for sending their children to the mission school beyond the desire for their boys to learn English directly from native speakers, and these were accessible only in this Christian school." (p. 64) This is yet another variation on the old theme of "missionaries and modernization."

HeRD #167 - More Thoughts on Church & Culture

The role of James, brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem Church, leads us to further reflections on the relationship of church to culture and other faiths. It appears that James stood midway between those Jewish Christians who viewed "Christianity" as a Jewish sect (the so-called Judaizing party) and those who sought a clean separation from the Jewish temple and cult. James fully participated in Jewish legal and cultic life but realized that other Christians did not share his sense of attachment to the Jewish "mother faith." He was, thus, quite willing to accept Paul's position that gentile Christians should not have to be circumcised and convert to Judaism. James' view contrasts with that of Paul. James and the Judaizers took a "soft" stand regarding Judaism, while Paul took a "firm" stand against some aspects of Judaism. James and Paul both took an accepting "soft" stand regarding gentile culture while the Judaizers took an intolerant "hard" stand. All three, presumably, shared a rejectionist hard stance against "pagan" religion. A crude chart would look like this:

"PARTY"	JUDAISM	GENTILE CULTURE	PAGANISM
Judaizers	soft	hard	hard
James	soft	soft	hard
Paul	firm	soft	hard

It is striking that James' authority as head of the "mother church" was accepted by all parties including Paul. His soft-soft approach, thus, was a viable option for Christian practice. It is also striking that all 3 parties took a hard line stand against pagan cults. One could NOT, thus, remain FULLY Greek and be a Christian in the sense that a Jewish Christian could remain fully Jewish.

Turning to Thailand, we should note that Thailand Protestantism has long taken a "Judaizer" position regarding both Thai culture and religion. It rejects both. In terms of the above schema, that approach is at odds with the dominant stream in the early church, one that was either soft or firm on Judaism and soft on culture. What this means for the Thai church depends in large measure into which column we place Buddhism. From the perspective of the Thai church, inevitably rooted in Thai culture, the first column might be most correct. Buddhism,

that is, is the "mother-faith" of Thai Christianity rather than Judaism. Is it not possible that a "Jamesian" soft stance vis-a-vis Buddhism is a viable Christian alternative in Thailand? A "Pauline" approach that is selectively firm in terms of Buddhism yet open and accepting in terms of culture would be another alternative. Least viable, from the perspective of the early church, is the Judaizing approach now actually in place.

HeRD #168 - Ecclesiastical Brain Drain

After describing briefly the process of urbanization in northern Thailand after 1900, Dr. Vachara in his thesis, "Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Change in Northern Thailand, 1898-1942," observes, "Both the government and the mission school systems fitted perfectly into the pattern of movement from rural to urban areas. Government model schools or missionary boarding schools in the cities drew prospective students from district and village schools. Upon graduation, or in many cases even before finishing the highest grade in school, they could find jobs away from home. Some even had a chance to attend prestigious schools in Bangkok, the largest and the fastest-growing urban center of the country, through either government or missionary connections." (pp. 130-131)

From the perspective of local church history, the fact that urban mission schools acted as a magnet drawing rural Christian children into the cities had at least two important consequences. ONE, this movement provided numerous individual Christians with opportunities for education and new directions in life, directions that many preferred to returning to the country-side. TWO, particular historical cases, my personal observation, and common sense suggest that most often it was/is the more capable young people who came into the cities and who then pursued careers that kept them from returning "home" to the country-side. Urban churches and Christian institutions have benefited from this process. Rural churches have been weakened through exporting of some of their best young people to the cities.

HeRD #169 - A Charter for Educational Institutions

A central theme for northern Thai church and missionary history is the emergence of mission institutions as the focus of missionary activity. After 1900 the mission's schools, hospitals, and press increasingly dominated Laos Mission thinking and consumed its resources. This was the result of a conscious policy. In a letter from Dr. Arthur J. Brown, Board secretary, to the mission dated 7 April 1910, Brown shared the contents of a lengthy Board policy statement for developing work in northern Thailand. That policy was arrived at in conjunction with members of the Laos Mission who were in the States on furlough. It read, in part, "The most serious defect of our present work is the lack of a sufficient number of competent native ministers, evangelists, teachers and physicians. We have a small native force in proportion to our missionary force and expenditure. Our work cannot be properly done or placed on a stable basis as things now are. It is too largely dependent upon missionaries. There are not enough of them to do anything like what needs to be done, while furloughs bring the work of some institutions almost to a standstill. We have neither the men nor the money for reinforcements large enough to handle our great and growing work by missionaries alone, or even in chief part. Even if we did have the men and money, it would not be wise to make everything depend upon foreigners. It is vital that we should at once take measures to secure a larger native force. Pioneer evangelistic work can often be done by untrained Christians, but congregations and schools require educated leaders. We shall never see a strong and self reliant native church unless we have the right kind of men to lead it; and we shall never have these men unless we have schools to develop them."

This policy statement reflects trends that were already taking place in 1910, trends that led to the rapid growth of Laos Mission institutional work. That trend also led the mission and the

Thai church in later years to locate much of its Christian education and leadership training efforts with institutions rather than with local churches.

HeRD #170 - Mission & World

In preparation for a course on early church history from the perspective of the Thai historical context, I've been going through my preliminary research looking for trends and ideas. One especially important issue is how Presbyterian missionary thinking in Thailand concerning the world is similar to or differs from early church models. My research suggests that in aggregate the early church tended to be quite withdrawn from the larger world. It created its own institutions, folk ways, and linguistic styles. It took a highly negative attitude towards other religions. It took some care to build clear boundaries between itself and the world to the extent that it became an identifiable sub-culture within the Roman Empire. In some ways it might almost have been a counter-culture. At the same time, the church generally respected political authority and showed no inclination to political activism. In a larger sense, it affirmed the general goodness of the created world and held tenaciously to the humanity of its Lord and Savior. Evidently some ancient church thinkers saw human evil as nothing but a veneer overlaying a fundamental, created goodness. Christianity is not a world-denying religion.

What is striking, on reflection, is that in each one of these particulars Presbyterian mission thinking and practice parallels that of the early church. There is but one significant area in which they differ markedly. The early church emerged from within its various cultural contexts, accepted many of the world's values for its own, and generally remained within the boundaries of the cultures where it arose. The Presbyterians in Thailand, on the other hand, equated Thai cultures with idolatry, Satan, and backwardness. They required a double re-socialization. One, the convert had to become a Christian. The early church also demanded this re-socialization. Two, the convert had to learn to function within a highly Westernized social and organizational context. Among the early Christians, only the Judaizers made a similar demand. More and more, it seems to me that a central issue concerning Presbyterian missions in Thailand has to do with Western ethnocentrism, the arrogant insistence that one's culture really is superior to another.

HeRD #171 - A Country Apart

Arthur J. Brown, Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions Secretary, provides the following brief description of Thailand in 1910 in a letter to the missions dated 25 November 1910. "Siam as a country lies apart from the world's great thoroughfares; it is seldom visited by travelers; it has not entered the world's great commercial relations; it does not frequently appear in the newspapers and periodicals." Sounds idyllic.

HeRD #172 - Money & Missionaries

In a long, heart-felt letter, dated 18 May 1911, to all 28 Presbyterian missions around the world, Dr. Arthur J. Brown of the Board of Foreign Missions discussed the dangers of emphasizing financial and personnel resources as the key to missionary success. He opened his remarks by writing, "But there is another peril which has become rather startlingly apparent and about which I feel that I ought to write. I refer to the peril of undue reliance upon money and reinforcements. I am painfully aware that the work needs a great deal more of both. I would not be understood as lessening in any degree the force of the appeal which we much continue to make for these needs. But if you could read reports and letters from missionaries in many parts of the world through a series of years and listen to hundreds of missionaries on furlough you would understand why I ask whether there is not danger of our imagining that the evangelization of the

world is simply a matter of appropriations and new missionaries. We are often told that if a given field could only have a sufficient force and appropriation, it could be evangelized in a short time. Hundreds of addresses, by missionaries, secretaries and laymen alike, dwell upon this argument, not infrequently figuring out just how many men and how much money the realization of our aim would cost." After citing examples where money and reinforcements did not lead to desired results, Brown went on to write, "Do we not need to remind ourselves, dear friends, that the grace of God cannot be bought; that the evangelization of the world is not a matter of money or re-enforcements or machinery?...It would be lamentable if we were to permit the commercializing of the missionary appeal and the missionary enterprise, lamentable if we were to feel that the chief needs of any field are men and money, or that men and money in any amount could bring a people to Christ."

Brown must have had the Laos Mission, among others, in mind when he wrote these words. From 1867 onwards, mission correspondence contained repeated pleas and demands for more funding and more missionaries. But, then, why pick on the Laos Mission? We could assemble, I suppose, a massive number of examples from our own experiences in which money and "manpower" have dominated the councils of the church.

HeRD #173 - Discipline

In August 1911 the Laos Mission (probably its Executive Committee) decided to transfer Dr. Charles C. Crooks out of the Lampang Station. The Crooks were home on furlough at the time. Crooks, in a letter dated 2 October 1911, objected strenuously; and in the course of presenting his arguments, he admitted that he was not popular with the Lampang Christians. He explained, "In the matter of the natives every one knows how the matter of the disposition of medicine has been abused in the Mission and especially in Lakawn. I have always stood by the Mission's Manual rule which demands payment except in cases of poverty. Of course the natives would object but it seems to me that the Mission is in duty bound to stand by its own rule on the matter of the primiscuous [sic.] free distribution of medicine." He went on, "Another matter which may possibly have made us unpopular with the natives was the stand we were compelled to take over the moral condition which existed about the Dispensary Compound. We were forced to take a very decided stand and of course stepped on some toes. The Mission will of course stand behind us on such a score."

Here were two issues that frequently harried the members of the Laos Mission. First, there was the whole problem of "worldly" benefits that converts derived from the missionaries. These included employment, legal assistance, protection from political repression, free medicine, and various social and financial benefits. Crooks, evidently, took a hard line that severely limited such "goodies." His stand would not have endeared him to Christians who frequently had come to depend on such missionary assistance. Second, the missionaries generally adhered to a fairly rigid, middle class, "old-fashioned" American ethic. They found northern Thai Christians shared too much of the moral "laxity" of northern Thai society, esp. in terms of sexual relations. Again, the clashes they had with the Christian community over church discipline sometimes caused unhappiness on the part of the Christians.

HeRD #174 - That Ill-fated Steamer

Now, here's a strange twist to the great web of Thai church history for you. In a letter dated 19 April 1912, Dr. Arthur Judson Brown, Board Secretary, expressed to the Laos Mission his regrets that the Board couldn't help provide relief funds for the malarial epidemic then plaguing northern Thailand. He wrote, "all our relief funds are now exhausted and the public appeals that are being made for the relief of the survivors and dependent relatives in connection

with the sinking of the steamship Titanic now sweeps all public interest in that direction." Brown added, "The Rev. and Mrs. A. F. Caldwell and their baby, returning from Siam, were among the passengers on that ill-fated steamer but we are rejoiced to know that they were among the saved."

According to biographical information collected by the Rev. Paul A. Eakin, Albert Francis Caldwell was born in 1885 in Sanborn, Iowa, and graduated from Park College in Missouri and the University of Wisconsin (M.A.). Sylvia Mae Caldwell was also born in 1885 and graduated from Park College. She was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. They sailed for Bangkok in September 1909 and were assigned to Bangkok Christian High School (Bangkok Christian College today). They resigned in November 1911 for reasons of health and returned to the United States. Eakin notes, "After a slow and rough trip to London, they decided to take the luxury liner, Titanic, on her maiden voyage from London to the States. They were three of the few passengers who escaped with their lives." They later divorced, and she remarried, while he eventually became a State Farm Insurance agent in Richmond, Virginia. This little episode tells us little about Thai church history that we didn't already know, but I just couldn't pass it up!

HeRD #175 - BFM Finances

The Laos Mission depended for much of its existence upon the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Only the medical side of the mission's work actually paid for itself, and even then that didn't include the salaries of the missionary physicians. The Board's financial condition, in short, was a significant concern to the missionaries on the field. They would, in this light, have read Arthur J. Brown's letter to the mission, dated 30 April 1913, with some gratification. He reported to them that, "We may have the satisfaction, such as it is, of knowing that the foreign missionary operations of the Presbyterian Church are again more extensive and are receiving a larger amount of money than the operations of any other of the 349 Boards of Foreign Missions in the world. Until two years ago the Church Missionary Society of England was at the head of the list, but now for the second year our Board leads all others in the amount of receipts." Receipts for fiscal 1912-1913 totaled \$1,994,262.08. Brown noted that the financial picture wasn't quite as bright as these figures suggested since general giving was done somewhat, and the Board had to make up the shortfall from legacies. He concluded, "However, considering the business depression which characterized the entire year, the strain and excitement of a presidential campaign which is always bad for the Boards, and considering also the fact that the Boards of several other denominations have come out with considerable debts, we have on the whole much reason to thank God and take courage."

HeRD #176 - Statistics

The following figures put into perspective the limited evangelistic success of the Laos Mission. In July 1913, the Board of Foreign Missions wrote of the Laos Mission's statistical record, "It reports only five ordained native ministers, 24 licentiates, 65 'other helpers', including Bible women, and 4,518 communicants out of a population which Dr. W. A. Briggs states that the last census places at 3,111,600." If these figures are correct, however, Christians represented about 1.5% of northern Thailand's total population. This figure compares favorably statistically with the general estimate that in 1996 roughly .5% of Thailand is Christian (Catholic & Protestant). The statistic that was, perhaps, most troubling in terms of the future of the church was the number of clergy since only ordained clergy could be pastors in those days. There was one clergy for every 903.6 communicant members.

Source: Brown to Laos Mission, 24 July 1913, in the Records of the American Presbyterian Mission.

HeRD #177 - Irregular Compassion

Missionary work is work with people, and from time to time it brings the missionary face to face with human suffering. At some point in 1913, Mabel Cort sent a "heart-rending" letter to the Board of Foreign Missions describing the suffering of the people of Phrae from famine and consequent poverty. She alerted the Board to the fact that the medical work of the Phrae Station, under the direction of her husband Dr. Edwin C. Cort, was facing difficult financial constraints. His patients couldn't pay for their medical care, and in some cases the Cortes had to feed people who were starving. In a letter dated 25 August 1913, Dr. Brown of the Board responded. The Board, he wrote, had "providentially" received a sum of \$840 for famine relief in China, which was no longer needed there. Although it had not received an official request for aid from the Laos Mission, the Board so deeply felt the plight of the people in Phrae that "we do not wish to stand upon regularity." So, it sent the money out to Thailand immediately.

HeRD #178 - Like a Bank Cashier

Way, way back in HeRDs #10 and #11, we looked at the role of the mission treasurer--in a somewhat whimsical fashion. It was a hard, time-consuming, and largely thankless task. A Board letter dated 16 September 1913 expressed appreciation for the fidelity and competence of the Laos Mission's treasurer, the Rev. William Harris. The letter observed, "The lot of a Mission Treasurer is not an easy one, especially as it is sometimes necessary for him to decline requests which may appeal to his personal sympathy. But a Mission Treasurer is like a bank cashier; he is not handling his own funds, and he cannot pay out what is in his custody except in the prescribed ways. I do not recall that Mr. Harris has spoken of this embarrassment, but other Treasurers of other Missions have, and we in the Board have frequent reason to feel it."

HeRD #179 - Medicine & Evangelism

In 1911 a severe, protracted epidemic of malaria swept large parts of northern Thailand. A great amount of human suffering resulted, and the Laos Mission did what it could with its limited resources to relieve that suffering. Its medical arm became one of the few resources available in northern Thailand to combat the epidemic directly. One consequence of the epidemic was the largest concentrated "in-pouring" of converts in the history of the mission. The mission's Annual Report for 1912-1913 surveyed the situation and found that there had been large numbers of converts in the Chiang Mai and Phrae stations due to medical work. It continued by observing, "In Lakawn [Lampang] as well, the medical work has been the right arm of evangelism. The large increase in the sale of medicine in Chiang Rai tells of increasing influence and usefulness there. The small pox epidemic in Nan has made it possible to dissipate in some measure the suspicion and ignorance, that have attended our work in that province." The report concluded, "Surely throughout the Laos field, the work of the Christian physician seems the key to the hearts of the people. Nothing else so readily breaks the bonds of spirit superstition, the master hold of Satan in their land."

The concept of "benevolence" that we looked at in HeRDs #127, #128, and #129 is a powerful analytical tool for understanding missionary work. While genuinely concerned about the physical and social well-being of the general population, their ultimate concern was for the immortal souls of those same people. Animism, thus, was as great an evil as malaria--both being the work of our old friend, Satan. And since the war on animism and on disease were but two fronts of a common conflict, the defeat of Satan medically "naturally" had important consequences for the battle against animism.

HeRD #180 - Benevolence Defined

While I don't want to beat this "benevolence" horse to death, that very same 1913 Annual Report cited in HeRD 179# contains one of the best descriptions of missionary benevolence I've come across. Here it is, unadorned by sage commentary: The Lampang Girls' School reported, "It is a great joy to bring little children from famine stricken villages where some of them have been living on roots and berries and various insects, until they are little skeletons weak with continuous malaria to take them and scrub them, and care for them, till daily quinine has removed the fever, and plenty of food has made the little bodies strong and plump, and daily study has brightened the mind, and daily teaching of Christ has kindled the spirit, and the face shines with happiness and content. It is wonderful how quickly this change takes place."

HeRD #181 - An Oft Repeated Refrain

The following brief excerpt from the Laos Mission's Annual Report for 1913 is one of the more frequently repeated statements in mission records. Concerning biblical work it states, "The pressure of other duties has delayed farther work in Bible translation, but Mrs. McGilvary has completed the revision of Matthew, and is busy upon the revision of Psalms." The Laos Mission from its earliest years intended to translate the whole Bible into northern Thai, but by 1913 it still had not completed even the New Testament. The constant refrain was that the few individuals qualified to do translating were so busily engaged in other work they had little or no time for translation.

HeRD #182 - The Drug Trade Missionary Style

Here's a new wrinkle on the missionary role in northern Thailand medical modernization: There was a wide-spread malaria epidemic in 1913; and, according to the Laos Mission Annual Report for 1913, the mission's Chiang Mai dispensary was the only place in a large region where the public could buy Western medicines. A number of individuals bought supplies of drugs for resale out in the country-side. The report states, "We welcome this movement, as it secures a wide distribution of reliable medicine." The report also acknowledges that the dispensary didn't keep a record of how many people were involved, but we are left with a general and vague impression that the number was not inconsequential. That impression, in turn, leads us to a general "feeling" that the Laos Mission's role in promoting medical Westernization was greater than any statistical measure available to us reveals. That is, it can't simply be measured by the number of in-patients and out-patients served in a given year. This impression is reinforced by statements like the following, contained in the same report, "The [Chiang Mai] Hospital has upon its register 186 in-patients, but usually one to three friends attend each of them, and also require treatment."

And all of this reinforces the impression that the Laos Mission played a substantial, humanitarian role in the social history of the North. There are solid grounds, I think, for viewing missionary activity in the North critically. At the same time, we should not forget or downplay the very important place they have in improving (and saving!) the lives of people.

HeRD #183 - The Danger of War

On 27 August 1914, the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions sent to all of its missionaries a general letter concerning the problems and implications of the outbreak of war in Europe. The letter covered numerous issues including the need for American missionaries to maintain strict neutrality, the need to be ready to help missionaries from the warring nations who may face distressful problems, and even problems in exchange rates. Point nine in the letter reads, "Make as clear as you can to non-Christian officials and people that this war is not due to Christianity but to a disregard of its precepts. While as Christian workers, we must be strictly

neutral as between belligerents, we should be outspoken in lamenting this war as essentially unchristian. At home, and presumably even more in Asia and Africa, people are saying that the war proves that Christianity is a failure, as the very nations in which it has been dominant the longest are the ones which are fighting one another....There is grave danger that this war may be a blow to religion which may have dire consequences to your work. In these circumstances, it is imperative that we should seek to make plain the distinction between the teachings of Christ and the acts of governments which are not in accord with those teachings, that this frightful disaster has come upon the world not because of Christ but because of the failure of peoples to obey His precepts and to exemplify His spirit."

Within the grand flow of mission history in Thailand, these words ring a bit hollow. The Presbyterians had long cultivated their close identification of their work with "American civilization" and consciously imported as much of their culture into Thailand as Thailand would accept. They cultivated what they saw as the close association of Christ, Bible, and Their Culture; and they firmly believed that the foundations of Western civilization were constructed on the Bible. The point this Board letter was making is quite understandable from a Christian perspective. One, however, can also appreciate how it might have sounded to those who had long been encouraged by Western Christians to closely associate things Christian with things Western. Any thoughts?

HeRD #184 - Discovering Christian Rank

Back in HeRD #82, we raised the question of the social status of the earlier generations of northern Thai Christian converts. The general picture I've long worked with is that they were predominantly social "marginals." More recent evidence indicates to me that sweeping generalizations don't work very well. What, furthermore, do the terms "predominantly" and "marginal" mean? Meeks in his book, *THE FIRST URBAN CHRISTIANS*, adds fuel to the fire. He notes that earlier generations of church historians long argued that the early church was primarily lower class. It was a church of the poor. Since the 1960s, however, church historians have increasingly questioned that view and now generally see the early church as composed of every social strata. Meeks summarizes, "When we consider the individuals and groups who joined Pauline congregations, then, we should not too quickly assign them to some general level. Rather, we should ask what clues we have that would indicate ranking in the several hierarchies which were relevant in that time and place." (p. 55) Meeks contends that one Christian individual would have had several rankings in society, depending on specific contexts. If we apply Meeks' perspective to northern Thai Christianity, we will probably discover a very complex picture. That picture would include a degree of social "marginality," to be sure, but the total picture may not even be dominated by marginality.

HeRD #185 - Harald I: Singapore, Gateway to Siam

The Rev. Harald Krahl is our second guest HeRDer. He is a Marburger missionary who has spent most of his missionary career in northern Thailand but is now located in Singapore. Harald is currently working on a Master's thesis on the history of the Thai translation of the Bible. Thank you, Harald.

John Taylor Jones, his wife, and their daughter arrived in Siam on 25 March 1833. Their journey began in Calcutta and went on to Maulmein, Penang, Malacca, and Singapore. Travel in those days meant following the monsoons. Jones wrote from Singapore, "... A passage to Siam can seldom be procured except from this place. During the early part of the N.E. monsoon, i.e. in Nov. Dec. and Jan., there are seldom vessels sailing from here. The most favorable time for a passage would be from July to Sept." He went on to state, "... There is now no vessel here bound

to Siam and no prospect of one. It is not therefore improbable, that we shall remain here two or three months. We have a Siamese teacher and abundant facilities for the acquisition of the language. ..."

As one who is living in Singapore, though for a different reason, it is quite interesting how similar my own experience has been to that of the Jones family even though they lived here 163 years ago. For example, Singapore today has not only a strong economy but also a very strong and active Church in the different denominations. Jones wrote in the 1830s that Singapore's being multi-racial and a good location made it "... a centre from which the rays of truth should spread in every direction." He gave the example of the Rev. C.H. Thomsen, "...a Dane, under the London Society's press," who, "distributes books, and labors among the Malays and Bugis; but a great part of his time is occupied in the care of the Society's press. He has just finished casting a font of Siamese type." There is another thing that is also true today. Jones complained of Singapore, "... The expenses of living here are high, twice as great as at Malacca or Penang. The allowance of the missionaries from the London Society, is \$100 per month, with their houses." Regarding the cost of living in Singapore, it seems that nothing has changed.

HeRD #186 - Harald II: Obstacle to Evangelism

Under the heading: "Obstacles to Spread of Christianity" John Taylor Jones writes from Bangkok in 1833 - III. Foreigners taking native wives: "As very few foreigners have ever been attended by here by their wives, it has been a usual practice to take some native woman to supply her place. ... These women are generally purchased by paying the parents 50 or 60 ticals. One of the first questions asked a foreigner, therefore, is, "Me meer ru? Have you got a wife?" If he replies in the affirmative, the business does not rest there, "Ou ik! take another!" When I have been out where I was not known, such inquiries and suggestions have been frequently made to me. ..." Jones gives another three obstacles to Christian evangelism. But this one seems to be of special interest, since it shows that the moral problems of Thai society date back some time and did not just arrive with the tourist age.

HeRD #187 - A Christian Korea

Secondary sources are an essential part of the historiographical process of digging out and understanding the past. An article by Daniel M. Davies, in the December 1992 volume of CHURCH HISTORY, describes the ideology of the Rev. Henry G. Appenzeller, a Methodist missionary who worked in Korea at the turn of the century. Davies notes that Appenzeller had a surprising commitment to Korean independence, democratic reform, and modernization that seemed far afield from his piety and his evangelistic goals. Davies attributes these seemingly un-missionary-like agendas to Appenzeller's vision of "a City on a Hill." Appenzeller sought to create a "Christian Korea" that mirrored the 19th century American evangelical drive to establish a "Christian America." He believed that Korea could attain that goal only if it were independent, democratic, and modern. Davies writes that Appenzeller, "...devotedly worked for the American way of life in Korea--political, social, technical, and religious." He did this believing that God had ordained America to spread American Protestant faith and culture in preparation for the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. According to Davies, Appenzeller believed that Anglo-Saxon culture represented the pinnacle of human "religious culture," and he concludes that Appenzeller, "practiced cultural imperialism but not political imperialism."

Exactly! As we've saw in HeRDs #160 and #161, the Presbyterians brought this same commitment to 19th century Siam. They sought to build a "Christian Siam," and in exactly the same manner they saw modernization as an essential strategic ingredient in that process. There

seems little doubt that a "literature search" would turn up numerous other instances of this same American evangelical missionary ideology. It would confirm that Presbyterian missions in Thailand shared in a much larger movement.

Source: Daniel M. Davies, "Building a City on a Hill in Korea: The Work of Henry G. Appenzeller," *Church History* 61, 4(December 1992): 422-435.

HeRD #188 - Nepali Beginnings

The following is a brief summary of the beginnings of Christianity in Nepal taken from Cindy Perry, *A BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN NEPAL*, 2nd ed., 1993. It has nothing to do with Thailand per se, but I thought you all might be interested.

"Before the 1600s it is doubtful if the name of Christ had even been heard in the remote Valley of Nepal...Then by virtue of her location between Tibet and India, for almost a century her natural routeway to those exotic lands was used by the aggressive Jesuit missions to travel to and fro. But Nepal was largely overlooked as a mission field in her own right. At least seven Fathers traversed her mountains and plains, and three of them had a vision borne in their hearts for a mission to be established there. There were two positive contacts with local Rajas, and even an invitation for Fathers to come and live there with freedom to propagate the Christian faith. Although a mission was finally ordered to be established in 1667, it was not to be. The few Nepalis who did accept Christ through their ministry were merchants living in Lhasa, Tibet. The mantle for conveying the Gospel with Nepal was destined to pass to the Capuchin Fathers.

"The Tibet-Nepal Mission of the Capuchin Order was formed in 1703, and the first mission established in the Valley of Nepal in 1715, in Kathmandu. In the ensuing 54 years before their forced expulsion in 1769, they experienced two significant periods of ministry in Nepal, lasting for about 20 and 30 years respectively, with a gap in between. It was under the Malla dynasty that the doors of Nepal were thus thrown open to the Gospel.

"Ministry houses were established in the three city kingdoms of the Valley...Two Catholic Churches were even built, one in Kathmandu, and the other in Bhadgaon....Perhaps most significant, for almost 30 years the Fathers ministered freely under royal 'Decrees of Liberty of Conscience,' and about 80 adult converts were gained from among the Newar population....Fr. Joseph of Rovato called them 'the best Christians in the whole mission...poor, honest, God-fearing and hard working.' In addition, there is evidence of some Nepalis settled in Tibet having converted under the Father's tutelage, then later returning to their homeland with the Fathers. One high-caste Nepali converted in Tibet, 'Michael,' accompanied Father Joseph to Bettiah, India, and aided in the founding of a new Christian community there.

"Then under the Shah dynasty the doors shut once again. Following the forced migration of the small Christian community out of Nepal in 1769, a policy of exclusion towards all foreigners and Christians came into force, and hardened in the ensuing years. It was not to be lifted for almost 200 years. Nepal had expelled all known Christians and firmly closed her doors to any further penetration of the Gospel." (pp. 10-11).

HeRD #189 - The Language of Separation

The Laos Mission laid down overt, clearly defined religious and social-cultural boundaries between its churches and their society. The very idea of the necessity of these boundaries was a central premise of the mission's work that affected nearly every aspect of church life. This includes the church's speaking and writing.

Meeks in *THE FIRST URBAN CHRISTIANS* observes that the Pauline churches, like the Laos Mission's churches, quickly established for themselves an identity separate from society. This separate, bounded identity influenced the way Christians spoke and wrote in several ways. First, he notes that they used certain common terms in a distinct way unfamiliar to society. They also used certain words unknown to society at large, words taken mostly from Aramaic. Meeks then states, "The special texture of a group's idiom is not confined to individual words, however, nor to vocabulary in general. Certain phrases tend to become fused by repetition in a small-group situation, so that they function as single units of speech, and not so much any more to convey information as to serve as tags or signals." Meeks concludes, "To a significant extent the Christians inherited their jargon from Judaism. A great many unusual words and phrases in the early Christian documents are Greek, either taken directly from the Septuagint [Greek translation of the Old Testament] or influenced by its idiom. The liturgy of the Greek-speaking synagogues also contributed patterns and style. Very quickly, though, the Pauline Christians developed their own slogans and patterns of speech that distinguished them from other Jewish groups as well as from the general environment." (p. 94) It would be interesting to study Christian linguistic usage in Thailand to see in what ways the Thai church has developed its own patterns.

HeRD #190 - In the Beginning

The more I study early church history, the more I'm impressed by the almost chaotic ferment, vitality, and creativity of the earliest church. Very little was fixed. Much was left for experimentation. Patterns of authority were fluid. The church intermingled general social values with its own emerging traditions and beliefs. In some ways the church radically transformed its Jewish heritage, such as in its acceptance of Gentiles into the church. The roles of women, of slaves, and of the poor were quite different from those of Greco-Roman society generally. Christian ritual varied from locality to locality. There was also, to be sure, a great deal of tension and disputation as we would expect from a period of vital, creative ferment.

The shift from early church to northern Thai church history is striking. There is some evidence that the first generation of northern Thai Christians shared in a vitality and enthusiasm. They began, however, with set structures, set beliefs, set ritual, and set rules. The first 50 or so years of northern Thai church history do not, thus, betray the sense of creative ferment that so marks the early church. Should it have? Did the founding of the early church set for us a pattern we should emulate? Or was it a unique historical event that later generations of Christians simply can't duplicate? In a sense these are theological questions, but they also have to do with our interpretation of northern Thai church history. Should the church historian appropriate early church history models and experiences for her or his interpretation of northern Thai (or American, or Australian, or European) church history? If so, to what extent?

HeRD #191 - They are Not to Withdraw

We're still working on "boundary issues," that is the question of the nature of the boundaries between the church and the world. Meeks in his *THE FIRST URBAN CHRISTIANS* writes in specific reference to the church at Corinth, "It is plausible that the Corinthian Christians, or some of them, had understood the rules they had learned and that Paul had earlier written to them to mean that they should avoid contamination by the polluting world, but that the group's own purity was impregnable. Paul tries to reverse that understanding (1 Cor. 5:9-13). The world is impure, but this is not their concern; what is polluting is internal behavior. They are not to try to withdraw from the world." (p. 155)

The Presbyterian approach in Thailand was quite the opposite of Paul's. They intentionally sought to separate the church from the world. That strategy, I think, lies at the very heart of the

Thai Protestant experience. Christian attitudes about and practices concerning Buddhism, animism, education, medical care, employment, and even the Bible all revolve around this approach. The drive towards separation has influenced where Christians live, who they live with as neighbors, and virtually every other aspect of Protestant life.

HeRD #192 - Satan Again

Here's food for thought: Jeffry Burton Russell, in his book *SATAN: THE EARLY CHRISTIAN TRADITION*, claims, "To deny the existence and central importance of the Devil in Christianity is to run counter to apostolic teaching and to the historical development of Christian doctrine. Since defining Christianity in terms other than these is literally meaningless, it is intellectually incoherent to argue for a Christianity that excludes the Devil. If the Devil does not exist, then Christianity has been dead wrong on a central point right from the beginning." (p. 25)

Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether or not Christians **MUST** believe in the Devil in order to be Christian, Russell's mix of history and theology is fascinating. He doesn't define Christianity either biblically or ecclesiastically. He says that the historical development of Christian doctrine from apostolic times determines what is Christian. This is worth pondering for a couple of minutes. Does the **HISTORY** of Christian doctrine determine correct Christian doctrine? Is that history unified enough to be so authoritative and determinative? No. The great mark of church history is chaotic diversity rather than ages-long consistency. Does the "fact" that the Devil has been a central Christian concept for 2000 years mean we can't drop it now? No. The church, in fact, has been discarding or reshaping doctrines for all of its history. Protestant views on the Virgin Mary is a case in point. It appears to me that it is Russell's historical determinism that is "intellectually incoherent." Any thoughts??

HeRD #193 - History as Evaluation Research

The Office of History is preparing for next semester at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology when it takes over full-time responsibility for teaching the Faculty's church history courses. One of those courses will emphasize the use of "evaluation research" for local church life. Most of the members of the class are pastors. This subject is more closely related to church history than it might first appear, at least in my thinking. Church history is not merely an antiquarian exercise. It is as much about the present as the past and is a potentially useful tool for the present.

In this light, the introductory remarks of Weiss in *EVALUATION RESEARCH* (pp. 3-4), are of some interest. She states that the goals of "evaluation research" are to "improve decision making, lead to the planning of better programs, and so serve program participants in more relevant, more beneficial, and more efficient ways." But, she adds, "In these terms, the history of evaluation research to date has been disappointing. Few examples can be cited of important contributions to policy and program. Part of the reason lies in the remarkable resistance of organizations to unwanted information--and unwanted change. Even evidence of outright failure can leave some institutions figuratively and literally unmoved." Weiss argues that another problem is the "unrealistic nature of the expectations" people place on evaluation research. It is but one factor among others--such as, values, ideology, available resources, and quality of leadership--that influence institutional and programmatic change. She concludes, "What evaluation **CAN** do is provide data that reduce uncertainties and clarify the gains and losses that different decisions incur. In this way, it allows decision makers to apply their values and preferences more accurately, with better knowledge of the trade-offs that alternative decisions involve."

The study of the past has a number of values including being a source of data for evaluation research and being, in and of itself, a form of evaluation research. Weiss describes both the potential and the limitations of history as evaluation research.

Source: Carol H. Weiss, *Evaluation Research* . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972.

HeRD #194 - The Distance Drain

In 1910 the Laos Mission submitted to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions a request for funding the transportation costs of moving the Palmer family from Chiang Mai to Nan. In a letter to the mission dated 6 October 1910, Board Secretary Arthur J. Brown reported, "The Board was considerably startled to find that it cost so much to move a family from Chiang Mai to Nan, but of course I explained the nature of the journey, and the laborious and expensive way of transporting goods through the forests of Laos. Making all due allowance for this, however, it seems rather odd that the cost should have been nearly 4000 Rupees. The Board also felt that the question of making an expenditure of such magnitude should have been submitted to the Board for approval before it was made. It would be a very serious matter if Missions all over the world were to run up bills of that kind and send them to the Board. The Board does not doubt that it was necessary for the Mission to reinforce Nan, but that is rather an expensive way to do it, absorbing a sum which would equal the entire missionary offerings of a year of some whole Presbyteries in the United States - a sum which would have sent out and maintained an unmarried man for a year." The Board reluctantly agreed to pay half of the Palmers' expenses.

Previous HeRDs have made the point that distance dominated missionary and church work in the North (see HeRD #51). There was no such thing as a "simple" trip. It took, for example, two full weeks, under favorable circumstances, to make the trip from Chiang Mai to Nan. The same distance today is covered in an easy 5-6 hours (or less for foolhardy speed-demons!). Brown's complaints suggest that distance was more than just an inconvenience. The mission experienced distance as a drain on its resources.

HeRD #195 - The Emotional Drain

Northern Thailand had a profound emotional impact on many of the missionaries who lived here. Laura McKean wrote in the May 1901 issue of *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* that, "The depressing effect of living in a heathen country, surrounded by all the word 'heathen' means, is enough to kill all the laughter the good Lord has put into the soul." She referred, in passing, to the worship of "hideous idols." Even a simple thing such as toy boats floating down a river triggered unhappy thoughts because those little boats represented the efforts "of darkened souls seeking to lighten their burden of sin." The wailing of mourners reminded her that "some soul has gone down in utter darkness." She summarizes by observing, "On every side we are reminded that we are in the midst of a lost people." And she asked rhetorically, "Is it any wonder there are so many nervous breakdowns on the mission field?" On a more positive note, McKean avowed that what brought laughter back to her life was the "...joy of seeing the darkness of heathenism giving way to the light of the gospel of salvation through Christ Jesus." The sight of northern Thai people going to church and their learning to live a Christian life added to her joy.

If there is one lesson that history teaches, it is the power of beliefs and ideology in our lives. What we believe and how we view the world reaches down into our guts, into our soul of souls and creates for us the world we live in and how we feel about that world. This was certainly the case for McKean and her colleagues of the Laos Mission.

Source: Laura B. McKean, "What Sets Them Laughing and What Kills Laughter, in Laos," *Woman's Work for Woman* 16, 5(May 1901): 128-129.

HeRD #196 - From the Classroom

The following is translated from a student paper handed in to my course on the history of pastoral care in Thailand. The paper compares biblical and missionary concepts of conversion, and summarizes its arguments as follows:

"Taken together, there are both similarities and differences between the biblical understanding of conversion and the missionaries' understanding. They are similar in the sense that a consciousness of having behaved wrongly leads to a desire to convert. And they are clearly different in the way [Christians] withdraw from society, cultural, and traditions. That is, the convert can't associate with these things and has to come under missionary patronage. They hold their new [Christian] society to be better. This view has had an impact in a number of ways down to the present. That impact is a result of missionary influence that was implanted in the past and has become the basis for church life. It is reflected in the church's ideas, feelings, and views of others in Thai society. Thai Christians frequently view Thai Buddhists emotionally as heathens, while forgetting themselves that they too were once viewed as heathens by the missionaries.

"The contemporary influence of all of this is that Christians think, feel, and understand themselves to be withdrawn from the sinful world, to which they are no longer related. Thai culture and traditions no longer have anything to do with them. But, in truth, Christians are being swallowed by the old society a bit at a time. They really haven't left the world at all. This causes their behavior to be hardly any different at all from Buddhists. Sometimes they do things that Buddhists don't dare do. And yet the Christians still understand themselves to have converted already in this time."

In the author's opinion, the Thai church has withdrawn from the world in the wrong way. It remains aloof in its attitudes while behaving in no way different. I will happily admit that this theme was a central one in the course. The student, however, is a pastor with some year's of pastoral experience and not one to be led by the nose. It is not a new thought for HeRD, but I would still submit to you that the church's social alienation and its failure to be a "light to the world" are two sides of the same coin.

HeRD #197 - At the Front

Not quite a year after the end of World War I, the Rev. William C. Dodd, a veteran missionary who first came out in 1886, died in Chiang Rung, Yunnan Province, China. The Chiang Rung Station was under the care of the Laos Mission (by then renamed the "North Siam Mission"). Dodd was a key figure in its history because of his insistent and persistent drive to expand the mission's work northward beyond the boundaries of Siam. At his death a colleague, Dr. C. W. Mason, wrote with rhetorical flourish, "Dr. Dodd was an officer in the Lord's Army who died at his post and that one of the most isolated out posts in the whole front. His is one of the Golden Stars in the service flag of the A. E. F. [American Expeditionary Force] against the forces of Evil. His place must be filled. We depend upon our General Staff in America to send the reinforcements to fill this gap in our long line. The line must and will be held."

It is interesting that during and after American wars, missionary literature tends to employ for a time the rhetoric of battle. Mason is a case in point. In one sense, it isn't fair to judge all of missionary thought on such passing rhetoric. That rhetoric, however, does highlight certain more lasting elements in their thought--especially the sense of being engaged in a great spiritual

conflict waged on a cosmic level. The missionaries felt very deeply that they were at the forefront of that battle in the midst of enemy territory. The image, thus, of the doughboys charging across the muddy, barbed, bloody moonscape of wartime France had a particular force for them. They felt, in a sense, engaged in the same struggle. The enemy in Europe was barbaric, the one in northern Thailand and southern China heathen.

Source: Mason to Brown, 21 October 1919, Records of the Chieng Rung Station, Payap Archives.

HeRD #198 - To Christianize or Liquorize

Presbyterian missionary records display a profound antipathy towards Buddhism and a general disgust at many, though not all, things Thai. From time to time, however, those records display a certain balance. The missionaries were not ignorant of the failings of Americans and could be as critical of their compatriots as of the Thai. Mary Cort penned in her book, *HEART OF FARTHER INDIA* (pp. 168-169), the following description of a class of Americans in Bangkok:

"It has been said that only 'two kinds of Americans come to Siam. One class to Christianize and the other to liquorize the natives!' In the past this was too true. Some years ago an American so dishonored our flag that now we dare not unfurl the stars and stripes above our homes, even on our national holidays, without the natives considering it the sign of a liquor establishment. It is charged that this American issued papers to venders of spirits who were thus enabled to sell imported goods, free of duty, under the protection of our dear old flag. The stars and stripes went up and down the rivers and canals on little whiskey-boats, and fluttered from doors in the principal streets of Bangkok and other cities of Siam, where the 'water of sin,' as my old native teacher aptly calls it, was sold."

HeRD #199 - Feminism on the Field

As should be readily apparent after all of these HeRD entries, the 19th-century Presbyterians in Thailand had a definite and narrowly writ ideology. The thing is (or was), it was a NINETEENTH-century ideology, which could take some twists that seem strange in the late 20th century. A missionary could hold strong views on the evils of northern Thai culture and religion and still argue that northern Thai society produced strong, capable leaders that, when converted, could lead churches well. Mary Cort in *HEART OF FARTHER INDIA* provides another case in point. Cort was as orthodox and Old School a thinker as anyone on the field. She openly worked, however, for a larger role for women on that field. She, like other missionary women, routinely preached, prayed in public, and did other work generally considered "men's work." For a time, she and a companion, were left fully in charge of a station. For Cort, the principle behind all of this was clear: "When the women of a country are elevated to walk side by side with their husbands and brothers in paths of usefulness and learning, then, and not till then, will the nation be truly civilized." (p. 309) Many of her compatriots on the field must have felt uneasy with her emphasis on walking side by side equally.

HeRD #200 - Winner Takes All

Historians of the early church focus a fair amount of attention, surprisingly critical and even negative, on the Book of Acts. Beginning in the 1960s, there is a growing consensus among main-stream church historians that Acts is not trustworthy as a historical document. Few are so crass as to say it bluntly, but they seem to consider it to be a party document that reflects the views and biases of the "Hellenistic" Jewish church and, especially, of Paul. It is a voice for the

"inclusivists," those who campaigned for the inclusion of non-Jewish people in the church. Opposed to this party were the "exclusivists," who argued for a Jewish church comprised only of those who kept the law and customs of "Temple Judaism." The exclusivists were strongly nationalistic and fully involved in the Temple cult in Jerusalem. The inclusivists were less nationalistic and partly or entirely rejected the cult. The power base and center of the Hellenists was in Antioch while the "Judeo-Christian" party lodged itself in the Mother Church of Jerusalem. From that central point they exercised considerable influence on the other churches of the incipient Christian movement. In 66 CE the Jerusalem Church had to flee to Pella because of the Jewish revolt, which subsequently brought about the partial destruction of Jerusalem. Although the Pella community continued to be influential, this event evidently broke the exclusivists' power base. They withered away and were lost to the memory of the larger church. Danielou writes in *THE CHRISTIAN CENTURIES: THE FIRST SIX HUNDRED YEARS*, "This obliteration falsifies the history of Christian origins, for it was James' party and the Judeo-Christian Church of Jerusalem which exercised the dominant influence during the first decades of the Church." (p. 9) [See also HeRD #167 and #170]

It's a case of "winner takes all." Pauline Christianity today dominates our thinking and methodology to the extent that we've forgotten the diversity of thought and action in the early church. In this sense, it is the duty of the historian to recapture the complexity of the past. In the Thai context, at least, it may also be helpful for the church to learn that Acts tells only part of the story of the past and does so with a bias.

HeRD #201 - 2000 Years of Closed Communion

We are so used to the "disunity" of the church that we tend to forget that ecclesiastical pluralism is a central fact of its life. The vast and complex divisions among Christians have had a major impact on its life historically. That is certainly true in Thailand, within the Church of Christ in Thailand as well as without. It was this way in the early church as well, and one of the primary divisions was between the gentile church and the Jewish church. Danielou, in *THE CHRISTIAN CENTURIES: THE FIRST SIX HUNDRED YEARS*, observes that the first important community of gentile Christians converted from "paganism." was formed in Antioch. That city was also the location of a community of Jewish Christians as well. He writes, "Antioch was the first town where this juxtaposition occurred. It is clear from the narrative of Galatians that the two communities were separate; converted to Christianity, the Jews remained subject to their customs, particularly to the law forbidding them to eat with non-Jews, that is to say with converted pagans as well. Since the Eucharist took place on the occasion of a meal, it was impossible for the Judeo-Christians and pagano-Christians to celebrate it together." (p. 25)

I don't know that this sheds any light on the church in Thailand directly, other than to reinforce what seems obvious in any event--i.e. that we are a deeply divided church in which many Christians refuse to commune with other Christians. It is interesting that the concept of closed communion wasn't a product of the Protestant Reformation, which I might have guessed it was. We Christians have been practicing closed communion on each other for nearly two thousand years!

HeRD #202 - Missionary Sin

In his discussion of Original Sin, Urban observes, "According to many social thinkers too much attention has focused on a biological transmission of evil. 'It has diverted our minds from the power of social transmission, from the authority of the social group in justifying, urging, and idealizing wrong,' said Walter Rauschenbush. 'Cultural Determinism' is certainly one of the forces that predispose people to sin. Insofar as it is a force for evil, it bears out the Christian

insistence that dispositions to evil are deep-seated in the human psyche and sometimes come to us in such a way that the individual is not responsible for their existence and their power." [A SHORT HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT, p. 147]

These comments are relevant, I believe, to theological reflections on the history of Presbyterian (and not just Presbyterian) missions in Thailand. Ethnocentrism and an unconscious arrogance regarding "the Thai" are in evidence everywhere in Presbyterian records. It is the same arrogance and ethnocentrism that dominated 19th and early 20th century American social relations and that scars all of "modern" Western civilization. One can hardly fault, individually, the missionaries for their values and even the general pattern of their actions, since they inherited both from their own culture. On the other hand, the consequences of missionary ethnocentrism still comprise a dominant theme in the study of Thai church history and pose a major challenge to the life of the Thai church today.

HeRD #203 - Laos Mission in Vietnam

From the mid-1890s onwards, the Laos Mission articulated a grand vision of expansion that would eventually encompass all the "Tai peoples" of Burma, China, and Indo-China. The mission invested a great deal of its time and resources to realize that vision. In 1915, for example, the Revs. W. Clifton Dodd and H. S. Vincent toured the Tai-speaking regions of northern Vietnam. They issued an enthusiastic report that urged the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to occupy French Indo-China as quickly as possible. They made this recommendation "...because we firmly believe that this is the quickest way to get into the territory adjoining Siam, and reach all the two million Laos speakers. By making good in Hanoi we believe that God will open the way to the whole Laos territory...The work in Tonkin may be counted on as the opening wedge to give us access to more than a million Laos people in the territory immediately adjacent to that of the Laos Mission." Dodd and Vincent reasoned that Hanoi provided the best door to reaching a small community of Kamu Christians founded in French territory from the work of McGilvary in the 1890s. It also offered a mission field for "the graduates of our Theological Seminary in Chiangmai."

A couple of thoughts: First, not all visions are worthy ones. From a Thai CHURCH history perspective, the Laos Mission vision for expansion drained considerable resources from its work in the North without significant (or even hardly any) results in those nations. Second, Dodd and Vincent apparently assumed that the purpose of northern Thai theological education was to produce missionaries. Other missionaries, certainly, saw other goals for leadership training, but it remains true that the Laos Mission tended to reproduce in its churches its own goals and values--which were mission-centered rather than church-centered.

Sources: W. Clifton Dodd and H. S. Vincent to the Board of Foreign Missions, "Supplementary Statement of the Committee to Explore in French Territory," n.d. [1915?], Records of the American Presbyterian Mission [Box 2, Folder 6].

HeRD #204 - Geography, Indigenization, & Theology

Tongchai Winichakul's SIAM MAPPED: A HISTORY OF THE GEO-BODY OF A NATION (1994) is a fascinating historical study of the "modernization" of Thailand. Tongchai's subjects are geography, maps, and the establishment of boundaries. He notes that the first generation of Thai-language Western geography texts made use of the terms and classifications of an earlier, indigenous Thai cosmology--the "Traiphum cosmology." He writes, "This indigenous taxonomy provided the means by which modern geography could be understood. Despite different conceptual systems, the indigenous taxonomy also became the vocabulary of modern

geography." (p. 59) One of his most important examples of this process is the geography textbook produced by the Rev. J. W. Van Dyke, a Presbyterian missionary. Tongchai argues that the use of Traiphum terminology by geographers created an "overlap" between the older and the newer ways of conceiving geographical space. He states, "The terminology, and perhaps the whole classificatory system, became a system of double signifiers. Hence the knowledge of space and its terminology became ambiguous. As a consequence, the new geography faced a twofold task: a defensive one, to unravel any confusion and to differentiate itself from the other; and an offensive one, to take advantage of the compatibility and the ambiguity of geographical discourse." (p. 59) At stake in this confrontation was "the fundamental question of the concept of the earth." (p. 60)

If Tongchai is correct, the older and the new concepts of space intermingled for a considerable period of time. This was to geography's advantage because it could pack old terms with new meanings. It seemed less alien. The parallel situation regarding the introduction of Protestant theology into Thailand is worth a thought or two. Protestantism rejected the approach taken by geographers and attempted to create a new vocabulary, one that would prevent a confusion between old and new religions. It would be interesting to know precisely how this choice of strategy has influenced the consequent place of Protestant theology in Thailand. My impression is that Protestant thinking has failed to work through the era of overlap and fuzziness. This failure has reinforced the general appearance of alienness that adheres to Protestant Christianity down to the present. It has also allowed a "covert" indigenization of Protestantism to go on uncontested by the deeper tenets of Christian theology. Any thoughts??

HeRD #205 - The CCS

The "Church of Christ in Siam" (today's CCT) was founded in 1934, primarily on the initiative of the American Presbyterian Mission. Two years later, the Rev. Paul Eakin, Field Secretary of the APM, observed, "The Church of Christ in Siam is but two years old. Hence but little can be said as yet regarding it. It has taken a great deal of time to get the leadership of the smaller and weaker churches in rural districts to understand what it is all about and what it involves in the way of their own personal sacrifice. This process of education and the process of preparing suitable rules and regulations has occupied the time of the leaders for the most part. They are just now beginning to face the matter of the need for a spiritual revival, and the last meeting of the General Council made finite plans for a nation-wide campaign to take place during the coming dry season."

Eakin's remarks are important in at least two ways. First, they portray the difficulties encountered in starting up the CCS. Second, his words indicate that at the time of its founding local church renewal was already a key issue and large-scale revivalistic campaigns were seen as the best strategy for renewing local churches spiritually. The CCT, thru various agencies and persons, vigorously pursued that strategy for a generation, with few tangible results.

Source: Paul A. Eakin, "Material on Siam for Centennial Pamphlet," n.d. [1936], APM.

HeRD #206 - On the Eve of War

In a 1941 memo entitled "Mission Problems" and intended for a Board of Foreign Missions' team to visit Thailand, Paul Eakin wrote the following short notes: ""Lethargy in National Church - due to experiences of last two years during and following visit of Song. His party took bit in teeth and got into power but did not deliver the goods. Old stand byes waiting to let them prove their inability and then step in. Also pressure of Government to get Buddhist.

No Xtns will be taken into Government service. Some old ones retained under constant pressure to change. Need to perk up church now. Many in Song group gone over to Jehovah Witnesses."

This memo is important in a number of ways, esp. concerning the Song revival movement. Dr. John Song, the well-known Chinese evangelist, had conducted a series of revivals in Thailand in the late 1930s. For a time the Protestant churches exploded into new life, and it remains widely believed even to day that this revival period sustained the church during the persecution it experienced just before and during World War II. While the final word remains out on that supposition, preliminary evidence (including Eakin's memo) throws considerable doubt on it. It appears that local factors and conditions, faced by every church, esp. the attitudes of local officials, played a much larger role in allowing the church to survive the War. Eakin here suggests that by 1941 the revival period had already passed. His final sentence is important and probably historically accurate, that is that several important revival leaders went over to the Jehovah's Witnesses. It is worth noting, then, that on the eve of World War II the Church of Christ in Thailand faced a waning revival movement, rising competition, and growing persecution from the government. It was not in the revived, strong state on the eve of war as is supposed by many.

Source: [Paul A. Eakin], "Mission Problems," [1941], APM.

HeRD #207 - 1941 Again

Paul Eakin, writing in the 1941 Evangelistic Report of the Bangkok Station, adds further details to the Church of Christ in Thailand's condition in 1941. He described the situation by quoting the Moffat translation of II Corinthians 7:5, "It was trouble at every turn, wrangling all around me, fears in my own heart." He then observed that the CCT was suffering from, "a cleavage that has weakened her witness and seriously damaged her organization." He was referring to the divisions caused by the Song revival movement of the late 1930s [mentioned in HeRD #206]. Those divisions caused confusion and uncertainty "...which has created a spirit of indifference toward the Church and mistrust of the leaders on the part of the laity, and mistrust of one another among the leaders. The Church has thus been unable to unite on any common program of action, as well as unable to present a united front to the forces that have pressed her from without." If Eakin is correct, the Song revivals didn't strengthen the church for its trial by fire during World War II. They actually left it in a weakened condition. Eakin's words are apparently carefully neutral. The Song revivalists would have argued that the resistance of "the hierarchy" to revival was the cause of the condition he described. The anti-Song faction would have replied that it was the revivalists' narrow-minded enthusiasm that was to blame. Reading somewhat between Eakin's lines, it is likely, also, that the division caused by the Song revivals caused many people to feel unhappy with both factions and the general condition of unrest they caused in the church.

We shouldn't, of course, simply accept Eakin's word on all of this. He was the Executive Secretary of the Presbyterian Mission, and his view was that of the "establishment." It is possible, perhaps likely, that the revival spirit still burned bright in some places in spite of the divisions. It is also possible that lay disaffection wasn't as great as he perceived. On the other hand, this report supports the sense that all was not well in the CCT in 1941.

Source: Evangelistic Report of Bangkok Station to Drs. C. T. Leber and P. P. Elliott," [1941], APM .

HeRD #208 - Persecution

In the same 1941 Bangkok Station evangelistic report quoted in our last HeRD, Paul Eakin described the growing pressure the government was putting on the church. He noted that there was a growing distrust of things foreign. He attributed this attitude partly towards the brief armed conflict between Thailand and France over territory on the Thai-Cambodian border. He wrote, "The spirit of hostility toward Christianity was brought to a focus by the Indo-China incident of last year. The religion of the enemy being nominally Christian it was but natural that the Christian religion and those professing it should be suspected of sentiments unfavorable to the nation. Such was especially true in the case of nationals who had embraced Christianity. Pressure was brought to bear on them from several different angles and was especially heavy in the case of those in government employ." Eakin went on to report that some Christians, including those born Christians as well as converts, renounced their allegiance to Christ. He went on to state that, "One of these was in the high position of Moderator of the Church in Thailand. These losses dealt a stunning blow to the Church and have left her dazed and uncertain." The Moderator was Lek Taiyong, whose defection is the most famous such case during the hard years of the 1940s. Acharn Lek returned to the church after World War II and soon served as General Secretary.

HeRD #209 - Stewardship

In 1915, Dr. Robert Speer of the Board of Foreign Missions led a delegation to Siam to visit the Siam and Laos Missions. His subsequent report was critical, particularly of the Laos Mission. He found it very backward both in its attitude about its churches and in taking practical steps to develop a northern Thai ministry. The following 1918 letter concerning stewardship from another Board secretary, Arthur J. Brown, to the Siam missions in recalls Speer's critique.

Brown noted that Laos Mission churches in 1918 had 6,786 adult members. They gave a total of \$1,023 towards church expenses, the equivalent of 15 per member for the year. This figured included missionary giving to the churches [which was substantial]. Brown wrote, "A comparison of the reports in 1916, 1917, and 1918 shows the average gift per capita was ten cents in 1916, thirteen cents in 1917, and as indicated above, fifteen cents for 1918. This is a considerable advance at a percentage rate, but the actual amount is still disconcertingly small." The Siam Mission figure was \$1.30/member and had grown considerably in recent years, from \$0.85 in 1916 and \$1.18 in 1917. Brown observed that there was less poverty in Siam than many other countries of Asia where the Presbyterians worked and that both the people were used to giving large sums to religion. He felt it reasonable to suppose that the Christians of Siam would, thus, be ahead of others in giving. He asked, "Is there not grave danger that the Christian Church in Siam will not be placed upon a solid foundation and will not be a permanent force, unless its members assume larger responsibility for it?"

Brown and Speer both faulted the Laos Mission for this situation, probably with some reason. The situation, however, was more complex than they realized in New York City. While it is true that northern Thai gave substantial amounts to support religion, traditional patterns of giving were very different from those expected of Christians. The rationale for giving was different. It would be fascinating to know to what extent these differences adversely influenced northern Thai church giving--or if, indeed, the mission was primarily at fault for failing to teach effective stewardship.

Source: Arthur J. Brown to North & South Siam Missions, 8 November 1918, APM.

HeRD #210 - A Statistic

As of January 1919, the Board of Foreign Missions Of the Presbyterian Church U. S. A. reported that it had only two missions with over 100 missionaries. The Chosen (Korean) Mission had 137 members, closely followed by the Shantung Mission, China with 128. The North Siam (Laos) Mission followed in ninth place with 62 members.

Source: Robert E. Speer, Arthur J. Brown, et. al. to the Missions, 25 January 1919, APM.

HeRD #211 - Dora Taylor: A Requiem

Obituary notices are an inevitable part of the missionary literature. Here's the one for Mrs. Dora Taylor, who died 7 March 1925 at Clifton Springs, NY. She was born in 1859 in Bellefontaine, Ohio, and graduated from Park College in 1888. She married the Rev. Hugh Taylor that same year. The obituary emphasizes that she and her husband shared a strong sense of self-sacrifice, one that led them to volunteer to work in the Nan Station after having spent 20 years in Lampang. It goes on to state, "Nan was considered the hardest situation in the Mission." It proved to be so. For example, "When there was no physician to go to Nan, and the Mission considered closing the station temporarily, Dr. and Mrs. Taylor chose to carry the work alone rather than have the station closed." Dora Taylor was a missionary educator who "...believed firmly that the prime object of school work is the Christian development of the children of the church. Many a vacation was spent with the whole family traveling from village to village, carrying a tent with them for shelter,-visiting pupils, instructing parents, and holding evangelistic meetings." The obituary describes her as having a sweet, sympathetic, gentle, almost heroic character. She did a pioneer work that sometimes put her in situations of real danger.

Taylor's death was not an easy one. Eakin's biographical data sheet on her states, "She had been sent to America with cancer, but the radium treatments in San Francisco completely cured the cancer, but the radium also burned the lining of her stomach and injured other organs so that she really starved to death. The cause of death was given as pernicious anemia."

Source: Arthur J. Brown and Mabel M. Roys to the Siam Mission, 24 March 1925, APM.

HeRD #212 - Mandate for Change

The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Mission fully supported the Siam Mission's moves in the 1930s to create a national church. Board Secretary Cleland B. McAfee, in a January 1933 letter to the mission, wrote that he didn't want to appear to be pressing the matter but, "I... remind you again of the anomalous situation when we talk of transferring leadership to the Nationals. As the situation now is you have no National group to whom you can turn things over officially and you are compelled to take all the responsibility of choosing the Nationals whom you wish to trust with specific things. In this case there can be no avoidance of foreign control in spite of all you can do. You will not have a real nationalization of the Church until there is a body of National Christians to whom you can go with any proposition and lay the responsibility on them because they represent their brethren. ...I will rejoice with you when our Christian brethren in Siam organize their own Church and so can be approached for true cooperation."

It is interesting that in the 1930s McAfee still evidently envisioned the Presbyterian Mission as the agent for initiating changes. His words suggest that he saw the need for a national church as being the need for a "national" body that could take responsibility for mission initiatives. The mission was to be proactive and the church reactive. In actual fact, things didn't quite work out that way. For some 40 years after the founding of the CCT in 1934, missionaries continued to play a major role in its life. They dominated theological education, social ministries, student work, Christian education, and many other areas of CCT work. On the other

hand, the CCT itself took a leading role in the areas of local church renewal and evangelism. Yet another subject that should be explored is the transition from a missionary-led to a Thai-led CCT. How did it come about? How has it affected the CCT's life and direction?

Source: Cleland B. McAfee to Siam Mission, 19 January 1933, APM .

HeRD #213 - Combs

On April 18th, 1905, the Lampang Station's Girls' School held closing exercises in the large assembly room of its new building. The British Consul, as well as northern Thai and Siamese government officials, attended. The program included drills in reading and geography and marching exercises. I thought you all might be interested in what sounded like the high point of the day. An article reporting the event in the July 1905 issue of the LAOS NEWS tells us that, "The older girls rendered the Siamese national anthem on combs. They entered, dressed in the national colors, red and white. When they started the anthem with organ accompaniment, all the visitors sprang to their feet."

One of my colleagues tells me that the national anthem in 1905 was a different tune and had different wording from the present one. This is one of those times when one wishes mightily for a time machine--to see the sights and hear the sounds of 91 years ago.

Source: "Lakawn Girls' School," *Laos News* 2, 3(July 1905): 64-65.

HeRD #214 - Dumbfounding Views

In 1915, Dr. Robert E. Speer, Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, led a delegation that visited both the "South Siam" and "North Siam" (Laos) Missions. In his report of the visit, Speer roundly castigated the northern mission for its backwards attitude on pastoral ministry and indigenous church leadership. He did so by first quoting the opinions of a number of North Siam Mission members. The following is typical of, if somewhat more strongly worded than, the general view: "The whole scheme of having pastors from the people supported by the people broke down and we have none such now and will not have any. Our system is to have elders only in the churches and to retain the whole pastoral control in the hands of missionaries. In fifty or a hundred years, perhaps, it may be possible to have ordained native pastors." Speer commented, "It is needless to say that these views were interesting. They were more than that. They were dumbfounding." He observed, "The disconcerting thing is that these views involved a disbelief in the capacity of the Lao people to provide a type of Christian leadership which it has been found possible to raise up, I think, among every other people to whom missionaries have gone. Certainly there is no other mission of our Church where it has not been possible to raise up an ordained ministry and pastorate." He found it discouraging that these views, "...eliminated the possibility of the one type of native workers who seem to be able to take over the indigenous administration of the church and to locate their functions instead in a foreign mission agency viewed as a practical permanency."

Little commentary seems necessary. Perhaps it is sufficient to urge that the situation of the 1930s described in HeRD #212 ["Mandate for Change"] is in part the consequence of the situation Speer complained about in the 1910s.

Source: Robert E. Speer, et. al., *Report of Deputation* (New York: Board of Foreign Missions, 1916), 109-110.

HeRD #215 - The Unhealthiest Mission

In May 1934 the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions released statistics comparing health furloughs for all of its missions for two periods, 1917-1922 and 1928-1933. During the first set of years, the Board granted a total of 58 health furloughs for all of its missions. Of that number, 11 (19%) were from Siam missionaries. The next highest number was 7, granted to the Shangtung Mission. During the second period, the Board granted 48 health furloughs, of which 7 (14.5%) were taken by Siam missionaries. Second place honors went to the Persia Mission with 5 furloughs.

We'll recall from HeRD #210 that the Laos Mission was the 9th largest mission in 1919. The Siam Mission was smaller and together the two missions would not have come close to being the largest mission after they united in 1921. Still, it sent the most missionaries home on medical furloughs of any Presbyterian mission. Thailand was the most physically and mentally debilitating missionary context in the world for Presbyterians missionaries. I'm sure that figures from earlier periods for each of the two Siam missions would show that Siam had long been the least healthy place in the world for missionaries.

HeRD #216 - A Noble Character

In the 1920s, an American film company shot the movie "Chang" ("Elephant") in Nan Province. The film's producers relied heavily on the assistance of the missionaries and Christian community in Nan. The main actors were Christians, and the Christians and missionaries facilitated nearly every aspect of the shooting of the film. One of those involved in the filming, Mr. Merian C. Cooper, later wrote in the August 1927 issue of the PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE about his experience and esp. about his admiration for the missionaries in Nan. He emphasized the isolation of that community. There were no amusements in Nan and no companionship "with other whites." Of Dr. Taylor, the leading figure in the station, Cooper wrote, "I have never known, in a life spent mostly in traveling, a white man who is more respected by an alien people than Dr. Hugh Taylor." He added, "To his people he is really a father and adviser. I have never seen a man more completely trusted." Cooper claimed for Taylor a "noble character." He praised the other missionaries there as well for their courage in a place that was reputed to be one of the worst tiger districts in the entire world.

While Cooper's words don't reflect the whole story of Dr. Taylor and the Christians of Nan, they do suggest something of the social status of the missionaries within the church well into the 20th century. They also suggest that there was a high price to pay to maintain that status. Dr. Taylor would probably have added that the price was less high than the calling or the privilege of serving the Caller.

HeRD #217 - Catholics in the East

The 1890s was the great decade of Expansion for the Laos Mission. It opened four new stations between 1891 and 1897. At the impending opening of each, missionaries on the field sounded clarion calls for expansion that involved any number of reasons. Among those given by Dr. Briggs in 1893 as the mission planned for opening its station in Phrae was fear of Catholicism. Briggs warned the Board that the "encroachment" of the French and of Catholicism in Eastern Laos only made occupation of Phrae all the more urgent. He reminded the Board that the Catholics were prone to buy off slaves if they agreed to convert and to marry their nuns to influential persons. He wrote, "The fact is we must take the vantage ground & plant our standard now or the standard of the Cross in a very different sense will be planted."

The Laos missionaries, in truth, didn't play the Catholic card very often in their appeals for new stations and new territory. Such rhetoric does underscore the fervency of their desire to

reach new areas and peoples and reminds us that in missionary writings Catholicism sometimes appears in the guise of "the enemy," one nearly as fearful as Buddhism or animism themselves.

Source: W. A. Briggs to Grant, 20 June 1893, no. 57, v. 9, Board of Foreign Missions Records.

HeRD #218 - Science is OK

Fundamentalist objections to scientific thought, symbolized by the Scopes "Monkey Trial," have created the impression that 19th century Protestants were all anti-science types. The truth, esp. among Presbyterians, could hardly be more different. Presbyterian thinkers such as Charles Hodge displayed a very deep respect for science to the point that Hodge argued at length in his SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY that theology is a science. He and other conservative Presbyterians hedged their understanding of science in a number of ways and insisted that "real" science couldn't contradict the facts of the Bible in any way. Within these limitations, the Presbyterians had a real respect for scientific thought that influenced their missionaries on the field in Thailand. Lillian Curtis, in her book THE LAOS OF NORTH SIAM, describes northern Thai animism in some detail and summarizes by writing, "Thus it may be seen that there is no rational perception of natural phenomena, and that the reasoning faculties are necessarily kept in bondage and subjection to the wildest flights of the fancy and imagination. The secrets of nature are not investigated, and no poor Roger [should be Francis] Bacon has ever arisen among the people to begin research and prove that natural phenomena are not sorcery and magic." (p. 230)

This is another one of those quotations that would require a lengthy book to "unpack" all of the ideas it contains. It is interesting that Curtis and her colleagues in the Laos Mission equated scientific knowledge and study with spiritual liberation. Presbyterians of her generation put a high premium on education and knowledge. They believed that ALL truth pointed towards God and could be used to lead people to the Christian faith, including scientific truth.

HeRD #219 - More Thoughts on Missionary Sin

Some time ago, I met with a missionary I'd never met before. His life is obviously centered on Christian faith, "filled with Jesus" if you will. His office walls are covered with religious posters, his stereo plays Christian music, and his talk is filled with Christian words, phrases, and concepts. In a number of ways he appeared to be a committed Christian using his skills to serve others. It became clear to me, however, that here was a person also smug in his opinions and judgmental in his attitude. The technical theological term, I believe, is "self-righteous." Though he "knows the Lord," there is still an unlovely person lurking within--one not so different I fear from many considerably less religious people. This is not to deny the good that also "lurks" within him, the fact for example that in the midst of an obviously busy schedule he gave me an hour of his time.

I mention this encounter not to wreck my own unlovely judgment on a missionary worker but to reinforce an important point in dealing with Thai church history. Missionary records exhibit precisely this same mixture of the triumph and the failure of faith. Christian missionaries have relieved considerable human suffering in Thailand and have brought social and spiritual liberation to tens of thousands. The Protestant missionaries (and Catholic too, I suspect) have also historically treated the Thai people with a smug superiority that has verged on disdain--and thereby greatly weakened the church here. They were, that is, better than their detractors allow and less holy than their supporters think--the same thoroughly human mixture of triumph and failure I detected in my encounter in the missionary mentioned above.

On a personal level I continue to be deeply impressed with the concept of idolatry. It seems to me that as committed Christians we are always in grave danger of turning our faith into an idol. "Jesus" can become a self-serving wall against God as much as or more than a channel for faith. The concept of idolatry, if we turn it more on ourselves and less against others, is one of the most powerful theological tools available to us for attaining the Protestant Principle of "reformed and always reforming." I always appreciate your insights, gentle readers. Any thoughts on this one?

HeRD #220 - The First Women Elders

An article in the April 1937 issue of the SIAM OUTLOOK makes the following claim, "The Leper Asylum, Chiangmai, Siam, has the distinction of having the first women elders in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Nang [Mrs.] La and Nang Kan Gao were elected to eldership in April 1925. At that time Siam formed two presbyteries of the Synod of New York. These two saintly old women went about the duties of their high office with a humility and joy touching to behold, all unconscious of the fact that they were out of order according to the rules of the Church." The article goes on to explain that the Leper Asylum was strictly divided into men's and women's areas and that while most of the patients joined together for services in the asylum's chapel there were a number of women patients who could no longer walk and weren't even strong enough to be carried to church. After long, hesitant discussion, the women patients themselves requested two women elders to minister to the most desperately crippled of their number. According to the article, Nan La herself was in the advanced stages of leprosy and died at some time before 1937. Nang Kan Gao, on the other hand, had been a church worker before she became a leper and sought treatment immediately on discovery she had leprosy. She eventually was cured and able to leave the asylum to resume her life "outside."

We must take, of course, the claim to be the first women elders of the whole Presbyterian church with a grain of salt. Roughly at this same time, Fifth Church, Bangkok, was also ordaining women elders because it was closely related to the mission girls' school there and had almost no men on its rolls. I don't remember the year, however. One has to assume it possible (likely?), however, that somewhere among the missions and churches of the PCUSA around the world (and unknown to the author of this article) women were ordained as elders prior to 1925.

Source: "The First Women Elders in the Presbyterian Church," *Siam Outlook* 13, 2(April 1937): 101-102.

HeRD #221 - Revolution Presbyterian Style

In a July 1908 article in the LAOS NEWS, the Rev. William Harris of Prince Royal's College in Chiang Mai described the Christian educational process in northern Siam as a complete recreation of the long atrophied tastes and desires of the people. Since the people had lived in ignorance and sluggish indifference for centuries, this process required a fundamental intellectual and spiritual reconstruction, which meant "slowly and painfully working upwards, with no precedents, and no rich historic past to fall back upon." Harris believed that if the people were intellectually alive and believed that mind is greater material things they would make material sacrifices in order to attain immaterial ends. He justified the need for Christian education in the North by citing the limited intelligence and sordid ideas of the people. Christian education would create both intellectual and spiritual demands.

Although stated in the somewhat updated language of the early twentieth century, Harris expressed a classic Presbyterian view of the relationship of change to Christian missions. He sought a complete, revolutionary reconstruction of the northern Thai mind. But, typically, he

understood the process of change to be a gradual one. Harris also emphasized the importance of the intellect, the mind and appears to imply that the creation of an intellectually alive people would logically lead to a people who would strive for non-material, this is spiritual, ends. The scholastic Calvinist approach of reason seeking faith echoes across his words.

Source: Harris, "The Educational Problem in Laos," *Laos News* (July 1908): 74-77.

HeRD #222 - A Lost Past

In HeRD #221, we described the Rev. William Harris' views on education and social change in northern Thailand. Harris looked for a complete reconstruction of northern society based partly on the premise that the North had no precedents for a higher culture and "no rich historic past to fall back upon." As far as I've been able to discover, Harris' sense of northern Thai history was generally shared by all of his colleagues in the Laos Mission. They appear to have been oblivious to the long, rich history of the Lan Na Kingdom founded in the late 13th century by King Mangrai. That culture reached its peak in the 15th and 16th centuries and for a time Lan Na was a major regional power. It met its demise, however, at the hands of the Burmese in the 17th and 18th centuries. By the time of the arrival of the Presbyterian missionaries in the latter half of the 19th century, the northern states were only a shadow of what the Lan Na Kingdom had been. Much of the old culture had been lost. It would be interesting to know more about what information the missionaries actually had about northern Thai history. Various chronicles and legends were extant, but we can assume that the missionaries treated these as mere "wives' tales" with no historical substance. Modern scholars, in fact, disagree among themselves as to the historical value of these documents.

In the absence of accurate historical information (for which they can hardly be blamed), the missionaries "created" a past for the North based on their largely theological assessment of its people and culture. As always, missionary social and historical analysis began with the "facts" of northern Thai idolatry and superstition. It was then only logical for them to imagine for the northern Thai a dreary, unprogressive, and degraded past from which they needed liberation.

Questions worth pondering: would a more accurate understanding of the past have made a difference in the way the Presbyterian missionaries viewed the northern Thai? Would such an understanding have had an impact on their work?

Source: Harris, "The Educational Problem in Laos," *Laos News* (July 1908): 74-77.

HeRD #223 - The Plough-Share of Change

Chalmers Martin, of the Laos Mission, put the significance of Westernization for Christian evangelism in the context of northern Thai social conservatism. Rather than argue religion with the missionaries, most northern Thai simply stated that they would not convert because Christianity was not among their customs. Martin wrote in an 1888 article in *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN*, "It is this tenacity of adherence to what has been, which, in Siam as in other Eastern lands, makes railways and telegraphs veritable John the Baptists, preparing the way of the Lord. As they run the plough-share of change across old-established customs, the missionary may drop his seed of truth, into the freshly-turned furrow." I have to admit that this is one of my favorite quotations from Laos Mission literature. Its mixture of biblical and technological images is fascinating as well as revealing.

Source: Martin, "Some Difficulties and Encouragements in Missionary Work Among the Laos," *Woman's Work for Woman & Our Mission Field* 3, 5(May 1888): 116.

HeRD #224 - The Two Books

One of the most common questions despairing seminary students ask is, "Why Philosophy?" What does philosophy have to do with anything in church work anyway? In today's world where philosophy is an increasingly marginalized, self-involved field of study, this question may be compelling. For the student of Thai Protestant church history, however, knowledge of the history of Western philosophy is extremely important and directly relevant. The "old-time" missionaries brought with them a clear philosophical tradition that reflects itself in both their words and deeds. They were "common sense realists" and "rationalists" who believed, among other things, that there are two witnesses or "books" that reveal God to humanity. The first is the Bible. The second is Nature. The Rev. William Buell, for example, in an 1843 letter to the Board of Foreign Missions expressed this understanding. He was struggling to find a way to interpret Christian beliefs to the Thai people and asked the Board if someone in the United States couldn't write a tract on the existence of God as the First Cause. Such a tract, he wrote, couldn't use the Bible directly as Buddhists rejected its authority; and thus it would have to focus on "the light of nature" as a source of religious understanding.

Buell's concern and approach would suggest that the missionaries did seek to "indigenize" Christian faith in Thailand. They followed (or, at least, considered) different approaches. Martin, in our last HeRD, followed the strategy of turning northern Thai society into something more Western-like, thereby making it more receptive to Christianity. Buell, here, wants to draw on certain types of Western Christian thinking that he deems more compatible with Thai Buddhist understandings. Neither considered the possibility of STARTING with indigenous forms and working back towards Christianity. Is it possible, that the heart of the issue here is that Protestant approaches to so-called indigenization have been essentially self-centered (on Western forms and content) rather than other-centered (on Asian forms and content)? Worth a thought.

Source: Buell to Lowrie, 4 December 1843, v. 1, BFM.

HeRD #225 - Reflexive Relationship

McGilvary, in an intriguing 1870 article in the NORTH CAROLINA PRESBYTERIAN, intimates at the reflexive relationship between social change and evangelism. He relates how he and the Chiang Mai missionaries had been introducing new varieties of fruits, such as raspberries, into Chiang Mai and planned to experiment with other fruits, such as plums. He justified these activities as missionary work by arguing that the introduction of new fruits and other luxuries cultivated the tastes of the people and stimulated them to other pursuits that would improve both their social and moral condition. McGilvary argued that Christianity made people dissatisfied with living in a half-civilized nation. He concluded, "If men live like savages it is difficult to make anything else out of them than savages. And the comforts and blessings of a temporal nature that attend the introduction of the Christian religion constitute a very tangible, and therefore no mean argument of its truth." Some four years later, the McGilvarys stopped in San Francisco on their way back to Siam from furlough and bought fruit and flower plants to send to Chiang Mai.

Two principles stand out in McGilvary's thought. First of all, one can't make much of savages who remain savage. His unstated conclusion seems obvious, that is that the missionaries had to remove the northern Thai from their savage, half-civilized state before Christianity could meaningfully take hold among them. Secondly, Christianity itself contributed to social and moral

improvement by creating a dissatisfaction with half-civilized life and by introducing temporal comforts and blessings. McGilvary delineated an interactive, reflexive relationship between Christianity and "civilizing" social change by which each contributed to the implanting of the other in a non-Christian society.

Sources: McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," *North Carolina Presbyterian* NS 3, 112(23 February 1870): 4.; and McGilvary, letter dated 13 July 1874, *North Carolina Presbyterian* , NS 7, 344(12 August 1874): 2.

HeRD #226 - Student Research

I'm teaching two research courses at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology this semester, one to M.Div. students and the other to "continuing" students, i.e. Bible school graduates who are now getting a B.Th. from McGilvary. In both courses the bulk of the grade is a research paper. Thought you might be interested in some of the topics. Among the continuing students the subjects include the following. One student is working in new church development in Lamphun and wants to study peoples' religious needs in Lamphun. A pastor wants to study why his church's youth aren't interested in church life. A school chaplain has never been given a clear job description and wants to do research into what his job should actually be. Another pastor wants to study her members' attitudes about lay ministry to discover why they appear to have little commitment to serving God in the church or the world. A pastor who founded a church in Chiang Mai 6 years ago wants to find out why his church has stopped growing, far short of the growth goals he had set for it. Another pastor wants to investigate ways of encouraging Bible study among his members. Among the M.Div students are studies of the pastoral needs of the elderly in Lampang, the current state of Christian education in churches in Uttaradit, and the meaning of and means for reconciliation in a local church, also in rural Uttaradit Province. These are only some of the topics, most of which are equally as interesting and immediately relevant to the lives of the students. What we have here is a cross section of the actual issues facing CCT churches and church workers today. They have to do mostly with how to improve the life and ministry of the church.

HeRD #227 - Dialogue McGilvary Style

In 1876 Daniel McGilvary entered into a series of discussions with a man he described as being zealous in merit-making in pursuit of "nippan" (Nirvana). They discussed a variety of topics, notable among them being "the sphericity and rotary motion of the earth on its axis." McGilvary particularly emphasized with this man that the fact that the North Star remains stationary in the heavens while the other stars circle it was "utterly inconsistent with Buddhistic teaching on the subject of geography and astronomy." After staying out all night to verify McGilvary's contention, the man was (according to McGilvary) "evidently much struck with the fact and explanation given of it, and also of the explanation given by means of a small globe and lamp of the phases of the moon." The following year, 1877, McGilvary reported on a series of discussions he had with a "high prince" of great intelligence and broad mind, during which the prince finally accepted McGilvary's proof that Mt. Meru, the center of the earth and the pillar of the Buddhist heavens, could not possibly exist. McGilvary had used a sea glass to demonstrate to the prince the reality of the heavens, as well as his same argument regarding the fixity of the North Star. McGilvary wrote that the prince "has finally given in that Buddh, or more probably his DISCIPLES, must be wrong in their report of his teachings."

For quite a period of time, McGilvary used scientific knowledge as a medium to introduce his evangelistic message. This approach is yet another variation on the central Laos Mission

strategy, namely that modernization would lead to Christianization. As we've observed before, it seldom worked out that way.

HeRD #228 - Godless Science

The Rev. Frank L. Snyder, in an 1892 letter to the Board, objected to a series of scientific articles published in a Thailand missionary periodical (in Thai) because the articles did not clearly, explicitly relate the "wonderful works of God" to scientific knowledge. He raised the questions, "Must we teach science as an end itself or must we use it as a means to an end? Are we pedagogues or are we ambassadors of the King of kings, sent on an especial errand to announce to these people the gospel of Salvation?" While Snyder's criticism seems to reject the older missionary idea that Westernization leads inevitably at some point to Christianization, his question still leave room for the use of science for evangelization. He simply advocates a blatant rather subtle approach.

Source: Snyder to Mitchell, 5 February 1892, v. 8, BFM.

HeRD #229 - Social Revolution

Dr. William Briggs, in an address to the Laos Mission delivered in 1903, depicted Jesus as a deep, but practical and wide-ranging thinker whose teachings were not understood by the people of his day. Jesus' attempt to simplify "the Constitution of the Kingdom of the Universe" and his answers to the cynics stirred the people out of their intellectual sleep. Jesus brought a new era. Briggs went on to say that Jesus came not to destroy but to build and enliven. Yet, the old customs had to be laid aside because one can't put new wine in an old skin or a new patch on old cloth.

Briggs here defines the missionary revolutionary program. To missionary thinking it was an essentially creative, positive process that required the tearing down, or the laying aside, of the old ways only as the initial step of liberation. It was, furthermore, an intellectual as well as a religious revolution, based on Christ's attempt to bring new understanding to the people, to stir them out of their intellectual lethargy. Briggs' brief description of the missionary revolution reflects traditional orthodox Presbyterian concern with the mind, rationality, and educational processes. It resonates with a Calvinistic Scholasticism that views the religious life as essentially a process of acquiring knowledge and understanding in order that one might then discover religious faith, a process which exactly reverses St. Augustine's famous summary of the Christian life as "faith in search of understanding." For Briggs and his colleagues the missionary revolution began, then, as a process of un-learning the superstitions, misconceptions, and lies of "heathenism" and then learning the truths of Christianity.

Source: Briggs, [Address to the Laos Mission], [December 1903], v. 272, BFM.

HeRD #230 - Westernization as Enemy

Numerous previous HeRDs have made the point that the Presbyterian missionaries in Thailand consciously used Westernization as a key means for the Christianization of Thailand. It would be incorrect to assert, however, that the missionaries saw nothing but good in Westernizing social change. Quite the opposite was true. They recognized that along with the "blessings of civilization" Westernization also threatened Christian missions with a new set of dangerous competitors. Dr. S. C. Peoples, of the Lampang Station, viewed the eventual coming of the railroad to northern Thailand with some concern. He urged that the missionaries must win over a substantial element of the people before foreign irreligion attacks the Kingdom of Christ

and draws the general populace to new vices. Along these same lines, Dr. Walter B. Toy, of the Siam Mission, urged the Board in New York in 1894 that the work in Thailand needed to move forward immediately before expected future social change reduced the missionaries' influence with the Thai people.

There were undoubtedly several factors that brought about this rethinking among some missionaries about the value of Westernization. Dr. Briggs of Chiang Rai gives us some insight in this regard. In a 1903 letter he complained about central Thai officials in Bangkok who, in spite of an overseas education, still acted in "heathen" ways. They could swear in English, drink toasts at European style dinners, and they womanized, stole from the people, and showed a lack of respect even for their own religion. There was, in other words, a growing realization among some that Westernization did not lead easily or automatically to Christianization. I doubt that these individuals would have advocated abandoning the modernization strategy, but we shouldn't think that the missionaries were hopelessly naive in their use of it either.

HeRD #231 - The Other Dr. McGilvary

THE Dr. McGilvary, Daniel that is, is familiar to the readers of HeRD as the leading figure of the Laos Mission. I haven't mentioned, however, the OTHER Dr. McGilvary, namely, Evander Bradley McGilvary. Evander was the son of Sophia and Daniel, and his story is worth a moment's pause. He was born in Bangkok on 19 June 1864 and was only two years old when he and his sister Catherine moved with his parents to Chiang Mai in 1867 to found the Laos Mission. He left Chiang Mai as a child and received most of his education in the United States. He graduated from Davidson College in North Carolina as class valedictorian in 1884 and then entered Princeton Theological Seminary. He graduated from Princeton in 1888 and won a Fellowship in New Testament Greek for 1889-1890. On the completion of his studies he became a Presbyterian missionary and with his wife, Ann Paton McGilvary, arrived in Chiang Mai in 1891. From the very first he showed promise as a missionary and was reputedly very popular among the "native" church members. In 1892, however, the Presbyterian General Assembly affirmed inerrancy of Scripture as the doctrine of the church, and in 1893 it suspended Dr. Charles Briggs of Union Theological Seminary from his office as a Presbyterian clergyman for views that were contrary to the doctrine of inerrancy. Evander, as a matter of conscience, felt compelled to withdraw from the Laos Mission because he strongly disagreed with the proclaimed doctrines of the Presbyterian Church concerning the inspiration of the Bible. More on Evander in our next HeRD.

HeRD #232 - ODM II

Standing beyond the pale of historiography just a bit, one can't help but feel that Evander McGilvary's leaving the Laos Mission in 1894 [see HeRD #231] was little short of a tragedy for mission and church work in Thailand. From northern Thailand he went on to win his PhD. in philosophy and become a philosopher of some note. He was a creative, perhaps even brilliant academic, who had a gift for teaching and possessed a deep sense of moral purpose. He was a capable linguist who had trained himself for translating the Bible into northern Thai. He seems to have had good administrative skills along with a lively mind. He also offered the possibility of theological balance in the midst of the unremitting Presbyterian scholasticism and orthodoxy of the Laos Mission. Evander, like his parents, lived to a ripe old age after an outstanding career in his chosen field. What a resource was lost to the Thai church! On the other hand it seems clear to me that Evander was never really meant for Chiang Mai. He was drawn to a free-wheeling mental life and to academic interests that he just would not have pursued in Chiang Mai. Chiang Mai and the Laos Mission in the 1890s were too constrictive for a man like Evander McGilvary.

However much his leaving Chiang Mai was a loss for the Thai church, the events of 1893-94 thrust Dr. McGilvary onto a larger stage where he served long and well.

As a footnote: interviews with two of Evander's grandchildren reveal that Evander McGilvary entirely rejected the Christian religion after he left the missionary field. His children (and grandchildren) were raised outside of the church. They seldom if ever heard him criticize Christianity, but they also knew that he personally wanted nothing to do with it. They believe that their grandmother, Ann, sometimes slipped off to church on her own and was saddened by her husband's decision to leave the church.

HeRD #233 - Threats in Chiang Rai

In the Laos Mission's 1886 annual report, the Rev. Jonathan Wilson described a case of persecution in a village beyond Wiang Pa Pao in what is today Chiang Rai Province. An older woman from Mae Dok Daeng, Mae Tow Pan, moved her family to her daughter-in-law's home village of Salee Toi. She met with a very bad reception there from her daughter-in-law's family because she was a Christian. They went so far as to notify her that she would be held responsible for loss of elephants or buffaloes due to the displeasure of the family spirits. The in-laws went so far as to consult with the governor of Chiang Rai to see if they could take other measures against Mae Tow Pan. When they received no satisfaction from that worthy, they threatened to force their daughter to divorce Mae Tow Pan's son if he converted to Christianity. The report doesn't explain why the son wasn't a Christian, but one surmises that Mae Tow Pan herself was a convert and that the son had not yet decided to join his mother in her new religion. According to Wilson, the son replied to his in-laws "that he loved his wife but if driven to the alternative he would follow his mother and embrace her religion." His wife, Mae Tow Pan's daughter-in-law ALSO threatened to convert if her family didn't stop putting pressure on Mae Tow Pan.

Such stories as this aren't uncommon in missionary literature, and they suggest that conversion to Christianity was no small matter. It was one thing for Mae Tow Pan to convert at Mae Dok Daeng where there was a large Christian community and the missionaries were less than a day's ride away. It was quite another thing to persist in her Christian faith in a more distant village where there were no Christians. Yet, persist she did. We should note the animistic source of opposition to her. Her in-laws feared that she would bring the displeasure of the family spirits on them all. That fear was a very real one, and those who held it invested no small amount of time or goods in tending the family spirits in order to avoid just such a fate.

Source: Wilson, "Annual Report of North Laos Mission for the year ending September 30th 1886," 2 December 1886, v. 22, BFM.

HeRD #234 - The Past Embodied

In his mission annual report of 1886 [see HeRD #233], Wilson explains why the Laos Mission seldom founded new churches even though its membership was founded clustered in numerous villages. The mission believed it wasn't wise to establish numerous small congregations. Wilson explained, "Of our organized churches Maa Dawk Daang has done well from the beginning. It has good officers and no little power of self expansion and furnishes a good illustration of the adaptability of our [Presbyterian] form of government to mission fields. But on the whole we have thought it better to keep our scattered members in connection with the mother church [i.e. Chiang Mai Church] than to form weak small ones, as we have a better hold on them and can better train them for independent separate organization." Throughout its history, the Laos Mission adhered to this policy of forming relatively few churches, each church it did establish being composed of members from several scattered villages. I've called this type of

church the "regional church." Even today, one sees strong evidence of this pattern in the current structure of the CCT's northern Thai churches.

HeRD #235 - The Puzzle of Animism

Nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries in Thailand, for the most part, held a highly negative view of Thai animism. Their views were largely the same as those they held concerning Buddhism. There was a difference, however, and the Rev. William S. Buell, writing way, way back in 1843 captured that difference. Writing to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in New York, Buell avowed that he personally didn't believe in devil possession, evil spirits, or ghosts. He was, however, perplexed by the fact that Jesus DID believe in these things and that they are found in the Bible. When people asked him WHY he didn't believe in the spirits, Buell lamented that he was hard pressed to answer. His letter containing these confessions ended with a request for guidance from New York on what he should think about animism. The problem, then, was this: Buddhism was easy for the missionaries to classify in biblical terms. It was one of the great false systems of superstition and idolatry the Bible so roundly condemns. Animism was more difficult for the reasons stated, namely that Jesus himself entirely believed in the world of the spirits.

HeRD #236 - Who Should Lead?

One of the most important shifts in Protestant missionary thinking in Thailand had to do with the missionaries divesting themselves of effective power over the churches that emerged from their work. The process was gradual with a great deal of steps taken toward that goal and away from it. Baptist missionaries in the 1840s allowed their converts a significant voice in the life of the church. In the 1970s, Presbyterian missionaries still held significant authority in the CCT. The shift wasn't an easy one as is shown by the experience of the Karen Baptist churches in northern Thailand.

The handful of Karen churches founded in northern Thailand before World War II had long looked to the Burmese Karen for leadership and support, but the War broke that relationship. Events after the war proved it couldn't be renewed. Thus, according to Karen sources themselves, the Thai Karen churches were overjoyed when the Baptists began missionary work in the North in the 1950s. Their joy soon turned to disappointment, however, when they found that the Baptist missionaries were all younger and believed that they shouldn't take a leading role in church life. The churches had hoped for an "old-fashioned" relationship with the missionaries in which the missionaries would take charge. When that didn't happen there followed an awkward period during which neither side took real leadership. According to his own report, this situation was resolved only after Thra [teacher] Tun Shein, a Burmese Karen, visited. He initiated discussions that led to better missionary-church relations. In later years the Baptist missionaries still refrained from taking direct leadership in the churches. They focused much of their attention on institutional, evangelistic, and development work.

HeRD #237 - Science vs. the Spirits

The Presbyterian missionaries were products of a philosophic tradition that finds its roots in Aristotle and wends its way down to 17th century Enlightenment Scottish thought. They were "commonsense realists." They held that the physical world is real and that our senses give us an accurate rendition of that reality. How do we know this to be true? Why, our God-given commonsense shows us that it is so. One of the consequences of this philosophic viewpoint was an appreciation for science. It was, of course, a science that didn't "contradict" the biblical accounts of creation and the nature of the world.

When Dr. Marion and Mrs. Sarah Cheek of the Chiang Mai Station, thus, described northern Thai animism, they did so from this "scientific" perspective. In an article published in the book *SIAM AND LAOS AS SEEN BY OUR PRESBYTERIAN MISSIONARIES*, the Cheeks claimed that the intellectual attainments of the northern Thai were limited to their animistic "superstitions". They wrote, "...their reasoning facilities are entirely in subjection to the imagination in accounting for the most ordinary natural phenomena." The northern Thai, the Cheeks stated, substituted their reverential awe of supposed supernatural agencies in place of rational perception of natural causes. (p. 504). The Cheeks felt that the northern Thai would accept any absurdity, however monstrous, provided only it be supernatural. Imagination took the place of reason and experiment, and speculation provided satisfactory solutions to any problem. The Cheeks noted of northern Thai medical practitioners in particular that "patient observation" and "intelligent experimentation" were unknown to the "Laos medicine man." It was doubtful that they'd achieved even one "verifiable fact either in physiology or therapeutics." (p. 513) The northern Thai, thus, neglected investigation of natural causes, appealed to the supernatural, and subjected their intellectual faculties to imagination.

HeRD #238 - Biblical Meanings I

Theological reflection in the Thai context has not yet worked through the meaning of Israel's historical experience for the Thailand. The Thai church largely ignores the Old Testament. There are, however, some important historical parallels that would suggest that the Thai church has a much more vital interest in "unpacking" the Old Testament than it has to date realized. Let's start with some thoughts on the Old Testament in this HeRD and then return to the Thai church's historical experience in HeRD #239.

Walter Brueggeman in his book, *Israel's Praise*, as well as in his commentary on the Psalms, *The Message of the Psalms*, reminds his readers that Israel's memories of slavery, dislocation, and suffering were time bombs pressed against the heart of the nation's worship. The royal cult and the needs of state, Brueggeman argues, threatened to tame worship and turn God into a passive divine being that affirmed the power of the king and his state. Memories of Egypt and the Wilderness and of how God *sides* with the poor, the oppressed, and the marginals was embarrassing and threatening to the royal cult. It forced the king to remember that he was a servant. It forced the state to remember that it held power for the poor rather than over them. When king and state forgot these uncomfortable liturgical reminders of God's authority and expectations, prophets stood up and reminded them of their duties. One of the harshest reminders is contained in Ezekiel 34. In that chapter, God displays a clear concern for the poor and suffering of Israel and pronounces, through the prophet, a harsh denunciation of Israel's leadership for fattening themselves rather than caring for the whole nation. Ezekiel 34:16 proclaims in God's name, "I will look for those that are lost, bring back those that wander off, bandage those that are hurt, and heal those that are sick; but those that are fat and strong I will destroy, because I am a shepherd who does what is right." (TEV) There was, we should remember, a clear connection between gluttonous leadership and the cultic failure to remember Israel's past. In Isaiah 58 God rejects the superficial, self-righteous fasting of Israel's religious people. The prophet, speaking for God, declares "The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives." (Isaiah 58:6-7, TEV cf. Amos, 5:21-24) Try as it might, in sum, the Israel's state cult couldn't paper over God's concern for the poor and the marginals. As much as we have long tried not to believe it, it does seem that at times the biblical God reaches out to the poor with a special longing and love reserved just for them.

HeRD #239 - Biblical Meanings II

Taking up from where we left off in HeRD #238, it would seem that the Old Testament memories of slavery and liberation have a great deal of meaning for the church in Thailand. Thai churches historically have contained many of the most marginalized people in the kingdom. Their historical records contain story after story of marginal people responding positively to the Christian message in concrete experiences of liberation. In the North, hundreds found in Christianity liberation from accusation of causing demon possession, the deadliest and most frightening of accusations in northern Thai society. The Chiang Mai mission compound sometimes harbored dozens of victims, exiled from their homes with nothing more than what they could carry by hand. Historically, lepers have comprised an important source of converts. Stories of Christ's healing of lepers can bring tears to the eyes of Christian lepers twenty and thirty years after their conversion. Missionaries helped many individuals find their way out of debt slavery. Others converted to Christianity because they found no hope or help in animistic practices. Such conversions still take place in the Northeast and among tribal peoples. Women Christians were locked away from learning before conversion. Thai-Chinese Christians were among the poorest of the poor when they converted. To be sure, not all of these conversions in their variety led to faithful or lifelong conversions. Rice Christianity is a fact-but less of one than the critics of Christian missions in Thailand believe. Viewed historically, the Thai church is heir to a vast store house of memories of marginality and liberation, suffering and consolation. If the it REMEMBERED those stories, the Old Testament would take on a new power and meaning in its life. More in HeRD #240.

HeRD #240 - Biblical Meanings III

Suppose the CCT would take more seriously the relationship between God's love for the poor as expressed in the Old Testament and its own history. Two things might happen. On the one hand, the CCT's historical experience might be utilized for worship. It, viewed creatively, might become a source for writing prayers, hymns, confessions, and sermons rooted in the Thai church's own experience. At the same time, local churches might become more sensitive to their own memories and stories as sources for confession and praise. On the other hand, the C.C.T. might also discover the sad but necessary need for soulful confession in its own life. My research into the state of pastoral care in the C.C.T., for example, convinced me that its pastoral care system is inherently unjust to its poorest, most needy churches. It does not provide them with resources for life and ministry available to wealthy churches. It does not provide them with the better trained pastors also available to wealthy churches. The C.C.T. has long been better at spending other people's money to help the socially deprived than it has been in committing its own resources for others in need. If we were to recover the stories of suffering and liberation among Thai Protestants and bring them into "dialogue" with the slave memories of Israel so clearly reflected in Israel's liturgy and worship, that dialogue might impel us to a more faithful witness to Christ's compassion in our own time. Worth a thought.

HeRD #241 - Heathenism Kills

Dr. J. S. Thomas of the Phrae Station took the title of this HeRD to be a literal, physical truth...as well as a religious and eternal one. Writing in 1897, Thomas described two medical cases where he had to treat individuals who had suffered from a lack of care and concern. Their conditions were both hopeless by the time they were brought to him. While he didn't provide his readers with any details, he stated that the fundamental cause of the death of these two individuals was the superstitious animism of the people. They didn't know HOW to give proper treatment to the ill. In another letter written that same year, Thomas observed that northern Thai medical practices were "steeped" in superstition and animistic practices. He complained that the

people of Phrae were so ignorant that they preferred their own "native" doctors to missionary medicine.

Thomas' remarks throw further light on the missionary concept of "benevolence" mentioned in several previous HeRDs. Missionary benevolence extended to concern for the physical, social, and intellectual well-being of the northern Thai because the spiritual and the physical-social condition of the "heathen" were intimately intertwined.

Sources: BFM-241.3, BFM-241.5

HeRD #242 - Gilkey Says

"To understand and to deal with the change in which humans are engulfed, the passing of the old and the appearance of the new in time, to affect the shape and direction of historical process, are inescapable requirements for human thought and for human life alike. We can neither escape time and change, nor easily subdue and control them-nor in the end can we acquiesce passively in them, and remain human." Langdon Gilkey, REAPING THE WHIRLWIND, 3.

HeRD #243 - Gilkey Again

"History becomes an overwhelming fate for those who seek neither to understand nor creatively to direct it." Langdon Gilkey, REAPING THE WHIRLWIND, 36.

HeRD #244 - Gilkey One More Time

"Religion is an inescapable element in historical life, but religion is infinitely risky. It injects the demonic as well as transformative grace into history. For the call to authentic action in each of us is only partial, and we corrupt it as we seek to embody it. The judgments we make on our world and on our political opponents are partial, stemming from our self-interest and fear as well as from the clear voice of conscience. And the vision we seek in history to realize, or to defend, is never as ultimate, as universal, as healing as we claim." Langdon Gilkey, REAPING THE WHIRLWIND, 68.

HeRD #245 - Heathens No Longer

Sadie Peoples, writing in a letter printed in the November 1888 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, described how she was caught in storm while traveling down river to Bangkok on a health furlough. The boat she was traveling was tied up on the river when the storm struck and was soon torn from its moorings. The northern Thai boatmen went into the water in the driving storm to hold the boat from being carried away. She related that in spite of the serious danger they faced, the boatmen did what they could to save her family. She wrote, "We used to call them 'heathen' at home, and it is true they know little or nothing about God, but they know much more about the eleventh commandment in practice than many who say 'Lord, Lord.' It is a long time since we have called the Laos heathen. Our relationship is getting too close, too dear."

It is difficult to say how representative Sarah Peoples' attitude was of missionary thinking generally in the late 19th century. It is worth noting, in any event, that at times the missionaries felt that they owed their very lives to people they'd formerly classed as "heathen."

Source: Mrs. S.C. Peoples, "A Health Trip From Lakawn to Java," from a letter dated 26 November 1888, in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN And OUR MISSION FIELD 4, 5(May 1889): 115-119.

HeRD #246 - God & Famine

God's presence in the midst of suffering remains one of the most difficult issues facing Christian thinking. We've touched on this issue before in HeRD. Discerning the missionary perspective on the relationship of suffering to God's activity (i.e. does God cause suffering?) isn't easy because the missionaries didn't deal with the issue in the abstract. The Rev. Jonathan Wilson provides an example. In a January 1892 letter published in the May 1892 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, Wilson described a famine then raging through the provinces of Lampang and Phrae. He stated that "Our hearts are sad and anxious..." for those without enough to eat. Many were facing starvation. He avowed, "Our cry is unto the Lord." He called on the American people to give with their money and their prayers. "Pray, then," he urged, "for the work of the Lord in this land; pray for the hungry poor, the aged, the feeble, the sick, the little children, whose gaunt faces may ere long send a throb of pain to the hearts of those who look upon them. I have already seen a few such faces." Wilson went on to state that the missionaries felt that as perhaps never before that the Lord Jesus was with them. He speculated, "Perhaps some of this apparent stretching out after God is the result of His hand in the impending famine."

Wilson's deep concern for the suffering is clear in his words. What is less clear is what he meant by "God's hand" in the famine. Was he hinting that perhaps God caused the famine to bring people to the Christian faith? Or did he see God somehow "embedded" in the famine bringing good out of it without being the cause of it? Or, is it possible Wilson's words aren't clear because Wilson himself didn't know anything more than that God was present in the midst of the hunger?

Source: Jonathan Wilson, letter dated 30 January [1892], in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 7, 5(May 1892): 119.

HeRD #247 - A Lesson from Mae Salap

One of my colleagues is writing up her study of the history of the Samakhitam Church, a suburban-rural congregation located in the village of Mae Salap near Chiang Mai. Her summary of the church's experience with pastoral care offers a possible lesson of wider application. Ach Janram writes, "The Samakhitam Church...from its inception down to the present has had pastors for much of its history, even though some pastors have looked after the church only for brief periods. Their pastoral styles have varied somewhat but not much. In those periods when there is no pastor, the church tends to drift and there are no new activities. Some previous activities disappear. When, however, the church has a pastor its work is carried out better and more consistently. There are new activities. The congregation's members are cooperative in carrying out those activities."

In other ecclesiastical settings, this insight into the value of pastoral care might be taken as mundane and hardly worthy of note. The CCT, however, is still struggling to put a denomination-wide system of trained, full-time pastoral care in place, and sometimes it is the local churches themselves that are most resistant to having a professional pastor. They feel that pastors aren't a good investment, that is they aren't worth the money the church has to pay them. Hence the importance of the Samakhitam Church's experience for other congregations is that it provides a possible lesson for other congregations, a lesson we can't take for granted in the CCT.

HeRD #248 - Chae Home Church

In a September 1891 letter to the Board, the Rev. Hugh Taylor of the Lampang Station reported on the results of a tour he and his family had just completed. They'd traveled by boat to Chae Home, a town some forty miles or more to the north. The purpose of this tour was to visit a lone Christian family that had moved to Chae Home only the year before. The Taylors had been concerned about the family because they didn't seem likely to hold on to their Christian faith by themselves. Their daughter, for example, had been dismissed from the Lampang Girls' School for laziness, and the "old man" of the family (grandfather) had never learned to read. Taylor expressed considerable relief, then, when they found that the family was living a neat and polite life. The old man was carrying out his own informal evangelism, and even the lazy daughter was using her knowledge of reading any hymn singing to help her brother-in-law prepare for joining the church. Taylor baptized a granddaughter, and on the whole counted the trip as a great success.

This single family at Chae Home remained "isolated" for some three years. The Laos Mission Annual Report for 1894 reports that the Taylors made at least two trips to Chae Home during that year, and on the first trip they baptized 14 adults and 11 children. On a subsequent visit he baptized another 6 adults and 1 child. The Chae Home Christian community eventually became one of the Laos Mission's stronger rural congregations and remains today one of the more important churches in the CCT's Third District.

Sources: Taylor to Mitchell, 22 September 1891, v. 9, BFM. #11; Wilson, "Annual Report," [1894], v. 22, BFM.

HeRD #249 - Ella

On evangelistic tours it was obviously important for the missionaries to do whatever they could to attract attention. They usually took with them a variety of gadgets and technological goodies to that end, but sometimes the most effective "instrument" for drawing a crowd was themselves. Missionary women pulled in the larger crowds. Even more of a sensation was a baby. On the trip to Chae Home described in HeRD #248, the Taylors took along their baby daughter, Ella. In a letter to the Board dated 22 September 1891 Taylor reported that, "Everywhere a white woman is the center of attraction but this time Mrs. Taylor found herself eclipsed by our little daughter Ella, just six months old." The "natives" loved little Ella, Taylor avowed, because she was a healthy, happy little bundle that never cried. We have to make some allowance, I suppose, for doting fatherly pride...but not much. The picture of a small crowd of northern Thais huddled around the arm-waving Ella hardly requires much imagination for anyone who's live in the North for very long.

Source: Taylor to Mitchell, 22 September 1891, v. 9, BFM. #11.

HeRD #250 - Chiang Saen Church

One of the most interesting figures in northern Thai church history is Nan Suwan, one of the key figures in the founding of the Mae Dok Daeng Church. He left the monkhood when his father converted in the mid 1870s, and quickly showed great promise to become an important leader in the northern Thai church. He was, however, descended from inhabitants of the city of Chiang Saen. Located on modern Thailand's northern border, Chiang Saen in the 1870s had been abandoned for many decades, and the central Thai government feared it would lose control of the old city's region if it left Chiang Saen in that condition. In 1878 it ordered the descendants of the city to return to it. At first, Nan Suwan planned to buy himself and his family off, but the

missionaries persuaded him that this was a fine opportunity to spread Christianity into an entirely new region of the North. He agreed in spite of the dangers of disease that killed off many of those resettling in Chiang Saen.

The missionaries sent him off with some quinine, which was a highly effective medicine in those days, and Nan Suwan soon acquired a reputation as a doctor. His medical efforts plus his own personality soon brought in a number of converts. Holt Hallett, in his book, *A THOUSAND MILES ON AN ELEPHANT IN THE SHAN STATES* (1890), gives us the following description of Nan Suwan: "Broad-minded, hospitable, kindly, and thoroughly upright, there could have been no better selection. He became the real father of the Chieng Sen church. His family was a light in the city. His youngest daughter, Kui Keo, one of Mrs. McGilvary's first pupils, taught most of the early Christians there to read the Scriptures in Siamese. The elder himself became a great favourite with the governor, who used to say that the fact of his being governor, and, therefore, under authority, alone prevented him from uniting with the church." (p. 223). The Chiang Saen Church later moved over into what is today Burma, and it long enjoyed unusually competent leadership. It remains a relatively large and active church today and is, I believe, the only CCT church located in Burma.

Sources: McGilvary, *Half Century*, 202-203; and Hallett, *Thousand Miles*, 223.

HeRD #251 - The Hard Issues I

HeRD started just over a year ago. I'd like to start out Year Two with some reflections on the issues we have to constantly wrestle with in Thai church history. These won't be new to the faithful readers of these research diary notes, but they may help to put the new year into perspective.

A central issue for all historical research is that historical records are produced by the powerful and privileged. That is certainly true for northern Thai church history. In this case, the historical record until the 1930s is largely a missionary record. The further back we go the more difficult it becomes to discover the northern Thai "voice". Our understanding of the historical development of the church, thus, lacks balance. It is especially difficult to weigh the role of the northern Thai church in its own formation. It seems clear that the missionaries imposed upon it many Western ecclesiastical forms, procedures, and values, thus making the church strikingly alien to northern Thai culture in many ways. But it is also strikingly indigenous in other ways, and many of its forms, values, and patterns of activity are peculiarly its own. The fact of the matter is that we have very little understanding of how the church mixes East and West today and how, historically, it worked out its own formation within the framework laid around it by the missionaries.

There are indications that the northern Thai played a much larger role than would appear to be the case from the records we have. Our research into the history of Christianity in Nan Province, for example, points to the possibility that Elder Kham Ai was as important to the founding of the church there as any missionary. He was originally a member of the Bethlehem Church near Chiang Mai, and went with the first missionaries in 1895 to found the Nan Station. It's impossible to dig out the details, but it seems fairly certain that he was the main leader of the Nan Christian community for quite some time. There were a few periods when there was no missionary at all in Nan, and he took charge of the work. It isn't clear, however, how his presence influenced the shaping of the church in Nan. Missionary thinking and praxis had a clear impact on that work, one we can describe and measure with some accuracy. The role of the northern Thai themselves is less clear and quite difficult to measure or describe.

HeRD #252 - The Hard Issues II

A second historical issue concerning the church in northern Thailand that is a source of endless headaches has to do with the role of Protestantism (foreign & indigenous) in the "modernization" of the North. This one is an ideological mine field as well as a historical issue, because the Christian community on the one hand wants to claim a large role while most historians of Thailand on the other look on Christian claims as just so much self-serving nonsense.

There is good reason to think the missionaries played a large role in the Westernization of northern Thailand. It is also highly likely that the northern Thai Christian community itself played a large role as mediators of missionary modernization. What is impressive in the missionary record is NOT the claims they made for themselves in introducing Westernizing social change into the North. What impresses one is how much they actually did that they recorded in passing. Yet, how do we actually measure their impact? Were they "essential" to the process? Were they merely "secondary" actors? What precisely was their role in any event? It seems quite likely that their central contribution to modernization is in their impact on the northern Thai world view. The very fact of their presence may have created more of an impact than anything they actually did. But how do you measure such an impact? The historian can't resort to sociological instruments, questionnaires and the like to discern such things.

There are at least two invaluable PhD theses here. The first would look at the direct missionary role. The second, and more difficult one, would study the mediating role of the Christian community in bring Westernization to the North.

HeRD #253 - The Hard Issues III

The issue that causes the most upset and dissension is the one having to do the role of the missionaries in establishing the northern Thai church. There are two camps, at least among Christians in the North. The majority camp is very sensitive to any criticisms of the missionaries. It argues that it is unfair to "judge" the missionaries. They did the best they could for their time and place. The Thai church in particular feels very clearly a sense of "merit-debt" towards the missionaries and finds criticism of them little short of scandalous. The minority camp (within the church) takes delight in missionary bashing, is willing to believe most anything bad about them, and is skeptical of anything good said about them. Actual evidence makes little difference here.

There are, then, actually two issues. The first is achieving a fair, balanced evaluation of missionary work in the midst of strong biases both for and against the missionaries. The second one is that of COMMUNICATING a believable evaluation to those camped out on both sides of the issue. We don't need to belabor this issue here as it has been an element in numerous HeRDs already. To date, however, I still haven't found the formula for telling the admirers that the missionaries weren't all that admirable while also telling the despisers they weren't all that despicable. The most discouraging fact historians have to face, perhaps, is that the world generally prefers its cherished misapprehensions about the past to more realistic descriptions based on evidence. It's not, of course, as if historians themselves don't have the same problem. There is no more ferocious creature on the face of the earth than a historian whose pet conception of the past is under attack.

HeRD #254 - Persecution at Ban Some

In a number of HeRDs, we've discussed the persecution of Christians in northern Thailand. The following description of persecution of the Christian community at Ban Some, Nan Province, is important because it comes from the pen of a member the church itself, Elder Sawai Kantakalang. He wrote an article published in CHURCH NEWS, the official CCT magazine, in 1974. The Ban Some community began in 1914, and other sources concur that it did suffer persecution in its early years. We have no way of confirming or denying the details below, but they are entirely plausible and likely accurate. Elder Sawai wrote,

"In 1915 the village headman and people of Ban Lang [Ban Some's alternative name] destroyed certain Christian property. Aside from that destruction, they also hid unlawful items, illegal liquor for example, under Christian homes or in their fields and called on the authorities to seize the Christians. They also forced Christians to worship the spirits. In 1916 the district under secretary made an official trip to the village and forced Christians to give up their religion by paying respect to Buddha images. There were, however, two individuals who were unwilling to give up their faith, namely Nan Ta Kantakalang and Nan Panya Chairangsri. They reported to Dr. Peoples in the city, who received them as Christian workers because of their unwillingness to be forced to give of their faith or flee from their homes. Dr. Peoples, a man loved and respected by the people, reported these events to the authorities in Nan. In 1917 two Christian homes were burned entirely to the ground, namely the homes of Nan San Chanta and Nai In Ti-ai. Subsequently, the person who burned down the homes of these two families confessed the deed and converted to Christianity. After these events the number of people who accepted Christianity increased."

Some observations. First, we should recall that the title "Nan" was an honorific that indicated the person so entitled had completed a course of study in Buddhism as a monk. These persons were knowledgeable, educated, and literate persons of some social standing. Note that three of the four members mentioned in this paragraph were "Nan". Second, Nan Ta, one of the two "stubborn" Christians was the first convert in the village and long the key leader of the Ban Some community. Third, we should again note the patron role the missionaries played. In this case, they provided assistance to the Christians both through employment of key individuals and by intervening (evidently unsuccessfully on this occasion) with the authorities on behalf of the Christians. Finally, this example serves to remind us that conversion to Christianity has involved real risks for the converts. Conversion for social or material gain ("rice Christianity") has not been uncommon in the North, but it is only part of the story.

HeRD #255 - King & Bible

In HeRD #246, we looked in on an 1888 report written by Sadie (NOT Sarah, as I incorrectly wrote in #246) Peoples and printed in the November 1889 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN. That report provides an important "window" on the missionary world in a number of ways. Sadie and her husband, Dr. S. C. Peoples, were on a health trip to Java that took them through Bangkok. While there she reported that during a stroll through the streets of the city they heard people shouting that the King was passing by. She observed, "We would gladly have lingered to see our King, for we all love him, but feared the crush. The scene made me think of the coming of the Bridegroom."

The King was King Chulalongkorn, who reigned from 1867 to 1910, and is generally considered to be the Father of Thai Modernization. The Kingdom experienced massive changes during his reign, not the least of which was the integration of the northern principalities into the Thai state. The missionaries of both the Laos and the Siam Missions had a profound respect for King Chulalongkorn--a respect clearly reflected in Sadie Peoples' words. It is interesting to note, however, the framework into which she puts her thoughts. Until late in the 19th century and even

into the 20th century the Bible provided an important frame of reference for daily missionary thinking. Biblical words and images, that is, formed a commonplace part of the way the missionaries expressed themselves in a way no longer true for all but the most devout Christians. That too is reflected here, in the biblical image of the Bridegroom. When Sadie came across the crowd huddled around the King, she didn't think of a similar scene in the United States as we might expect. The event took her back to the Bible instead.

At a deeper level, I have the impression that the missionaries felt that living in 19th century Thailand was like living in biblical times--or, at least, the Thai way of life provided insights into the biblical world. Both were "civilized" to about the same degree. Both experienced similar social and spiritual evils, particularly idolatry. It might be too much to say that reading Paul was like reading the newspaper for them, but there is something of that "feel" to their writings.

Source: Mrs. S.C. Peoples, "A Health Trip From Lakawn to Java," from a letter dated 26 November 1888, in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN And OUR MISSION FIELD 4, 5(May 1889): 115-119.

HeRD #256 - Hodge

Continuing on with Sadie Peoples' 1888 description of her visit to Java, reported in the November 1889 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, she wrote that she and her husband stayed in a "sanitarium" (simply a place of rest) in Java. She observed that everything was "very Dutch." On Sunday they had no worship service available, so they "took a volume of Dr. Hodge's lectures" and walked to a nearby botanical garden. They found a deep, shaded seat under a banyan tree at the edge of a pool, and there they sat down to worship. Sadie was especially impressed with the profusion of beautiful flowers.

Sounds almost idyllic. Those souls with a less romantic bent, however, might wonder about the volume of Hodge's lectures. It isn't clear here WHICH of the Hodes is intended, Dr. Charles or Dr. Alexander A. Hodge, father and son. Both were widely regarded conservative Presbyterian theologians who taught at Princeton Theological Seminary, the son replacing the father at his death in the 1870s. Charles Hodge was the premier exemplar of the so-called Princeton Theology, and Alexander Hodge followed faithfully in his father's footsteps. They had a major influence on Presbyterian thinking throughout much of the 19th century. All of this makes Sadie Peoples' passing comment about the Hodge lectures invaluable to the historian of missionary thought. The Peoples were on a health trip, and their need for renewal led them not only to a beautiful garden spot but also to study together a text of the Princeton theologians in that healing surroundings. We should note also that the Peoples took this book of theological lectures to use in worship, thereby denoting its spiritual value for them. This is a window into a whole world view, one highly important for understanding Presbyterian missionary thought and activity in Thailand.

Source: Mrs. S.C. Peoples, "A Health Trip From Lakawn to Java," from a letter dated 26 November 1888, in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN And OUR MISSION FIELD 4, 5(May 1889): 115-119.

HeRD #257 - An Ecumenical Spirit

One more time for Sadie Peoples' report on her health trip to Java related in the November 1889 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN. During the trip, the Peoples visited Singapore, and Sadie wrote of their reception by the Christian community there, "It is wonderful how the

'isms' of different denominations sink into insignificance out here where Christ is everything and the Church nothing except as it breathes His spirit." Wouldn't it be nice if we could say the same thing of the Christian "isms" of Bangkok and Chiang Mai today.

Source: Mrs. S.C. Peoples, "A Health Trip From Lakawn to Java," from a letter dated 26 November 1888, in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN And OUR MISSION FIELD 4, 5(May 1889): 115-119.

HeRD #258 - Wifehood in Siam

Writing in the May 1890 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, an author styled simply as "A Bangkok Missionary" provided the following description of married life in Thailand. The author describes in some detail the mistreatment of wives by husbands. She states that physical beatings were a normal part of married life and that divorces and broken homes took place. The author provides the example of one family where the wife suffered from a severe beating that the author herself had to listen to. She heard the screams of the wife and of her children. Such beatings were frequent, and on this occasion took place because the wife had exposed the fact that her husband was cheating on her. The author observes that in general men held a very demeaning view of their wives.

It is difficult to judge the evidential value of this piece. When dealing with missionary social commentary, we have to keep in mind that they viewed all of Thai society from an ideological perspective. It was, to them, heathen and evil. There is little doubt that our "Bangkok Missionary" reported faithfully the details of the particular case described in her article. There is also no doubt that she felt she had cause from her personal experience to generalize to the whole of Thai society. How accurate her judgment is, however, must be weighed in terms of other data. It is worth noting, in any event, that "women's liberation" is not the invention of the mid to late 20th century. This missionary, at least, is deeply concerned with justice and liberation in gender relations.

Source: A Bangkok Missionary, "Wifehood in Siam," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN And OUR MISSION FIELD 5, 5(May 1890): 121.

HeRD #259 - Christmas

Christmas in the Thai church is a mystery, at least in the historical sense. Protestants here emphasize Christmas over Easter to the extent that in some cases churches fail to celebrate Easter at all. Christmas, on the other hand, is the high point of the ecclesiastical calendar. Why? There are probably many historical factors at work. It might be that Thai culture feels uncomfortable with Easter because of its portrayal of Christ as a convicted and crucified criminal who suffered. There is little doubt that popular Protestant theology in Thailand exalts the God-Jesus to the near exclusion of the man-Jesus, so this speculation is possible. If so, Easter is more an embarrassment than a cause for celebration.

It seems to me, on a less lofty plane, that the missionary approach to Christmas may also have played a part in bringing Christmas so radically to the fore-front. Kate Fleeson in a letter published in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN in May 1890 described a Christmas celebration held at the Lampang Sunday School in December 1889. They celebrated with a "real Christmas tree, as we do at home," something the children had never seen before. There was cake, tea, taffy, and popcorn balls; and all of the children received presents. Fleeson pulled off the whole thing as a surprise, and it was clear that both children and adults had a good time. What impressions were made on young Christian minds? Nothing like this happened at Easter. It seems

plausible that missionary nostalgia for a home-like Christmas and the attempts to recreate Christmas in northern Thailand was another source for the latter-day emphasis on Christmas.

Source: Fleeson, letter dated 27 December 1889, WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN And OUR MISSION FIELD 5, 5(May 1890): 128-129.

HeRD #260 - First Impression

Larissa Cooper, writing in a letter dated 15 November 1890 and printed in the March 1891 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, wrote that her first impression of Bangkok from a distance was that it looked just like an American city with churches and spires "pointing skyward." She lamented that, "The reality doesn't bear out the first impression, but we hope for a time when such will be the case." It's difficult to be precise about Cooper's meaning here. Did she mean simply that she hoped that Bangkok would become like an American city in that it was full of churches? Or do her words also imply that she hoped it would become American-like more generally? My sense is that the larger meaning is constantly implied in the narrower one-- the hope that Thailand would become Christian necessarily meant it would have to become more Western.

Source: Miss L. J. Cooper, letter dated 15 November 1890, in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 6, 3(March 1891): 78.

HeRD #261 - Racism?

While the missionaries were clearly and most certainly ethnocentric in their attitudes about Thai society, it is more difficult to decide whether or not they were racist. There are few sources that would seem to indicate that such was the case. Mary Cort, in an article in May 1891 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, provides one example. In the article she refers to four little Siamese children being afraid of white people and asks of her readers, "Did it ever occur to you that black folks can be as afraid of us as we used to be of the negroes?"

Cort, a North Carolinian by birth, seems to be saying here quite clearly that in the past she had an irrational fear of black people. Given the context of the Deep South in the late 19th century, we can conclude with a fair degree of certainty that she was a racist at that time. It would seem, however, that in later years she had come to see her former feelings towards blacks in a different light. She could look at the fear Thai children felt towards her sympathetically and with some understanding of how black people must have felt towards her. On the other hand, it is interesting that her experiences with these Thai children recalled to mind her former experiences with black people. She, in a sense, equated being Thai with being black.

As always we have to be careful about not making too much of one passing reference. Perhaps the most we can say is that by 1891 Cort still clearly viewed people of other cultures in terms of race. She saw parallels between Asians and the black people of her childhood, a people she once must have felt inherently inferior. But she also seems to have gained new insights that, at the very least, softened her racist background.

Source: Mary L. Cort, "In and Out of Petchaburee," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 6, 5(May 1891): 129-131.

HeRD #262 - Worship & Spirit

Laura Eakin, in a letter written in March 1891 and published in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN in August 1891, describes chapel services at the Boys' High School in Bangkok with these words, "It seems remarkable to me that so many heathen boys bow their heads reverently and make no disturbance whatever during these seasons of worship. The Spirit is truly in our midst, although His workings are quiet." It is striking how clearly Eakin reflects the subdued, quiet form of Protestantism that marked 19th century conservative American Presbyterianism. We have noted elsewhere that the "Old School" Presbyterians entirely rejected emotional, demonstrative revivalism. They prized a quiet, orderly, introspective, and learned approach to worship and to the Christian life generally. Eakin, here, is delighted that "heathen" Thai boys seem to take to that style of spirituality readily. It is to her a sign of the presence of the Spirit that they do so.

We shouldn't overlook the profound impact the Presbyterian "style" has had on Thai Protestantism. It became the traditional and accepted approach to the Christian faith that in our time is accepted by many in the CCT as the "true way" and rejected by others as lifeless. The highly influential revivalistic movement that emerged in the 1920s was a reaction against the "emotionless" Christianity that many take to mark Presbyterianism. Thai Pentecostalism, which developed into a major force in the 1980s, is another reaction against "traditional" worship.

In this instance and more generally, the study of Thai Protestant history between 1840 and 1970, or even 1980, must begin with and focus on the Presbyterian missions and the churches born of those missions. Other missions and churches have been "present," to be sure, but not in the axial manner of the Presbyterians.

Source: Laura Olmstead Eakin, letter dated 10 March 1891, in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 6, 8(August 1891): 222.

HeRD #263 - Buddhism Defined

Robert Irwin, writing in the May 1892 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN provides a particularly succinct statement of the missionary view of northern Thai Buddhism. He writes, "There are many interesting things about the monasteries, but the interest dwindles to nothing before the fact that this mighty atheistic and agnostic system of Buddhism, with its absurd combination of high moral principles and degrading superstitions, holds millions of the human race in the grasp of a cold and heartless belief, giving to some the glimmer of a hope of future nothingness, and that hope based on an impossibility."

However we may feel about Irwin's statements, we should remember that he felt very deeply about the degradation he saw around him. He continued on, "Like Paul at Athens, my spirit was stirred in me and I preached Christ, a living, loving, crucified Saviour, as well as my limited knowledge of the language would permit."

Source: Robert Irwin, "On the Maa Wung River, Below Lakawn," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 7, 5(May 1892): 126-127.

HeRD #264 - Towards Cultural Sensitivity

It is possible to describe the general 19th century Presbyterian missionary attitude towards Thai culture. It was defined by ethnocentrism and a narrow view of the relationship of Christianity to people of other faiths. Within that general description, however, there lurks a variety of other views. Annabel Galt wrote in a January 1892 letter later published in the May 1892 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN that some of the customs she found in Thailand

seemed strange. It took some effort for her to "join in" them. But she tried to do so because, as she wrote, "...we have no right to disregard them and, taking all into consideration, many of them are not less sensible than some of our own." It would have been unlikely to find a Presbyterian missionary expressing these sentiments even a decade earlier, but by the early 1890s there were some changes coming about in missionary thinking in Thailand and in American Protestant thinking about other cultures and other peoples. Galt's words reflect that change.

Source: Annabel Galt, letter dated 26 January [1892] in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 7, 5(May 1892): 135.

HeRD #265 - Strangers at Home

The old-time Presbyterian missionaries were fully aware of the difficult task they faced in "calling out" Christian churches from Thai society. Writing in the July 1892 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, Margaret Galt observed that the great mass of the Thai people weren't interested in any kind of teaching. Those among them who knew about Christianity refused to sacrifice the "customs of their fathers" for a new religion. It reflected upon their human nature that they "love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil." Galt went on to state that the converts were "sorely tried" because they were surrounded by the wicked practices of their "heathen" neighbors. She wrote, "Every influence has a degenerating effect on their spiritual lives, and only the power of God is able to keep such from falling. Paul's epistles to the early churches come to these churches won from heathenism with peculiar force."

We should take note of a couple of things here. First, Galt closely identified the missionary and convert struggle to maintain a life distinct from the larger culture with biblical times and themes. This wasn't a new battle they were waging, but simply another skirmish in a war that had been going on for over 1,900 years. Second, Galt fully realizes the tremendous gravitational pull the "old culture" exercised over the small Christian community. I don't remember if I've used the image of a satellite in HeRD previously, but if so it bears repeating. It was as if the Presbyterians were trying to launch and maintain a tiny satellite in an orbit around a massive planet with an equally over-powering gravitational well. It took great effort to keep that small object in orbit.

Source: Margaret Galt, letter dated 21 March 1892, in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 7, 7(July 1892): 195.

HeRD #266 - Lizzie's Ministry

The mission field often made the missionary rather than the other way around. Missionaries, that is, found that what they intended to do and what they ended up doing could differ a great deal. Elizabeth ("Lizzie") Eakin offers an example. She came to Bangkok in 1888 to assist her brother, the Rev. John A. Eakin, in starting up a mission boys' high school. She did that, but she also found herself involved in medical work as well. In a May 1893 letter subsequently published in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN in September of that same year, Eakin explained that Bangkok only had two doctors at that time. (She meant, of course, Western-style doctors). Neither one was a missionary. It happened that she came across a woman in critical condition and, there being no doctor available, treated the woman herself. She thereafter continued to treat people and became more proficient at it, and as a result more and more people came to her for medical assistance. She artfully turned the medical work into an evangelistic opportunity by holding what amounted to a clinic on Sunday mornings in conjunction with

Christian worship services conducted by the missionaries. She wrote, "Sometimes it seems quite like a dispensary, but in this way many come and hear the Gospel."

There are a number of ways to look on Eakin's experience. A woman's history would note how the mission field often opened up opportunities for women they seldom had in the United States. A social history might remark on the importance of the missionaries in importing Western medicine. A history of Protestant ministries would most certainly observe how the missionaries attempted to turn every activity into an evangelistic opportunity.

Source: Lizzie Eakin, letter, 20 May [1893], *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* 8, 8(September 1893): 252.

HeRD #267 - Musical Indigenization

Indigenization is the process of transforming that which is foreign to an environment into something that is native or native-like to that environment. On the whole, the "old time" missionaries weren't very good at indigenization. At the end of the 19th century, however, Presbyterian missionaries were making some attempts at indigenizing church music. An article in the May 1895 issue of *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* describes such efforts. In the North, the Rev. Jonathan Wilson was writing new hymns in northern Thai. An unnamed person had turned "Old 100th" into a chant, and the Rev. Robert Irwin had also turned the Gloria Patri into a chant. In Bangkok, Miss [Larissa] Cooper had re-written a number of hymns to conform to Siamese prosody. The article stated, "It is believed the Christian religion will gain by using the native melodies...especially those sacred and venerable chants which are associated with religion in Siam." This is the earliest instance that I'm aware of in which the Presbyterians in Thailand consciously sought to adapt church music to Thai culture. It gives us further evidence that in the 1890s changes were taking place in missionary thinking about the relationship of Christianity to Thai culture.

Source: [no author], "The Service of Song in Siamese and Lao Worship," *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* 10, 5(May 1895): 122-23.

HeRD #268 - Transformed Women

Ada Collins observed in an article entitled "Lao Women" and published in *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* in May 1896, that conversion to Christianity transformed northern Thai women into brighter and happier looking women. They had been liberated from a hopeless, godless religion and from a society that kept women in a low status. Christian women learned to pray and to lead singing. Collins avowed that, "...not only is the inward change great but, externally, the change in a Christian Lao woman is just as noticeable. It is at once indicated by her wearing more and cleaner clothing than her heathen sisters."

In interpreting Collins' statements, we have to carefully note the ideological context of them. Collins is arguing that Christianity alone had the power to liberate northern Thai women from bondage and transform them into whole, happy people. In this context, she more or less necessarily has to emphasize the terrible state in which northern Thai women lived. Her views on the status of women are at odds with those frequently expressed in other places in the missionary record [see HeRD #125] as we will see in our next HeRD [#269]. I suspect that Collins herself, in a different context, would agree that the status of northern Thai women was not as low as she claims here.

Source: Ada P. Collins, "Lao Women," 11, 5(May 1896): 121-2

HeRD #269 - A Most Advanced Nation

In HeRD #268, Ada Collins lamented the low status of women in northern Thai society. She wrote her article in May 1896. Just one year later, Dora Taylor wrote an article in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN in which she stated, "If we judge by woman's position the degree of civilization attained in Laosland, I should say it is more advanced than that of most idolatrous nations." From what I know about northern Thai society, Taylor is more nearly correct than Collins.

All of this suggests that if one is interested in "making" the missionaries hold a certain position, one can always find "good" and "juicy" quotations to "prove" they said whatever it is we want them to say. It is more difficult (and more interesting as well as more truthful!) to search out the larger tendencies within the missionary record. In this case, Collins is more nearly typical of missionary views on northern Thai society generally while Taylor reflects a view point on women more frequently expressed in mission records.

Source: Dora Taylor, "Family Life in Laos," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 12, 5(May 1897): 121-122.

HeRD #270 - The Deeper Meaning of Weddings

The following was written by Larissa Cooper in the May 1897 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN. Cooper wrote, "Weddings of Christian Siamese girls mean to us more, perhaps, than you would think. Every new home where Christ is known and honored means one more step towards 'Siam for Christ' and one more lever to lift this land upwards. It means that good influences instead of evil will surround the early years of those who will influence the Siam of the Twentieth Century."

One can argue, in a sense, that missionary women were feminist activists, although admittedly of a rather narrow sort. They had, at least, a very definite evangelistic strategy based on the social importance of women. Nineteenth century American thinking about gender relations and roles assigned to women a definite "sphere" of activity centered on (and usually limited to) the home. It was women's God-given mission in life to create strong, moral, and loving domestic environments that would "tame" worldly husbands and "train up" unruly children. This model, accepted by women and men alike, held that women were a key means for both civilizing and Christianizing society. It is one of those wonderful paradoxes of life that missionary women frequently stepped OUT of their assigned sphere, the home, in order to train Thai women to function more effectively IN that sphere. Missionary women, that is, frequently acted "like men" in assuming professional and leadership roles usually denied them in the United States. But they did this in order to help Thai women better live within their more restricted social and religious sphere.

Source: Miss Cooper, letter, August 1896, WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 12, 5(May 1897): 125.

HeRD #271 - The Seed

All of the 19th century Protestant missions in Thailand emphasized printing and had their own presses. In an article on the Presbyterian Siam Mission press in the June 1897 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, John A. Eakin observed that selling and distributing Christian literature in Thailand was relatively easy. He argued that the whole population, "...is gradually becoming penetrated and permeated by the leaven of divine truth, and it is impossible

to estimate the result of this silent, secret influence. God's Word will not return unto Him void." Eakin saw evidence that "this silent seed-sowing" was blessed by God. He time and again came across individuals from distant provinces who professed to believe in the Christian religion after having read books about it. This, in spite of the fact that they had never seen a Christian teacher. He wrote, "Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to accompany the printed words into the homes of those who are sitting in darkness, opening their eyes to see the light of everlasting life."

Eakin here provides us with a classic justification for missionary presses in Thailand. The missionaries' favorite image was that of a seed that, once planted, grows mostly on its own. Such seed often bears unexpected fruit in unexpected places.

Source: J. A. Eakin, "The Mission Press in Siam," *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* 12, 6(June 1897): 186-187.

HeRD #272 - The Flies of August

This HeRD falls into the "just couldn't pass it up" category. Rosaltha (Mrs. F. I.) Lyman, newly arrived in Bangkok, shared her first impressions with the readers of *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* in its October 1897 number. She wrote that in Bangkok heathenism and Christianity were struggling as Jacob wrestled all night, and she avowed that she shared the "blessed hope" of Psalm 72 that all the nations would serve Christ. She put the struggle to achieve that end in Thailand in the framework of civilization versus a lack of civilization. She observed, thus, that the carriages, horses, and trams of Bangkok looked civilized to her. The narrow dirty streets, nude children, and nearly nude populace, on the other hand, appeared uncivilized. In terms of a lack of civilization, she was especially struck by the monks. She wrote, "I had read of the priests, but was not prepared to see the yellow-robed creatures with shaven heads so numerous." She felt that the priests were as numerous as flies in August at home, and observed, "But they are not as our flies, eating the refuse. They live on the fat of the land."

Lyman's views on the monkhood were quite typical of missionary thinking well into the 20th century. We might observe, however, that hers were a bit more crudely put than usual. As we seek a "balance" in interpreting missionary thinking and activity in Thailand, we need to remember that a strong prejudice against Buddhism was a central fact of both. At the same time we should also note the difficulty Lyman had in deciding whether or not Bangkok was "civilized" or not. It was a perplexing mixture that defied easy analysis. Missionary thinking in general shared her ambivalence, and one finds in missionary literature very few clear references to either the Thai or the northern Thai being called "uncivilized" by the missionaries. They recognized that Thailand was civilized in a manner of speaking, though they would not have seen it as being so fully civilized as the United States.

Source: Mrs. F. I. Lyman, letter, 26 May [1897], *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* 12, 10(October 1897): 277-278.

HeRD #273 - Medical Questions

In an article published in the November 1897 issue of *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN*, Dr. Mary Bowman described the various medical practices of northern Thai "spirit doctors" and northern Thai ideas about health care. Wherever she turned, she saw almost universal superstition and ignorance, which caused her to ask, "How to reach the mass of the people, how to alleviate their sufferings, how to teach them the simple laws of health, how to make them know Christ as one who can help them in every condition of life, how to make them know that our work for them is not done for the sake of 'merit,' are all most perplexing questions which

confront the medical missionary constantly." This is a fascinating mix of questions, that recall for us yet again the missionary conception of "benevolence," itself a mix of humanitarian and religious concerns that can't be separated out from each other in missionary thinking. These questions also indicate their situation sometimes forced the missionaries to reflect on quite basic questions concerning their professions and their faith.

One wonders, on the other hand, if Bowman had actually studied traditional health practices sufficiently to judge them as she did. I suspect not. We hear much of the failures of traditional medicine in missionary records, partly because in the earlier days only those patients who weren't healed by other means would be brought to the missionary. We are left with the impression that no one was ever healed by traditional practices. One wonders.

Source: Mary A. Bowman, "The Medical Missionary *Versus* the Laos Doctor," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 12, 11(November 1897): 301-303.

HeRD #274 - Comforting Words to Missionary Ears

Missionary work wasn't easy. Missionaries, particularly newer ones, experienced numerous strains and tensions that could weigh heavily on them. They had relatively few "sources of comfort" with which to deal with their fears and discouragement's. One of those was the Bible. In a letter printed in the August 1898 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, Rosaltha Lyman, working in Bangkok, gave examples of passages that comforted her. They included Isaiah 49:10, which says that God will guide "them" to "springs of water," and Revelation 7:16-17, where it promises that those Christians who have experienced "great tribulation" won't hunger any more or be scorched by the sun. The Lamb will feed them and lead them to "living fountains." She also mentioned Deuteronomy 32:2. Of such passages, Lyman wrote, "I could but think this was written for missionaries' comfort, solace and joy, who live in the tropics. These words sink down upon our thirsty, weary souls and we are revived and praise fills our hearts."

Way back in HeRDs #113 and #114 we saw one way in which the missionaries used the Bible. They read it with an eye for finding passages to support or give images to their evangelistic emphasis. We noted there that they sometimes interpreted the Bible in ways far afield from what biblical scholars now consider to be the original intent of the authors. Here we find a different usage of the Bible, one based on passages intended to encourage God's People and from which the missionaries themselves could find strength.

HeRD #275 - Conversions in Nan

Dr. S. C. Peoples of the Nan Station, in a letter published in the October 1898 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, reported on the conversion of the wife of one of his patients. Her husband, as Peoples told the story, was ill and not expected to live; but after an operation by Peoples he did recover. The doctor attributed the man's survival to the gracious of love God, who saw the tears of a "heathen woman" and took pity on her. The woman came to Mrs. Peoples the day after her husband's operation and told her that this was the first day she hadn't heard him groan in pain. She told Mrs. Peoples that she and her husband would "cleave" to her and the good doctor forever. They would convert to Christianity.

As far as we can tell from missionary records, very few northern Thais converted out of any deep-felt sense of personal sin, such as is demanded by classical Protestantism. The liberation they experienced was not from sin--at least, not generally. It was from social oppression, from illness, and from certain animistic practices. As was befitting hierarchical

northern Thai society, these converts expressed their reasons for conversion in terms of relationships with individuals of higher status. They "thanked" God and the missionary doctor by "cleaving" to the doctor and converting to his religion.

Source: S.W. Peoples, undated letter, WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 13, 10 (October 1898): 265

HeRD #276 - "Uncover the Mysteries"

Taken From a Regent Chiang Mai Resort publicity brochure selling the charms of northern Thailand: "Uncover the mysteries of a bygone civilization. The Enigma of mist shrouded peaks. And the secret to better tennis and golf."

HeRD #277 - McGilvary & the Kamu

During the 1890s, McGilvary initiated work among the Kamu, a tribal group located in modern-day Laos, then French controlled territory. In 1898, He traveled to French territory with the intention of spending a full year with the Kamu, because there was a real possibility that many would convert to Christianity. French officials, however, ordered him to leave the country. He felt so depressed at having to leave such promising work that we went into something of a spiritual retreat. He spent two mornings sitting on the lower limb of a tree reading his Bible and praying about the situation. He "committed" the Kamu to God's care. The result was a substantial reduction in his depression. McGilvary wrote, "The whole Bible seemed never before so full of promises suitable to my situation, and somehow or other the burden seemed to be lifted..." He went on to write, "The second day it seemed so sure that I tried to carve on the limb where I sat, 'June 26, P.H. & P. A.'-prayer heard and prayer answered." In his article on this experience, published in the May 1899 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, McGilvary expressed his feeling that things worked out in accordance with his prayer. He was able to leave two northern Thai evangelists with the Kamu. Their work "bore fruit."

From a church historian's perspective, McGilvary's manner of dealing with his depression and fears points to the nature of his personal piety. It is sometimes difficult for so-called "secular" historians to deal with missionaries and other religiously-motivated people. It is hard for them to understand the power, the depth of such motivations. It would be impossible, however, to understand the person and the work of a man such as Daniel McGilvary without giving central attention and importance to that motivation. If we haven't noted it before, we should also note here that McGilvary was given to "going off" at important times to pray, read the Bible, and think.

Source: Daniel McGilvary, "The Kah Moohs," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 14, 5(May 1899): 129-130.

HeRD #278 - A Happy People

Writing in the May 1900 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, Lillian Curtis provided her readers with a glowing account of the northern Thai, whom she called the "Laos" after the fashion of her day. She wrote, "Many of their ways seem odd to our Occidental ideas, but from the time of our very first sight of the country and people we find much to enjoy, admire and love." She especially described northern Thai home life, saying "The homes of Laos are perhaps the happiest to be found in the heathen world." She stated that the people were affectionate, domestic in their taste, loved children, and had homes that were comfortable for hot a climate. She found that simplicity was the rule of life among them. They were free from social

cares and strains, and they lived their lives with light hearts and smiling faces. She especially made the point that northern Thai Christians made "good, earnest Christians." She wrote, "...they are generally whole-hearted followers of the Master." Curtis and her husband had worked in northern Thailand for four years prior to 1900, and had already returned to the United States when these words were published. In 1903 she published the first book-length "ethnographic" description of the northern Thai, entitled THE LAOS OF NORTH SIAM.

Although she is quite complimentary of the northern Thai here, there lies embedded within her description a sense that the northern Thai were still child-like. They were a simple people, light-hearted and carefree. They smiled a lot. By implication, they also lacked seriousness and depth and those traits that made for mature leadership of churches. They were a people who had not reached the higher levels of civilization already attained by the West. This is more of a caricature, a very superficial one at best, than it is a balanced description of northern Thai society. I would also suggest to you that it is a naive one.

Source : Lillian J. Curtis, "In the Home of Laos," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 15, 5(May 1900): 117-119.

HeRD #279 - Building Character

Anabelle Briggs, writing in the May 1901 number of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN describe eight young women who were studying in the Chiang Mai Girls' School (Now Dara Academy). They were able to help in the church, able to give a good witness to their faith, and were a good influence on the people around them. Briggs wrote that it did the missionary heart good to see the "beautiful Christian character" developing in these women. She then stated, "After all, that is the great and important work-character building, rather than receiving mere numbers into the church." She further observed that these eight girls had learned in missionary homes to sew, cook, wash dishes, serve table, sweep, and perform other tasks. In school they'd learned to read and write. And in both places they had learned to think and, more important than anything else, to serve God and their "fellow men."

Briggs' thoughts on the purpose of missionary education were very much in keeping with traditional American thinking about education. Throughout the 19th century, American society generally looked on education as primarily a way of socializing children morally. What is esp. interesting here, however, is the role of the missionary home as an adjunct "school" that augmented and complimented the mission's formal program of education. These girls had worked as servants in missionary homes, and Briggs felt that the experience had imparted to them not only domestic skills but also new values. We should also note that Briggs felt, evidently, that these girls really didn't know how to think until they came into the missionary-Protestant Christian domain. Taken together, Briggs' article is a remarkable affirmation of the missionary role in the Westernization of northern Thailand.

Source: Anabelle K. Briggs, "Re-Stationed and Looking About," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 16, 5(May 1901): 130-131.

HeRD #280 - Johannine Schismatics

Raymond E. Brown in his book, THE COMMUNITY OF THE BELOVED DISCIPLE, presents a fascinating explanation of the process by which Christianity formed itself into a separate religion. According to Brown, Jewish authorities grudgingly allowed Jews who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah to continue to participate in the life of the Jewish community and in the activities of the Jewish religion. The "Johannine Community" of

"Christians," however, presented them a problem. First, they were a group of Jewish Christians who rejected the importance of Jewish worship and religious activities for themselves. Second, they had evangelized among the Samaritans and succeeded into bringing Samaritans to believe in Jesus as well. Third, these followers of the "beloved disciple" had come to have a "high christology" that emphasized the divinity of Christ. Brown argues that all of this led to the expulsion of the Johannine Christians from Judaism. he writes, "Truly, Johannine Christianity has become a new religion separate from Judaism, a religion that self-defensively affirms that it is richer than poorer---what it has gained is greater than what it has left behind. On the other side of the street, the spurning of cult and feasts by the Johannine Christians after their expulsion from the synagogue served to make 'the Jews' certain they had done the right thing in rooting out such people." (p. 53)

Brown's portrayal of the emergence of Christianity out of Judaism at least serves to remind us that Christian relations with people of other faiths has always been a major "problem" and issue for Christianity. This is particularly true of Judaism, the Christian church's "parent faith." The lesson for the study of Thai church history is, I think, that in accounting for the emergence of the Christian church in Thailand we have to give special attention to its relationship to Buddhism and animism.

HeRD #281 - First Church, Asia

In its most proper sense, Asian church history begins in Jerusalem and is the granddaddy of all church history. If, however, we talk about the church "outside the Roman Empire," early Asian church history is more of a neglected orphan than anything else. It is also quite murky. There are legends about the Apostle Thomas going to India, but they are impossible now to verify. There are also legends about a disciple of Thomas, named Addai, being the first one to carry Christianity to Edessa, in Syria. It is possible, perhaps likely, that Edessa emerged as the first center of "Asian Christianity." Samuel Moffet in the first volume of his HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN ASIA argues, "By the end of the first century, as tradition contends, it is quite possible that there were indeed Christians in Asia from the Euphrates to India, and that Edessa, 'the blessed city,' had become the center of an early Asian Christianity so vigorous that it had already begun to penetrate eastward into the Persian Empire." (p. 56) According to Moffet, furthermore, the church in Edessa was the first organized church in non-Roman Asia for which historians have "solid evidence" of its existence. (p. 57)

It is one of the ironies of Thai church history that Edessa has nothing to do with Bangkok. Thai Protestantism finds its formal ecclesiastical heritage in Philadelphia, Boston, Edinburgh, Geneva, and, more distantly, Rome before it returns to Asia and the church in Jerusalem (which is the "Mother Church" to us all). The same is true for Thai Catholicism, though we have to insert cities like Paris and Lisbon in place of Philadelphia, etc.

HeRD #282 - Sixth Conference I

The Sixth International Conference on Thai Studies opened here in Chiang Mai yesterday afternoon (Mon. 14th), and Dr. Prawase Wasi delivered the keynote address to an audience numbering over 500, including Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. I'd like to share with you thoughts from Dr. Prawase. He argued that education today should aim to create an "expanded consciousness" of the unity and the spirituality of reality. Dr. Prawase presented to us a visionary description of the vastness of the universe and urged that in one sense there is no way we can comprehend that vastness. Yet, he also explained that some 40 or 50 billion years ago, prior to the "Big Bang," all of what now comprises the universe was compressed into one small point of intensely dense matter. The matter that makes up each of us came from that point so that

we are one with the universe in a very intimate way. He stated, "We are the Universe. It is us." This sense of unity is at the heart of the new consciousness that is growing in the world and is symbolized by the beautiful photographs from space of the planet Earth. He cited statements by astronauts that seeing that globe floating against the velvet backdrop of space changes their whole way of thinking. Dr. Prawase observed that this "new consciousness" is already a reality in our midst. He quoted research done in the United States that claims that some 44 million Americans exemplify it. It is a spiritually based, anti-materialistic consciousness typified by seven movements, including among them democracy, human rights, gender equality, and environmental concern. Dr. Prawase didn't make a direct connection between his observations and Thai Studies, but the message seems clear anyway: those engaged in Thai studies should associate their research and teaching with the new consciousness and promote it.

Although Dr. Prawase made little mention of organized religion, his message was a religious one. He repeatedly used the term "spirituality." To a large degree, he removed us from the mundane world of scholarship into a visionary realm in which the knowledge we create amounts to what he termed "cultural DNA." It is social and cultural knowledge that ties the past to the present and that programs the future even as DNA programs the body. It was an excellent keynote address.

HeRD #283 - Sixth Conference II

It isn't possible to attend nearly all of the sessions of this conference that one would like to attend. There are 7 "themes" running concurrently, and some of those themes are sub-divided into sections. I'd like to share with you some points from the presentation of one of the readers of HeRD, Dr. Mike Leming. Mike teaches sociology at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota USA. His paper was on "The Christian Karen of Northern Thailand."

The paper examines religious affiliation as a factor in the integration of the Karen tribal people into Thai society. Mike began with the thesis that Christian Karens are more likely to be isolated from the rest of Thai society when compared to Buddhist Karen. He looked on the Karen Christians as a "double minority," that is both an ethnic and religious minority. His research found precisely the opposite to be the case. He found Christian Karen more "Thai-ized" and less "Karen" than Buddhist Karen in terms of daily living. As it turns out, the Christians are much better educated than their Buddhist Karen neighbors, and Mike sees education as the key factor in determining the degree to which Karen have assimilated themselves into Thai society. The Karen Christians he studied have their own school, but of course it teaches the government curriculum and does so in central Thai. The Karen Christians themselves have very rigidly refused to have their school doing anything to preserve either the Karen language or culture--this out of fear that "the government" might be displeased if they did. Thus, the Christians have themselves, probably unwittingly, promoted the decline of their "Karen-ness" and aided in their integration into the larger society.

Mike found that in the two villages he studied, one Christian and one Buddhist, that when he asked what language people used with their friends some 67% of the Christians spoke Karen with their friends while 98% of the Buddhists did so. He found that 65% of the Buddhists ate only Karen food at home while only a little more than 1% of the Christians did so. Or, again, 52% of the Buddhist Karen wore tribal clothing every day while only 14% of the Christians did so.

It would be interesting to move to the level of values and to see if there has been an impact at that level as well. In any event, it would appear that the Protestant emphasis on a literate Christianity has had unforeseen consequences and implications for the relationship of

tribal people to Thai society. One wonders to what degree the same was true for the northern Thai Christians a century ago.

HeRD #284 - Sixth Conference III

I heard 8 papers yesterday [Wed., Oct. 16th], in 3 sessions of the Sixth International Conference on Thai Studies, and I'd like to share with you a couple of ideas that "jumped" out at me during the day. One idea will suffice for today. You'll get another one in HeRD #285.

At the end of his paper entitled "The Changing Face of Thai Religion," Dr. Gehan Wijeyewardene (Australia National U.), concluded by writing, "I will close by emphasizing my view that many of these changes represent a growth of individualism and perhaps involve an attack on the traditional nature of Thai religion which was more attuned to communal rather than individual salvation." He goes on, "...since its inception Buddhism was a religion that preached to the ruling classes, with the intention of creating a society which was conducive to Buddhist renunciation and salvation...The emphasis on individualism and individual salvation, undermines this character of Thai Buddhist civilization." (Proceedings, Theme 2, p. 472)

Note two characteristics here. One, traditional Thai Buddhism emphasized communal salvation. Two, it sought to create a society appropriate to its practices. This characterization of traditional Thai Buddhism very well fits American Old School Presbyterianism as well. While the Old School made allowance for individual conversion experiences, it tended to locate the source of salvation in a proper social and cultural environment. Such an environment trained up children to faith and provided a secure society for Christians to live, one that augmented and protected their religious faith. And, similar to Dr. Gehan's portrayal of traditional Thai Buddhism, the Presbyterians directed their evangelistic and missionary efforts towards the transformation of society into a "Christian America." Some Presbyterians consciously sought to direct their evangelistic message to America's upper classes on the belief that the Christianization of them would facilitate and hasten the Christianization of the whole of society. It is worth asking if this mean that the 19th century Presbyterian missionary approach was "congruent" to some aspects of Thai religious thinking? If so, did that congruence have any significance? Or was it merely a fascinating coincidence?

HeRD #285 - Sixth Conference IV

Louis Gabaude, of the Ecole Francais d'Extreme-Orient and a Chiang Mai resident, submitted a paper to the conference entitled, "Globalization in Thai Buddhism through SAMADHI Magazine: An Introduction." The following brief quotation from him serves to remind us that some of the communication barriers we are so proudly destroying in the Age of the Global Village were artificial ones we created ourselves. He writes, "As for Thailand's immediate Southeast Asian neighbors, in at least some periods of history, links and communications, albeit slow, were even more frequent, easier and freer than they have been in this century when the 'mapping' ["modernization"] of Thailand, Western colonialism, and ideologies have divided what used to be a single Southeast Asian 'religious place.'"

HeRD #286 - Sixth Conference V

Although I didn't hear this paper delivered, it offers insights for those interested in the relationship of Christianity to culture in Thailand. Ryoko Nishi of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies wrote a paper entitled, "Social Memory as it Emerges" A Consideration of the Death of a Young Convert on the West Coast in Southern Thailand." In the article he reports on the death of a young, married Muslim convert in Satun Province, southern Thailand. The paper

notes that the Islam in Satun has taken over many elements of Buddhist thinking and has an unusually high rate of inter-marriage for Islam. The Satun Muslims are native Thai-speakers, something not true of most of Thailand's southern Islamic population. Most of them speak Malay as their first language.

As it happened, the deceased's Muslim wife and his Buddhist relatives fell into a controversy over his corpse with the Buddhist relatives ultimately seizing the corpse by a stratagem and cremating it according to Buddhist ritual. The issue for both the Muslim wife and the Buddhist relatives was that of merit. From the Muslim perspective, the deceased was a Muslim, though he hadn't been a very good one. He drank, ate pork at times, and seldom attended religious activities. In any event, the Muslim community felt that it would have been sinful for the wife to agree to the Buddhist cremation of her convert husband because of Muslim strictures on the relationship of Muslims to other religions. The Buddhist relatives justified their seizure of the body in two ways: first, the deceased had been a sinful Muslim and being buried with Muslim rites would have confirmed his sinfulness and tarnished his hopes for a good rebirth. Buddhist cremation enhanced those hopes. Second, the couple had no children to make merit for the deceased. The Buddhist family avowed that if there had been Muslim children they wouldn't have interfered.

Just a few observations. First, Nishi makes it clear that these Satun Muslims share with their Buddhist neighbors belief in such things as merit and reincarnation. They preserve their unique religious identity through ritual and in the insistence that conversion to another religion is a sin. Thai Protestantism has taken a somewhat different direction. It preserves its uniqueness primarily in its belief system, though its ritual is also unique. While I suppose it also considers conversion to another religion a sin, one never hears the matter put that way. Conversion by Protestants to Buddhism is a common event. Second, it is significant that one of the points of inter-religious tension here had to do with funeral rites. In mixed Buddhist-Protestant families this same tension arise, though it is seldom in so dramatic a fashion. Christian children, for example, find it difficult to meet the ritual expectations of Buddhism concerning making merit for the dead. Buddhist relatives find it equally difficult to accept Christian strictures against participation in their rituals. Finally, it would seem to be that Thai Islamic studies might have important insights to offer Thai Christians.

HeRD #287 - Sixth Conference VI

The high point of the Sixth International Conference on Thai Studies for me came on the last morning of the conference, Thursday, October 17th. The conference sponsored a round table on the current state of the study of Thai history. Before us sat three of the "Big Names" in Thai history, and into a room arranged to seat perhaps 50 crowded something around 180 people. The participants raised several key issues. They are important to the study of Thai church history to the extent that they comprise one of the scholarly contexts within which church historians must work. Dr. David Wyatt of Cornell U. deplored the current state of the sources for studying "pre-modern" Thai history. The old texts and inscriptions are scattered, poorly or not at all catalogued, improperly copied and transliterated when published, and just generally hard to get a hold of for historians. Dr. Yoneo Ishii, a well-known Japanese historian of Thailand, and Dr. Charnvit Kasetsiri of Thammasat U. both raised the issue of "unilinear" history. For most of this century, the standard interpretation of Thai history has been that the Thai nation began with the Kingdom of Sukhotai, was transformed into the Kingdom of Ayudhya, which eventually became the present "Bangkok Era." Few historians accept this schema, but nothing clear has been put in its place. Some argue that "the Thai" were always here and in one fashion or another eventually emerged as the ruling people.

Many other concerns came out, particularly regarding the present state of historical studies in Thailand. As is true elsewhere, the number of history students in Thai universities is dwindling and the quality is noticeably poorer than was true 15 or 20 years ago. Yet, this round table itself demonstrated the intense interest in historical study. As indicated above, it was packed and the discussions were lively, if somewhat chaotic.

In a sense, the discussions weren't directly relevant to the study of Thai church history. Church historians, for example, have much more ready access to the records they need to use than do historians in many other fields of Thai history. Unilinear history doesn't affect us directly, although obviously major trends in the interpretation of Thai history are important for church historians. It is usually stimulating, however, to hear "the Names" wrestle with the issues of the field, and this case was no exception.

HeRD #288 - Sixth Conference VII

In his presentation on Buddhism and globalization, Louis Gabaude observed that the world of globalization appeared to be shoving religion even further off into a corner. He cited the Sixth Conference itself as an example. There were, he noted, relatively few papers on religious subjects. Wondering if he was right, I counted the papers on religious subjects and found that of a total of 366 papers, 28 (7.7%) were on identifiably religious topics. These included Buddhism, animism, folk religion, and Christianity. Christianity was overtly the theme of only 4 papers, including two by the Office of History and another by Dr. Mike Leming, a recipient of HeRD. Even more striking is the fact that of a total of 115 panels and sessions, only 5 (4.3%) were on identifiably religious subjects. (I don't guarantee the complete accuracy of these figures).

It is worth wondering if religious themes were well-served, esp. when we note that the field of theology seems not to have been represented at all. It is hard to say whether the fact that religion was the overt subject of less than 10% of all papers and less than 5% of all panels is a "fair" treatment or not. It would seem to me, however, to be inadequate. It is also difficult to say just why religious themes and concerns were under-represented, if indeed they were. Is there a prejudice on the part of scholars against those themes? Have "religionists" walled themselves off from so-called "secular" scholarship? Are the Thai religions intellectually moribund and thus unable to contribute more than they did?

On a deeper level, I wonder if theological reflection on the issues raised by Thai studies is irrelevant to a conference such as this. Of the 28 papers, very few consciously reflected on those issues from a theological perspective. I personally only heard one, delivered by Dr. Tavivat Puntarigivat of Mahidol U., that attempted such reflection. His subject was "Toward Buddhist Social Liberation" and was termed "utopian" by one of his audience. Two other questions come to mind. Is a major conference on Thai studies a suitable venue for theological reflection? Two, would the attempt to use it for theological reflection be acceptable or even tolerated by the conference itself?

HeRD #289 - The Walls of Jericho

HeRD could spend a year going through all of the material that came out of the Sixth International Conference on Thai Studies, but the seven entries you've received will have to suffice for now. It's time to get back to WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN. I should have noted long ago that WOMAN'S WORK was a monthly magazine published by the women's boards for missions of the Presbyterian Church USA.

Jeannie McClure of the Siam Mission provides a classic statement of the "battle mentality" the old-time missionaries frequently carried into their work. In an article entitled, "Hand-to-Hand Work in Siam," published in the October 1902 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, McClure described a three week evangelistic campaign in which she participated. She noted that the missionaries attracted large crowds, and she was convinced that some people were seriously considering conversion. She then went on to state, "We often thought of the children of Israel going around the walls of Jericho when we started out with our tracts, realizing that the battle was not ours but God's."

The image is both stark and vivid. In some ways it expresses the heart of the missionary sense of what they were doing in Thailand. They were marching to war against the enemies of God. They were sounding their trumpets without the city walls, preparing for a vast miracle of victory to take place.

Source: Jeanie H. McClure, "Hand-to-Hand Work in Siam," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 17, 10(October 1902): 292-93.

HeRD #290 - On a Lighter Note

Here's one to close out the month on a lighter note. If Paul Eakin's biographical data on Rosaltha Lyman of the Presbyterian Siam Mission (see HeRD #272) is correct, she had one of the most improbable middle names one can imagine. Eakin lists her as Rosaltha NEBRASKA Lyman. And she was, indeed, born in Nebraska (Papillion, for the Nebraskans out there).

HeRD #291 - The "Antecedents Issue"

I've made the point before (e.g. in HeRD #280), but I think it bears repeating, that one of the central issues in the study of Thai church history is the relationship of the church to Buddhism-animism. Raymond Brown's reflections on Jewish-Christian relations in the early church are helpful here. Writing in THE COMMUNITY OF THE BELOVED DISCIPLE, Brown observes that the Johannine community of Christians was expelled from the synagogues because it insisted on the divinity of Jesus. Jewish authorities, Brown notes, for a time tolerated Jews who thought Jesus was the Messiah, but they couldn't abide those who turned him into a "second God." The Johannine Christians accepted expulsion. Eventually, even believing in Christ as the Messiah was taken by both Jews outside and inside the church to mean that one could not longer be a practicing Jew. Brown writes about Jewish-Christian relations today, "To Jews disturbed by Christian attempts to convert them, the Christian question comes back, which may be phrased in the words of John 9:22: Why have they agreed that anyone who acknowledges Jesus as Messiah can no longer be part of the synagogue? Christians have ceded to that decision by converting Jews AWAY FROM the synagogue. Both parties, today as then, need to wrestle with the question of believing in Jesus and remaining a practicing Jew--a question that ultimately reflects upon the compatibility of Christianity and Judaism." (p. 69, emphasis in original).

One of the things that has been striking about early church history is the relationship of the early church to Judaism. It was THE major issue facing the earliest church. By the same token, THE major issue facing the first generation of Thai Christians was their relationship to their former religion. The very fact that they "converted" suggests the nature of the break from the local temple that came with accepting Christianity. It is clear that even today one of the central questions facing Christians is the question of the boundaries between their religion and popular Buddhism. In Thailand, it was the Christians who initiated the break by insisting that believing in Jesus is incompatible with participating in the ritual life of their community. The community, in consequence, generally developed a negative attitude against Christians. Brown

raises the possibility of drawing the "boundaries" between Christianity and Judaism in new places. We need, I think, to consider that same issue in terms of Christianity's relationship to Buddhism in Thailand.

HeRD #292 - Keeping the Sabbath

Dr. C. H. Denman, of the Laos Mission, in an article published in the October 1902 issue of *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN*, related how the head of a Christian household at San Sai (located just east of Chiang Mai) explained to Denman why he hadn't been in church on a recent Sunday. Village officials had forced him to do government work (corvee labor) on that particular Sunday. Denman responded by reminding the man of Peter, "who thought it right to obey God rather than men, and exhorted him to never again let fear of man interfere with his duty to God." Contrast Denman's "old-fashioned" strict attitude towards the Sabbath with that of the Rev. John A. Eakin, a member of the Siam Mission. In an article that appeared in *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* just a few months earlier, in May 1902, Eakin wrote that he was approached by a Christian graduate of the Bangkok Station's high school. This graduate was a secretary in a police station, and he always had to work on Sundays. He asked Eakin to write a letter for him to get him excused from work on Sundays so he could go to church. The tone of Eakin's article suggests that Eakin didn't condemn the man in the way Denman had. He just wrote the letter.

The point here is not that one missionary was a "good guy" and the other one a "bad guy." It is, rather, that two missionaries from the same denomination and writing in the same year displayed different attitudes about the Sabbath. Context may have had something to do with it, as it would have been easier to reprimand a "lowly" farmer than an educated civil servant. Or, again, Denman may have been impressed negatively by the villager's excuse-making while Eakin was impressed positively by the civil servant's attempt to find a way out of his dilemma. From what I know about the two missionaries in question, however, I suspect that Denman was more "inclined" to a strict view of the Sabbath and a judgmental attitude about those who didn't live up to his standard. Eakin, in contrast, was probably more "inclined" towards a less strict and less judgmental approach.

Sources: C. H. Denman, "How the Medical Missionary Does Not Keep the Sabbath," *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* 17, 10(October 1902): 295-97; and, J. A. Eakin, "The Christian High School at Sumray," *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* 17, 5(May 1902): 134-135.

HeRD #293 - Two Boats

In the May 1902 issue of *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN*, the Rev. John A. Eakin of the Siam Mission described a Christian wedding ceremony he performed in which he wed a couple that had not actually converted to Christianity. Both of the newly weds had, however, expressed interest in the new religion. Eakin stated that he, "talked to them plainly about the duty of being faithful to the Lord, in whose name they had taken these vows. I especially warned them against the folly of trying to live according to both religions, saying that if a person who wished to cross the river should try to go in two boats at the same time he would soon find himself overboard." The image of two boats crossing the river at the same time is an apt one for describing the missionary perception of Christian-Buddhist relations. You must choose your boat. It's impressive how frequently dualistic images and attitudes, such as are reflected here, appear in the missionary literature.

Source: J. A. Eakin, letter, 31 May 1902, in *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* 17, 10(October 1902): 303-304.

HeRD #294 - Inscrutable Providence

Missionaries in Thailand felt deeply the deaths of their colleagues on the field. Jeanie McClure, thus, wrote, in the May 1903 number of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, concerning the death of Jennie Swart at Phet Buri that when Swart first arrived in Phet Buri, "We welcomed her as only the separated from all the world can." Swart first came to Phet Buri in 1898 and subsequently died in childbirth in 1901. Her death hit McClure with particular force. She wrote, "We still ask ourselves why it was. Here was one who had passed through the first most trying years. She was fitting into the work well...We needed her so much. Oh, why was it? Some time we shall understand." McClure went on to avow, "Heaven seems nearer now that she is there. Some whose gaze followed her in through the wide-open gates, never till then had a glimpse of the Eternal City." McClure called on God to make of Swart's dying the means for winning many converts to Christianity.

Over the years death or debilitating diseases removed a number of promising new missionaries from the field. Missionary literature sometimes terms such an occurrence as an "inscrutable Providence." As in this case, missionaries generally reaffirmed their faith in God, avowing that God had a reason for "calling home" those who died. They, furthermore, readily expressed their grief and confusion, thus making their statements of faith in God's providence all the more impressive. In this case, we should note that one way McClure sought meaning in Jennie Swart's death was by praying it be the cause of many conversions. Such a prayer gives further proof to the observation that the missionaries highly valued evangelism, generally placing it at the head of the church's ministries. They not infrequently saw evangelism as being the reason for the very existence of the church itself.

Source: Jeanie H. McClure, "Petchaburee Memories," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 18, 5(May 1903): 107-109.

HeRD #295 - The Web

From time to time, HeRD has made much of the concept of the past as a "web" of events, beliefs, and vast historical strands. The complexity of this web is such as to, at times, stagger the imagination, and trying to understand it is an awesome, ultimately impossible task. Brown's THE COMMUNITY OF THE BELOVED DISCIPLE provides an example. That book is a study of the "Johannine community," one of the parties or groups in the earliest church. At one point, Brown describes the relationship the Johannine Christians had with other Christian groups. Among those groups were the "crypto-Christians," Jewish Christians who remained in the synagogue. Brown writes, "John 12:42-43 supplies the clearest reference to a group of Jews who were attracted to Jesus so that they could be said to believe in him, but were afraid to confess their faith publicly lest they be expelled from the synagogue. John has contempt for them because in his judgment they prefer the praise of men to the glory of God." (pp. 71-72).

Some 18 centuries later, the very same issue of "crypto-Christians" arose again in northern Thailand. The first generation of northern Thai Christians preferred not to declare themselves Christians openly. The missionaries on the field in the late 1860s insisted, however, that if they were to be baptized and received into the church and the Kingdom of Heaven they MUST declare their faith publicly. They must make a complete break with their former religion. The missionaries exhibited John's perspective. It is nearly certain that they did so directly on biblical precedents taken from John and other Scriptures. In other words, the attitude taken by the Johannine party in the First Century almost certainly influenced the emergence of the northern Thai church in the Nineteenth Century. The web of the Thai church's past, if I'm correct on this

point, reaches that far (and further) back in time and that far away geographically. That is both exciting and intimidating.

HeRD #296 - The "Crypto-Christian" Question

In HeRD #295, we saw that the "Johannine community" of the early church pronounced a strong judgment against the Jewish "crypto-Christians," so-called, who refused to declare themselves Christians openly because they wanted to avoid expulsion from the synagogue. The Johannine Christians had been expelled because they insisted on the divinity of Jesus and denigrated the value of Jewish ritual. Brown in *THE COMMUNITY OF THE BELOVED DISCIPLE* argues that the crypto-Christian position was perhaps quite defensible from their own perspective. They would have seen Jesus in a less exalted way than did the Johannine Christians and also valued their Jewish heritage more deeply. They would have seen the expulsion of the Johannine faction from the synagogue as the consequence of the radical, unwarranted behavior of the Johannine Christians themselves. Brown suggests that the crypto-Christians probably viewed themselves as the more responsible party, the ones who worked from within the old religion. They would have believed they were following in the tradition of Jesus himself, as well as James and Peter, all of whom functioned within the synagogue. Brown goes on to write, "History has shown that their strategy had no future, for the Christian movement continued in the path blazed by John, away from the synagogue. Without such hindsight, however, the choice between confrontation and compromise may not have been a clear issue to many in the late first century. And indeed, in subsequent Christianity there have been many times when it was not easy to decide whether for the sake of the Gospel one should split from the establishment or should stay and work stubbornly within it, striving for change. On the long road which position really exhibits more courage?" (p. 73)

Brown is a Westerner, writing out of a dualistic heritage that requires an either-or attitude. One must either "compromise" or "confront." In the Thai context, however, it is worth wondering whether the dualistic paradigm is the wisest course of thinking for the church. Is it not possible to both "stand out" as a Christian and "stand in" as a participant in the communities' ritual life? Our Western instincts cry, "No!" We've taught the Thai church to cry, "No!" But, I wonder...South East Asians frequently value non-dualism, non-confrontation, and a middle way. Would not a truly indigenous Christianity share these values? Worth a thought.

HeRD #297 - Bears, Karen, & Noi Wong

Medical care, historically, has played an important part in the conversion of northern Thais to Christianity. Here's the case of Noi Wong, who in a sense experienced a two-part conversion. According to Hugh Taylor, writing in the May 1905 issue of *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN*, Noi Wong lived in Lampang Province. One day he was mauled by a bear and taken into the missionary hospital in the city. We can assume his case was a desperate one as the missionary doctors weren't called upon by rural peoples very often unless the injured or ill party was at death's door and local remedies had failed. While in the hospital, Noi Wong converted to Christianity. When he left the hospital, however, the Christian community and the missionaries lost track of him. One day, he reappeared asking for someone to visit his home village and baptize his family and a neighboring family. He related to Taylor how he had, in fact, lost interest in his new religion until he heard the singing and praying of Karen Christians. Although he didn't understand a word of what was going on he was profoundly impressed with its spiritual depth, and the experience helped him to realize that God had sent the bear as a way to bring him to Christianity.

The Karens referred to here were members of a small cluster of Karen Baptist churches founded near Lampang in the early 1880s. They were the only Karen churches in the North and the only Christian communities not associated with the Presbyterian Laos Mission. By 1905, these churches were struggling in a number of ways to maintain viable congregational life, and the general image of them is that they were quite weak. It is interesting, thus, to find that they nonetheless had sufficient strength to impress other, nominal Christians rather deeply. The Lampang Station of the Laos Mission maintained occasional and informal contacts with these Karen Churches.

Source: Hugh Taylor, "Bear-Bitten Noi Wong," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 20, 5(May 1905): 113-114.

HeRD #298 - Progress in Bangkok

Here's a glimpse of the "old Bangkok" of 90 years ago. Jennie McClure, a veteran of the Siam Mission who began her career in Bangkok, wrote an article published in the May 1905 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN concerning her relocation to the Bangkok Station after a long absence. She stated that in the 17 years since she had last lived in Bangkok "wonderful changes" had taken place. She observed, "Our young men and women have advanced far in their ideas. There is such a desire to become civilized that old, harmful customs are dropping away as if by magic." She cited the example of "lying-in" in which women were expected to slowly roast themselves by a fire for a month after giving birth. It was a cruel custom profoundly detested by the missionaries. McClure wrote that the missionaries had thought it would take a century for this custom to disappear. Instead, she found that more "foreign manners" were being adopted by the people.

Sounds a lot like the "Global Village" doesn't it.

Source: Jennie McClure (Mrs. W. G.), "Progress in Bangkok," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 20, 5(May 1905): 117

HeRD #299 - - The "Crypto-Christian Question" II

In response to HeRD #296 and the thoughtful reply by [JD], Don Swearer sent [J] and I the following. With his permission, I send it on to the rest of you. (Note, I received Don's reply before three more responses arrived. I'll have a few more thoughts in HeRD #300).

Date: Sun, 10 Nov 1996 10:10:51 -0500 (EST)

From: Don Swearer

To: [JD]

Cc: cnxhswns@chiangmai.ac.th

Subject: Re: HeRD #296 - The "Crypto-Christian Question"

[J] and Herb-

Herb's general question about a more accommodating, "relativistic" stance by one religio-cultural tradition vis a vis another religio-cultural tradition and [J]'s response represents one of the pervasive, creative dynamics of the historic religions throughout history. From an historical point of view we cannot avoid the conclusion that religious traditions are syncretic from the outset. This is as true of the New Testament, e.g. John's appropriation and transformation of the Gnostic Logos to the "paganization" of Christmas and Easter to the kind of Buddhist syncretisms [J] points to in Thai Buddhism. The interpretation of Sakyamuni Buddha by most modern

Buddhists from Walpola Rahula to Buddhadasa as a "rational renouncer" belies his shamanic character which resonates with contemporary Thai forms of Buddha-puja.

Niebuhr's ideal type of "Christianity transforming culture" has some serious problems both because the Weberian-Troeltschian ideal type analysis is historically problematic and because it reflects a modern (Protestant) way of understanding religion. On the other hand, structural analysis is heuristically and hermeneutically useful. For example, just as Luther represents this "type" of Christianity for Niebuhr, we might say that in the modern period Buddhadasa or Dhammapitaka might be said to represent Buddhism-transforming-culture for Thailand. From a dialogical perspective, then, this analysis allows us to see Luther not simply as a historically unique figure within European (German) Christianity but sharing a particular "reformist" type of religious faith with folks like Buddhadasa vis a vis their cultures. In a similar manner we can compare the Anabaptists with the Santi Asok movement as radical over against-culture sectarian groups and the Swarthmore Presbyterian church's Fall Fair and Poy Luang Wat celebrations as forms of Niebuhr's religion-within culture type.

Although Niebuhr's book is out of fashion these days, it would be very useful for someone in Thailand to do a sustained analysis of Thai Christianity and Buddhism using his categories. This would demonstrate Herb's and [J]'s point, that Thai Christianity is no more monolithic than Thai Buddhism and that from the perspective of a structural analysis they share similar patterns. It is unfortunate that many Thai Christians would see such a conclusion as undermining the uniqueness of Christianity. What they fail to realize is that historically, culturally, and philosophically Christianity has never been nor ever will be completely unique. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith pointed out years ago in *THE MEANING AND END OF RELIGION*, the absolute uniqueness of Christianity resides in faith not in "tradition." For a religion that theologically is based in the paradoxical claim that God (i.e. the unconditioned) is a human being (i.e. the conditioned) to evolve an absolutist Christian imperialism that condemns relativism is both theologically inconsistent and historically incorrect. Throughout history religious imperialism whether it be Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist (yes--Asoka, Duttagamani, Tilokaraja, Wu Di, and Shotoku were all Buddhist imperialists!) is much more a product of politics, economics, and institutional self-interest than it is faith. But it is an important aspect of religion's ubiquity, one that fits into Niebuhr's categories.

Hope this is of some interest.
Don Swearer

HeRD #300 - The "Crypto-Christian Question" III

Been awhile since we've had so much excitement on HeRD! Thank you, [J], Don, [D], and [K] for thoughtful and even provocative responses. **[For those responses see Appendix I]** I'd like to share a few more thoughts.

First, the term "crypto-Christians" was a term Brown used to describe how the "Johannine Christians" viewed less radical, more conservative Jewish Christians. I suspect that those Christians would have resented the term and stated that they weren't "hidden" believers at all. Secondly, for these Jewish Christians the issue was NOT that of adapting Jewish ritual or renewing it in the sense we've been discussing. They accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the bringer of salvation, and the reformer of their faith. They saw in him the fulfillment of Jewish faith, not the end of it. For them being a good Christ-follower meant being a faithful Jew. What we are talking about here, then, is a different way of conceiving how a follower of Jesus relates to her or his birth-faith. Unless we are prepared to cast Peter, James the Brother of Jesus, and a significant segment of the earliest church into the fiery pit we need to take this perspective

seriously. The first followers of Jesus were not "Christians". They were faithful, God-loving Jews who believed that in the Risen Jesus they had found the Messiah.

The point here is one made in earlier HeRDs, namely, that among the earliest believers in Jesus there were a number of different responses to the "mother faith" of Judaism. Many never broke with it all, and a distinctively Jewish church persisted for hundreds of years. Others rather quickly began to doubt the value of the Law, the Temple, and the Jewish cult. They came to believe that these things were unnecessary for those who accepted Christ. James and Peter took a more middle position that leaned towards remaining Jewish. Paul also took a middle position but leaned towards breaking away. Paul, however, didn't himself make that break. He still participated in Jewish ritual. What Protestantism has done in Thailand is to define as totally unacceptable all positions (including Paul's!) except that which demands a radical break with the "mother faith." Was that necessary? Was it wise? I see some signs in the missionary literature that some northern Thais wanted less abrasive and divisive Christian alternatives to the one of having to openly break with Buddhism. In shutting out that possibility, what did we lose? Thai society, for example, appears to thrive on ambiguity. By insisting on an unambiguous Christianity did we shut a door on the emergence of a distinctively Thai Christianity?

These issues are not simple ones, obviously. The early church also had to wrestle with the whole question of its identity and its boundaries. There's been, however, no such struggle here. We lament the failure of Thai Protestantism to be an indigenous faith. I wonder if, even today, we're willing to take the risks that meaningful indigenization would require. My reading is that truly Thai expressions of the Christian faith would be mostly unacceptable to the majority of Western Protestants. The Johannine radicalism of the first century became the orthodoxy of later generations, while the Jewish Christian conservatism of that century was transformed into heresy.

HeRD #301 - Core Sample

The following quotation from Jonathan Wilson of the Laos Mission, written in a letter published in the May 1905 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, is virtually a core sample of missionary beliefs. Wilson wrote, "The dark, deep night is being pierced at many points by the beautiful, the health-giving, life-giving rays of the Sun of Righteousness. How beautifully Malachi put it! (Mal. iv: 2) There is something, too, in the last clause of the verse that suits the body of Christ's workers in His Church, 'They go forth and gambol as the calves of the stall.' Yes, God's mission workers in the homeland and the pagan, that work for the poorest and most degraded, are in their hearts gamboling for joy before the feet of the Crucified One because though their work He is gathering many lost souls for His heavenly kingdom. Let us work and exult, and sing praise before Him, and we shall in our experience realize the truth and the wealth of Malachi's figure. Jesus Christ stands now in almost every city of the world and says, with the emphasis of the passing years, 'I am the Light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light.'"

Source: Jonathan Wilson, letter, undated, in WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 20, 5(May 1905): 118.

HeRD #302 - A White Neighbor

In recent HeRDs we've been paying attention to missionary relations to the northern Thai church and culture. Dr. Mary Bowman Irwin's letter of 8 February 1905, published in the May 1905 issue of WOMAN'S WORK offers us further insights. She was working in Phrae at the time she wrote, and in her letter she expressed her joy at having a "white neighbor," Mrs. Florence

Crooks. Irwin wrote, "We are always in touch with the natives, but they can never take the place of our own countrywomen."

We've made the point in earlier HeRDs that the missionaries who worked in northern Thailand for long periods often came to feel more at home there than they did in North America. The fact is, that the "signals" the missionaries sent through their correspondence and other records are mixed ones. As we've seen, there was also a sense of alienation and of being outsiders. Irwin felt that for "real" companionship she had to turn to a person of her own culture and country. No one who has lived overseas for any length of time will be surprised by that feeling. What I suspect was happening, however, was that in their mixed feelings about living among the northern Thai, the missionaries were creating a distinct "third" culture of their own. It certainly wasn't northern Thai. Yet, it wasn't exactly Western either, as it had to accommodate itself to its social and cultural environment. Again, the experienced expatriate won't be surprised. What is fascinating, however, is to find these traces of the expatriate experience reflected in missionary records nearly a century old.

Source: Mrs. Robert Irwin, letter, 8 February 1905, in *WOMAN'S WORK* 20, 5(May 1905): 118-119.

HeRD #303 - White Neighbor Lost

In HeRD #302, Dr. Mary Irwin expressed her joy at having a "white neighbor" living next door. That HeRD quoted her as writing, "We are always in touch with the natives, but they can never take the place of our own countrywomen." Irwin wrote these words in February 1905 while she was living in Phrae. Her neighbor was Mrs. Florence Crooks, a sister worker in the Phrae Station of the Presbyterian Laos Mission. It is striking that a year later, in an undated letter published in the May 1906 number of *WOMAN'S WORK*, Florence Crooks wrote that since the departure of Mary Irwin from the Phrae Station she was left as "the only white woman in the province."

A feminist historian, it seems likely, would note the sense of sister feeling and "solidarity" that Irwin and Crooks felt towards each other. The thing that I find striking is that they expressed those feelings racially. In coming HeRDs, we'll wrestled with the question of missionary racism. At this point, I'd offer the tentative conclusion that the Presbyterian missionaries serving in Thailand weren't racist in any clear sense. It's a complicated issue as these two passing references suggest. If Irwin and Crooks were typical, the missionaries of their era were certainly race conscious. They distinguished themselves from the northern Thai in terms of race rather than culture or nationality as such. They seem to have thought of themselves, first and foremost, as white women rather than as Western women (cultural origins) or American women (nationality).

I would still argue that this does not mean that they were racists in the sense of holding their own racial stock to be inherently superior to Asians. Crooks, in her letter, provides an example. She goes on to express her delight in working with northern Thai girls. She describes their black hair crowned with flowers, pretty brown skin, and graceful manner; and she concludes of the northern Thai girl, "...she is a fair sight to behold!" There are clear traces of racial awareness here, but Crooks shows no evidence of feeling herself RACIALLY superior to the northern Thai woman.

Source: Mrs. Chas H. Crooks, letter, undated, in *WOMAN'S WORK* 21, 5(May 1906): 115-16.

HeRD #304 - A Defective Communion of the Saints

Here's one that's a bit hard to interpret. In the May 1905 issue of WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN, Laura McKean wrote, "Laos Christians are mostly children in the faith and a missionary is giving off all the time without getting much in return from the communion of saints." She pointed out, further, that she didn't get as much good out of northern Thai sermons as she did out of English-language ones.

This passing comment brings us to the boundaries of our interpretation of missionary relations with the northern Thai church. On the face of it, McKean's thoughts could be taken to reflect an arrogant, ethnocentric attitude about the northern Thai church. The attitude that the northern Thai Christians were childish Christians is not a rare one in missionary literature to find. Her observation about not getting as much out of northern Thai sermons, however, seems to imply that part of the issue was linguistic rather than ecclesiastical ethnocentrism...northern Thai wasn't her native tongue. Still, I think, we can detect in her words an ethnocentric, prejudiced tone here that is reflected clearly in many other places in missionary literature. That tone might be softened by McKean's comments about the language factor. The fact that in the late 1890s and after the turn of the century missionary thinking was shifting away from a rigid ethnocentrism would help us to account for her modified, less clearly expressed ethnocentrism.

What is particularly striking in McKean's observation is the sense of distance and alienation she seems to have felt in her relationship to the northern Thai church. It didn't speak her language. It didn't fit her spiritual needs. All of this drained her. She had to give without getting. What makes this situation complex and difficult to evaluate is that, the issue of ethnocentrism aside, it is the rare person who can come to feel completely at home in a foreign culture. Thus, mixed with the ethnocentric attitude of superiority is the strain of not being "at home" in the church she works with and the cultural context within which she works.

Source: Mrs. J. W. McKean, letter, undated, in WOMAN'S WORK 20, 5(May 1905): 118.

HeRD #305 - Half-Naked in Church

Florence Crooks, of the Laos Mission's Chiang Rai Station, told a cute little story about "Auntie Green" (Pa Keo) in a letter published in the February 1907 issue of WOMAN'S WORK. It happened right there in Sunday morning worship at the Chiang Rai Church. Auntie Green stood up and in front of the whole congregation removed her jacket and changed into another one. Crooks felt shocked, but when she looked around no else seemed even to have noticed, and Auntie Green herself, "sat down looking the nice, decent woman she is."

This, friends, is about as close to X-rated as HeRD is going to get. Half-naked Auntie Green in church on a Sunday morning. Obviously, however, "X-rated" (like beauty) is in the eye of the beholder. And, to quote Forrest Gump, "That's all I have to say about that."

Source: Mrs. Charles H. Crooks, letter, undated, in WOMAN'S WORK 22, 2(February 1907): 42.

HeRD #306 - The Christian Counter-Culture

In HeRD #305 we had "Auntie Green" (Pa Keo) changing her jacket in church, much to the chagrin of Florence Crooks. In the May 1907 issue of WOMAN'S WORK, Crooks describes the further adventures of Pa Keo with a sense of delight rather than shock. It seems that Pa Keo took in a very young woman who was homeless and began to make her over into a Christian. Crooks wrote, "...it is not easy to take one of these out-village women and make her over into the sweet, gentle person that Christian culture produces." Pa Keo instructed the woman in how to spend money, to do marketing for necessities, and how to do things at the right time.

Several points are worth making. First, there's the concept of "Christian culture." From Crooks' point of view, apparently, that culture is a modern one economically. It also has a different conception of time. That leads us to a second point, namely that historians of modernization consider the change in understanding of time to be a crucial one. "Moderns" do things at prescribed times, value time in ways different from traditional cultures, and keep a careful reckoning of time. Third, we should note again the role of the northern Thai Christians themselves as modernizers. This is a role that needs much closer study, but it seems clear that the convert community was a medium for the modernization of northern Thailand. How important it was is difficult to say. What Pa Keo's instruction of the young woman highlights is that this type of modernization was the introduction of a new consciousness as much as it was the introduction of new technologies or processes.

Source: Florence B. Crooks, "A Laos Woman's Adopted Daughter," *WOMAN'S WORK* 22, 5(May 1907): 111.

HeRD #307 - Liberation from Fear

Florence Crooks was a good story teller, as we've seen in the last few HeRDs. In the *WOMAN'S WORK* issue for May 1909 she told the story of Nang Boa Keo at length. - Nang Boa Keo was a woman who believed that three spirits surrounded her wherever she went. She felt greatly distressed by them, and in her anxiety and frustration she caused disruption in her village. Crooks writes that Nang Boa Keo needed a refuge. It happened there were two Christian women living in the village who "knew of a Refuge" and shared the Christian message with Nang Boa Keo. She subsequently converted, and Crooks states that at the service where she was received into the church, "The Spirit of God came in great power. The look of fear and terror left those beautiful eyes and a great peace filled them."

Although it may have been unique in its details, Nan Boa Keo's conversion represents a fairly typical story in general. Only very rarely do we hear in the missionary literature of individuals converting to Christianity because they were dissatisfied with Buddhism. Conversions away from animism, from the spirits aren't at all unusual. Many northern Thai people seem to have experienced animism as a burden, and in their desire for liberation from the spirits some of them became Christians.

Source: Florence B. Crooks, "An Escape from the Spirits," *WOMAN'S WORK* 24, 5(May 1909): 102.

HeRD #308 - Christian Disunity Then & Now

Raymond Brown's *THE COMMUNITY OF THE BELOVED DISCIPLE* is a study of the development of the "Johannine community" within the earliest church [see HeRD #291]. Brown argues that the Johannine community developed a very "high" view of Christ that distinguished them from other Christians in the First Century. Their views caused dissension among Christians. Some Christians viewed Jesus only as the Messiah, an entirely human figure. Others saw Jesus as the Son of God, but put him in a subordinate position to the Father. The Johannine Christians argued that the Son was equal to the Father and was "pre-existent" with the Father. The Johannine community utterly rejected those who saw Jesus as only the Messiah and thought that those who saw Jesus as subordinate failed to understand the real and full nature of Christ. Brown goes on to state that at some time around 100 CE, the Johannine community split into two warring camps. On the one side were the "secessionists," those who withdrew from the community because they came to feel it too didn't understand the nature of Christ. This faction strongly emphasized the divine nature of Jesus to the point that they believed his humanity was

irrelevant. His being human had nothing to do as such with his bring salvation to humanity. On the other hand, those who remained within the original community believed that Jesus' humanity was important, esp. in his death on the cross. Brown marks other difference in the thinking of the two sides as well, but the issue of christology was the central issue.

The two sides came to dislike each other intensely, each arguing that the other was betraying the "true" Johannine tradition. The Johannine Epistles reflect the arguments of those who remained, and they reflect a shift in emphasis from the Gospel of John. Brown sees the Gospel as being the common heritage of both the secessionists and those who agreed with the writer of the Epistles. He writes, "Indeed, when we compare the Gospel and the First Epistle, we see that the dualistic language once employed by Jesus [in the Gospel] in his attack on the world or on 'the Jews' (love/hate; light/darkness; truth/falsehood; from above/from below; of God/of the devil) has been shifted over to an attack on Christians with whom the author disagrees."

On the whole, Brown's description of early Christian disunity sounds quite plausible. We might only wonder if it sounds TOO plausible and betrays a fair degree of reading later Christian disunity back into the First Century. My guess, however, is that from the earliest days there has been an inherent disunity among Christians that is evident throughout church history. In Thai church history we find the same phenomenon. Nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries, for example, wrote about the Catholicism much the same way as they wrote about Buddhism. They attacked other Christians with the same dualistic language that they used against "the world." Catholics and Buddhists were on the side of the devil while Protestants sided with God. Since World War II, of course, increasing Protestant factionalism has led to the same dualistic condemnation of Protestants by Protestants as in the "Johannine tradition."

HeRD #309 - Lamphun Research Notes

During first semester of the current academic year at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, I taught two courses on research methods. In both courses, the students had to do their own research projects. One of the students brought in some research results that are worth pausing over. He is engaged in starting a new congregation in the city of Lamphun and prepared a very simple questionnaire--asking about attitudes towards religion--that he distributed to 30 individuals in one neighborhood.

The questionnaire asked about the influence religion had on the lives of those who filled out the forms. On a scale from 1 to 10, none of the 30 scored that importance as less than 5, and sixty percent gave high scores of 8 or 9. To the question about the importance of religion to society, just over 86% gave scores of from 8 to 10. In other words, the respondents both value religion highly and see religion as having significant influence on their lives. What is interesting, however, is that on the question that asked about the frequency with which they participated in religious activities fully 70% gave the question the very low scores of 1 to 3. These 30 people value religion highly but seldom participate in religious activities. The student himself, rightly, argued that we can't make too much of these results, taken as they are from such a small sample. Yet, I suspect that further research would bear out this pattern.

One other result of this research is also worth mentioning. The questionnaire asked what religions the respondents might want to study further. They responded: 51.6%, Buddhism; 24.1% Christianity; and 3.5% Islam. Another 21% filled in themselves "all religions." Both the student and I are surprised at the relatively high interest in Christianity, esp. since all of the respondents were Buddhists.

HeRD #310 - Christmas Greetings from the Board

We've come to the end of another three months of HeRD, and it's time to shut down for a month. HeRD will be back on or about New Year's Day 1997. Let me take this opportunity to send you best wishes for the Holidays with this final HeRD for the year.

Under the date of 22 December 1913, Dr. Arthur J. Brown, Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, sent the following Christmas Greeting to the members of the Laos Mission. "As we approach the Christmas season, I am thinking with special interest and prayer of you all, my dear friends, and not only of the Mission as a whole and its work, but of each of you as individuals....I can imagine in some respects the holiday season is an unusually trying one for the missionary, as one must think at that time with especial longing of dear home circles and family reunions far away, and yet I like to feel also that the missionary is far better situated than we who are at home, to realize the deeper and tenderer significance of the Christmas time. Surely you have consecrated your lives to the very essence of the thing of which Christmas reminds us, that is, the good tidings of great joy which are for all people. I am praying, therefore, that you may be led by the spirit of God at this season into an even deeper and holier realization of the meaning of your ministry and that you may find a steadily increasing joy in it."

Eighty-three Christmases later, Brown's love for and appreciation of his colleagues on the field still comes through. Some of them, in northern Thailand at least, might have quibbled with his assumption that HE was home for Christmas but THEY weren't. Some of them felt quite at home among their friends and colleagues of the mission as they celebrated Christmas and New Year's together at Annual Meeting time. They usually met in Chiang Mai, and the only regret some of those from the other stations might have felt was that they weren't in Phrae or Lampang or Nan or Chiang Rai to celebrate Christmas with their church.

In any event and although it's a bit early, Merry Christmas, friends. May you always be and feel at home for Christmas....wherever you are.

Special Series on Buddhism

HeRD #S1 - Buddhism & Heathenism

Presbyterian missionary views on Buddhism may be described by a number of key interlocking concepts which are interrelated, overlapping, and comprise what might be called a "cognitive ecosystem" of interdependent analysis. These concepts shouldn't be treated in a hierarchical fashion, as if one were the "key" to all of the others. The concept of "heathenism," at the same time, appears frequently and provides a good entry point for studying the whole complex of ideas, feelings, and attitudes. Mary Cort, of the Phet Buri Station, stated the general missionary view of Buddhism as a heathen religion in an 1876 article describing Buddhist funeral rites. Thai Buddhist, according to Cort, cremate their dead and then give themselves over to feasting, to play, and to "wicked and foolish things." She wrote, "They pray for the dead as do the Roman Catholics, and make offerings to the Buddhist priests and to the evil spirits. It is altogether one of the greatest displays of heathenism which this country affords." (p. 151) Cort's description of these funerals reflects a general understanding of heathenism that includes the following elements: It is wicked, foolish, and superstitious. It gives its offerings to mere humans, priests at that. It is "playful" in a frivolous and immoral manner when it should be solemn and respectful. It is overtly animistic. It is Catholic-like.

Cort's analysis betrays both deep-seated cultural and religious attitudes about "people of other faiths." She feels that Thai Buddhists are serious about foolish things and frivolous about solemn things. Middle class, evangelical America arranged things quite differently and, to missionary thinking, much more appropriately. Cort's comparison of Buddhism and Catholicism

deserves particular note. Other missionaries also write of the supposed parallels between the two religions. It seems likely that missionary attitudes about Buddhism were partly grounded in or informed by Protestantism's centuries old, deeply held antipathy towards Catholicism.

Source: Mary L. Cort, letter dated July 1876, FOREIGN MISSIONARY 35, 5(October 1876): 150-153.

HeRD #S2 - Buddhism & Satan

For the "old-time" Presbyterian missionaries in Thailand the "heathens" and their religion lived in bondage to Satan and, whether blindly or knowingly, accepted Satan's lordship as their own. In 1875 Jane McFarland described merit making as the sum and the substance of Buddhism. She wrote, "Satan has helped the Siamese to invent thousands of ways by which they suppose they MAKE MERIT." Among her examples of merit making was the case of the "...widowed mother [who] makes merit when she takes the last bowlful of rice from her starving children and gives it to feed the lazy priests." McFarland concluded, "In some SUCH WAY all are busy TRYING TO SAVE themselves. It seems to me that Buddhism is Satan's grand master-piece—his most successful scheme for deluding and destroying souls." It would do well to note that once again we hear the echoes of an age-old Protestant theme, namely salvation by grace alone. The missionary simply could not have viewed merit making in any other light than as the wrong-headed, Satan-begotten denial of God's grace. Equally to the point, the missionaries consigned those who held such views to the realm of Satan. There could be no compromise with them. There could be no acceptance of their beliefs. All of this points to the rigidly dualistic substrata under girding all of missionary thought. Missionary dualism, rooted in a tradition that went back to Persia, divided the world into antagonistic, mutually exclusive spheres of good and evil, God and Satan, and light and darkness. Within this world view, merit-making and Satan were necessarily linked since the former was taken as a denial of Protestantism's central faith in God's grace.

Source: Mrs. McFarland, "King of Siam on His Way to the Temple," FOREIGN MISSIONARY 34, 1(June 1875), 1-3.

HeRD #S3 - Buddhism & Superstition

The concept of "superstition" here is a broad one, and the term itself is an important cognate for "heathenism." The Presbyterian missionaries generally viewed Buddhism as an irrational, illogical system of thought based on ignorance. They would have expected no more from a religion they considered idolatrous and satanic. Dr. Samuel R. House, thus, wrote in an 1853 letter to the Board of Foreign missions that the Siamese are "those sitting in the gross darkness of Buddhism ignorant alike of there being a God who made them and a salvation available without money and without price." We should note here that the image of darkness (and "benighted") is one frequently used in missionary literature. It expresses nicely the rigidly dualistic core of missionary thinking that divided the world into two contending spheres of good and evil. Van Dyke, writing in 1871, captured both these dualistic themes nicely when he describe his "dialogue" with monks in a number of temples he visited while on an evangelistic tour. He wrote, "I endeavored to tell them about Christ and the work of redemption, and also compared the teachings of Buddha with the teachings of Christ, showing that on the one side was only doubt and uncertainty, whilst on the other everything was definite and certain." (p. 110) He adds to the dualistic contrast between superstitious Buddhism and Christianity by emphasizing that there is no doubt in Christianity. Things are sure and certain, as well as reasonable and logical. Letty Snyder, writing at the turn of the century, branded Buddhism as a religion of evasion and legalism and stated, "The inability of the Buddhist to work out his own salvation

through his own strength, has led to an elaborate system of evasions with which they delude themselves." (p. 127)

Sources: Samuel R. House, "Annual Report of the Siam Mission for the year ending Sept. 30th 1853," v. 2, Records of the Siam Mission, Board of Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church U.S.A.; J. W. Van Dyke, undated letter, FOREIGN MISSIONARY 30, 4(September 1871): 109-111; and Letty D. Snyder, "The Buddhist Preaching Service in Siam," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 15, 5(May 1900): 126-127.

HeRD #S4 - Buddhism & Idolatry

The Presbyterian missionaries believed that idolatry lay at the heart of Thai Buddhist heathenism and was a chief manifest of its alliance with Satan. Mary Cort wrote in her book SIAM, THE HEART OF FARTHER INDIA, "The Siamese are gross idolaters, worshipping these images and bowing before them with clasped hands and faces to the earth in the most abject manner." She described how the idols were given daily offerings, enthroned with royal ceremonies, carried in processions, and taken into the fields at times of drought. These was sure that only a small number of the most intelligent and highest ranking Siamese could look beyond the image to Buddha as the real object of worship. She concluded, "...the Siamese Buddhist, as a nation, must be classed among veritable pagans." Lillian Curtis in THE LAOS OF NORTH SIAM, picked up on the theme that most Thai Buddhists worshipped the Buddha image as an actual idol. She agreed with Cort that it was only the intelligent and highly spiritual people who could look through the image to the Buddha. But, having given Buddhist practice this small modicum of credit, she cynically and rhetorically asked, "But where are the 'intelligent and highly spiritual' to be found under the fostering care of this religion?" Mary McClure, writing to the Board of Foreign Missions in 1891, picked up on another of Cort's themes, the one about the fields. She related how in a dry spell, the Siamese took their "idols" out into the dry fields and showed them the parched land. Two days later, she wrote, it began to rain and there was sufficient rain thereafter. McClure concluded with disgust, "Poor benighted people, they think those poor dumb idols brought the rain!"

Sources: Mary Lovina Cort, SIAM, THE HEART OF FARTHER INDIA (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Co., 1886), p. 122; Curtis, Lillian Johnson, THE LAOS OF NORTH SIAM (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1903), p. 93; and Mary McClure to Mitchell, 23 June 1891, v. 8, no. 61, Records of the Siam & Laos Missions, Board of Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church U.S.A.

HeRD #S5 - Buddhism & Atheism

The missionary critique of Buddhism repeatedly emphasized Buddhism's failings as a theological system. It is always important to remember that the missionaries took their system of beliefs to be an entirely accurate description of the natural world order. That system was, for them, as solid as rocks, as real as the sky, sea, and earth. They held that their theology was rooted in the very fabric of the natural universe, so that denial of Christian theological principles and doctrines was tantamount to denying the natural order of things. This is one reason why they considered Buddhism superstitious, that is irrational. The point that concerned the missionaries as much as any other was Buddhism's atheism. Dodd wrote, Buddhism is a "religion without a God." House observed that Buddhism teaches that there is no God, no Creator. The world made itself. He noted that Buddhists actually worship the Buddha and places images of him in every temple; but he was a mere man just like them. He has left this world and now cares nothing for the world or anything else. Though not stated baldly, House is charging Buddhism with being, at

one and the same time, an atheistic system because it doesn't recognize God and an idolatrous religion that has replaced God with a human being.

The missionaries believed that "Buddhistic atheism" resulted in terrible consequences. Robert Irwin wrote in 1892 that, "There are many interesting things about the monasteries, but the interest dwindles to nothing before the fact that this mighty atheistic and agnostic system of Buddhism, with its absurd combination of high moral principles and degrading superstitions, holds millions of the human race in the grasp of a cold and heartless belief, giving to some the glimmer of a hope of future nothingness, and that hope based on an impossibility." (p. 127) Dodd echoed Irwin's concerns by arguing that Buddhism is a system of ethics with no moral sanction. He elaborated, "...there is no Giver of moral law; no just Judge of all." He goes on to raise the issue whether an ethical system that has no God, no moral sanctions for its ethics, and no help for humanity other than humanity itself can be properly called a religion. (p. 184)

The missionaries general approach to Thai culture and society grew out of their theological critique of Buddhism. The fact that Buddhism was an atheistic and merit-winning religion necessarily meant that Thailand was, at best, a semi-civilized, inferior country. It was, again necessarily, immoral, degraded, and its people were without hope.

Sources: William C. Dodd to Labaree, 10 May 1897, v. 13, no. 80, Records of the Siam & Laos Missions, Board of Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church U.S.A.; Samuel R. House, "Cholera-Time in Bangkok," SIAM AND LAOS AS SEEN BY OUR AMERICAN MISSIONARIES (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1884): 241-46; Robert Irwin, "On the Maa Wung River, Below Lakawn," WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 7, 5(May 1892): 126-127; and, William C. Dodd, quoted in Lillian Johnson Curtis, THE LAOS OF NORTH SIAM (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1903), 184.

HeRD #S6 - Buddhism & Works Righteousness

The missionary measure of Buddhism was inherently Protestant, as may be seen from their arguments concerning merit making. The Rev. Stephen Mattoon wrote in 1853, "Practically the Siamese are Atheists and have no God, or perhaps I should rather say, their real gods are merit and demerit. The former the author of all good, and the latter of all evil." He argued that merit making is the foundation of the Buddhist system and holds a most prominent place in that system. It is more important to Buddhism, according to Mattoon, than the worship of a god or religious system. A person may believe anything, so long as she or he performs meritorious acts. Mattoon argued that merit making in Buddhism holds a place similar to Christ in Christianity, that is, it is the Buddhist hope for this life and the next. He observed that the Siamese spend great amounts of money on merit making. All of it was to no purpose, however; because, as the youngest of his readers realized, everyone is a sinner and none can work out their own reward. Therefore, the Siamese, couldn't be saved by their works-righteousness religion.

According to Mattoon's analysis, the crucial failure of Buddhism was not its atheism. Here, in fact, he treats Buddhism as a theistic religion that has replaced Christ with the false god of works righteousness. He especially objects to the idea that Buddhists can believe whatever they want, as this also diametrically contradicts Protestantism's emphasis on salvation by faith. The Rev. J. L. Hartzell contended that the Buddhist system of belief was a self-reinforcing delusion that blinded the northern Thai people from understanding the Christian message. He wrote, "Buddhism, in which these people were reared, knows nothing of the teaching, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Every act of worship and every offering is made in the spirit of barter so much merit for so much offering, and one of the hardest things for Christian of this Country to learn is, 'Freely ye have received, freely give.'" Again, it is worth noting the

importance the missionaries sometimes assigned to merit making. It reinforced the whole idolatrous system they believed Buddhism to be.

The Presbyterian missionary critique of Buddhism, in sum, was primarily a theological critique, as the various categories we've used here all suggest. Their attitudes about Thai culture and society, it must be emphasized, did not grow out of what we would today consider an empirical inspection those phenomena. From their perspective as Old School Presbyterians, however, the fact that Buddhist thought and practice differed radically from their own entirely justified their negative views on Thai society generally. They generally, if subconsciously, treated their religious beliefs as if they were solid, natural phenomena of the same substance and reality as the natural world. They took their beliefs TO BE PART OF the natural world. Thus, the very fact that Buddhist thinking differed radically from their own proved to them that it must be a false, unnatural, immoral, and anti-God hodge podge of superstition.

Sources: S. Mattoon, letter dated 21 February 1853, in FOREIGN MISSIONARY 12, 4(September 1853): 76-77; and J. L. Hartzell, "The Lakawn City Church," LAOS NEWS, 13 [14], 2(May 1917): 63-67.

HeRD #S7 - Buddhism & Immorality

The Presbyterians in Thailand, in particular, and their American evangelical sub-culture, more generally, made a correlation between Thai religious beliefs and the Thai moral condition. The Thai people didn't know God. Their religion, according to the missionaries, was thus necessarily superstitious. Since they were a people without God and without true religion, it followed, again necessarily, that they were immoral as well. Cort in HEART OF FATHER INDIA again provides an especially articulate rendition of missionary thinking. She held that Thai Buddhism was selfish, indolent, indifferent, and vice-ridden. "Nipon" (nirvana) offered nothing more than a cheerless, hopeless future. Of the Thai she wrote, "As they know not the real God, and will not love and serve Him, they have exalted Buddha far beyond his deserts, and attribute to him many superhuman qualities." This ignorance and false adoration of the merely human, in Cort's estimation, was the source of the "gloom and darkness" surrounding the missionaries. Even the priests were ignorant, and she argued that, "Every act of a Buddhist's life is a selfish one, and is believed in some unknown way to augment his merit." (p. 117) In sum, according to Cort, the whole Buddhist system was "rotten and dead." It lacked good fruits, justice, mercy, love, and a purity of heart and life. (p. 120) All of this was proof of the old adage that one rotten apple spoils the whole barrel. In this case, the offending apple was atheism and the consequence for the barrel was a rotting morality.

HeRD #S8 - Depths of Feeling

However we might feel about missionary views on Buddhism, it is important from a historical point of view to understand the depth to which they felt those views. Missionary views about Buddhism were not simply "theological" or "intellectual." They felt a revulsion for it that was as much emotional as anything else. In 1897 the Rev. Hugh Taylor was out touring. When people he met on tour asked him why he had come he explained that he visited them to tell them about religion. They would ask, "What religion?" And he answered, "The Christian religion." He would then tell them about God and sing for them a hymn. He wrote, "This is a strange sound in Laos ears, for they have no music. Buddhism crushes out all the music from the soul. We pray-a strange sound in Laos ears, for in their prayers is no tone of belief, no expectation of answer." (pp. 292-93) This is how most missionaries experienced Buddhism themselves, as a crushing force, a dead weight that squeezed from people all of their songs and all of their hopes. It is, of course, ridiculous to say of any people that "they have no music." At a deeper level, however,

Taylor meant they had no SACRED music that SOUNDED like music to him. He could not have accepted the chants of Buddhist ritual as "real" music. At the very least, Buddhism inspired a sense of distaste, and in the more extreme cases the missionaries looked upon it with real loathing. It stood for everything they abhorred.

Source: Hugh Taylor, untitled, WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN 12, 11(November 1897): 292-93.

Appendix I

The Crypto-Christian Debate

HeRD #296 created more debate than any HeRD to date. Before I realized how much of a response it would generate, I turned one of those responses, from Dr. Don Swearer, into HeRD #299. Further comments from other recipients of HeRD inspired me to write up HeRD #300. Appended below are those comments and responses. I've tried to preserve the order and sequence of the inter-changes. (Note: This correspondence is not included in the index)

1. HeRD #296.

2. From [JD]

Date: Sun, 10 Nov 1996 08:11:43 +0700 (GMT+0700)

From: [JD]

To: "Herbert R. Swanson"

Subject: Re: HeRD #296 - The "Crypto-Christian" Question

How about "conditional crypto christianity"? I for one am slower to jump up and say "no" to certain situations where the Thai Christian could "stand in". But that seems to be conditional. As I look at my own evaluation of what the Thai call "Buddhism", I find myself wanting to say, "They 'stood in' TOO much when it comes to adopting practices that are not at all Buddhist but more akin to animism, spirit worship, etc." If I feel that way about the Thai's Buddhism, imagine how I feel about Thai Christianity. WAIT! It's not what you think! I have encountered already here in Bangkok some very rigid "standing out" - even to the point that a Baptist refuses to accept someone else from another Christian tradition - let alone anything that would be Thai laced with Buddhism. That doesn't seem right to me at all. But I have also seen the other extreme which looks a lot like syncretism.

Alas, what to do? What to think?

Funny, this sounds a lot like the Neihbur book I had to read in seminary, "Christ and Culture". I agree with Neihbur's position (or what I think is his position) that of all the choices (i.e. Christ over culture, Christ in culture, etc. etc.), the transformation model seems best. As Christians (Thai or otherwise) are not we to be transformers? What does that mean? The celebration of the coming Advent provides a clue. Wrapped up in the theology of the Incarnation is our answer. Transformation of culture cannot happen without participation in it. But just as much as Jesus was "in flesh" was he not also "very God"? That means sometimes, while incarnate, he must resist or restrain from the pulls of the culture and be set apart. Unfortunately, that can be a costly thing as Jesus found out.

It sounds conditional. It sounds like we "pick and choose" what's in and what's out. But that already has problems!

Still after all these centuries - nearly 2000 years - that which will unify us is Christ Himself. And in Christ we see God and humanity together. The Thai church and the church around the world would not do so well if it chooses to be Johannian or Crypto. It will do best if it chooses to be Christo.

"Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith."

Sincerely,
[JD]

3. From Don Swearer. See HeRD #299

4. From [DA]

Date: Wed, 13 Nov 96 00:30:42 -0000

From: [DA]

To: [JD]

Subject: Re: HeRD #296 - The "Crypto-Christian" Question

Good comments, [J]. Regardless of our culture, Christ is our focus and to become more like Him is our daily goal. This discussion of what Thai ritual is OK for the Thai church to incorporate brought to mind Paul's letter to the Galatians. He reminds them that in Christ they are set free from the Torah and its rituals. If anyone returns to the ritual of the law for justification (circumcision in their case), then Christ will be of no value to them at all, and they have been alienated from Christ. 5:1-6. -- what if they return to the ritual for celebration? of grace? are you saying that the Jewish Christians who for over 400 years continued to be circumcised & to participate in Jewish ritual weren't really Christians??

The question remains, when does Christianity blend in to culture, and when does it stand against culture? This question is not always black in white, and sometimes is difficult to answer. In regards to Thai rituals, I think we must determine the ritualistic meaning more than focusing on its cultural form. If the meaning of the ritual in anyway binds Christians to a works righteousness, or gives glory and honor to any other than our Lord (particularly animism), then I think the letter to Galatians clearly states that this ritual will compromise our relationship with Christ. -- American Nat'l Anthem During grad school, a Catholic friend told me of a similar situation in Brazil. The early missionaries were faced with a culture full of animistic practices. In order to save as many as possible, the missionaries made concessions in regards to ethnic rituals. They incorporated the rituals, and simply told the people that these rituals now had new meaning in the church. On one hand, the missionaries incorporated the rituals, and simply told the people that these rituals now had new meaning in the church. On one hand, the missionaries succeeded. Many Brazilians became Christians. On the other hand, they failed, for the people still considered the rituals as means to manipulate the spiritual world. Regardless of what the priest told them the new meaning was, they still believed in the old ways. Today, one of the biggest problems in some Brazilian churches is that the people use ritual to try to manipulate the spirit world, and even God. They do not have freedom in Christ, but are still enslaved and live in fear of the spirit world. -- Thai Protestant practices still resonate with merit-making in spite of missionary attempts to change them --- Hughes found spirit propitiation a major element in prayer Personally, I can see more clearly what particular Thai rituals should not be brought into the practice of the church, than I can see those that should. I would be interested to hear from any of you who have specific ideas on what Thai rituals would be helpful to incorporate into the church to make it less Western and more Thai. For those who work in this country, I think that most will agree that the church is too Western. Any takers?

5. From [JD]

From: [JD]

To: [DA]

Subject: Re: HeRD #296 - The "Crypto-Christian" Question

Thank you for your encouragement in this matter, Herb.

Personally, I feel as you do that it would be best NOT to incorporate MANY of the Thai rituals given the meanings attached to them which would compromise faith in Christ. However, I am equally uncomfortable with a "baptized ritual" that tries to maintain but redefine an old form. That certainly is better than the first alternative, but I feel it is still not the best.

I am young, so I lack much wisdom, but I have an ethno musicologist friend in the states who is older than I am and I would like to borrow from his wisdom for a moment. He says that regarding music the role of an ethno-musicologist is NOT to go to a culture and help them "get in touch again" with their own music (ie. revive the old forms). He says the role of this person, instead, is to help them always create new music. For, in his opinion, no one advances, progresses, develops culturally unless they are creating something.

If I apply my friends logic to the Thai church and my role as a missionary, I wonder if I am here NOT to baptize old forms and by so doing somehow make them less compromising, or NOT to import western forms to be "incensed" and by so doing somehow making them more Thai. No, I wonder if I am here to help the Thai church create NEW ways and forms and by so doing the church would truly develop spiritually AND culturally. Thank you for your patience with one who really is rather inexperienced, but just sort of feeling my way around.

Sincerely,
[JD]

6. From [KP]

Date: Wed, 13 Nov 1996 06:59 -0500 (EST)

From: [KP]

To: [JD]

Subject: Re[2]: HeRD #296 - The "Crypto-Christian" Question

HeRD #296, as well as the responses from [DA] and [JD], reveal what seems to me to be one of the biggest challenges facing the Thai church. I would agree with the latter that the focus must be upon "Christo," but how does one implement such a viewpoint in the everyday life of the church? The most refreshing and inspiring church services I have ever attended in Thailand have been in Esarn churches related to the work of Jim Gustafson and the Evangelical Covenant Church. Besides being very holistic in scope to retain Christ-centeredness in a way that is culturally relevant (and maybe "cultural relevance" is a better word/concept to use than cultural adaptation or cultural blending, as it touches on inward meaning rather than outward form). Traditional Esarn music and dance is incorporated into the services. Sticky rice and the juice of a local berry replace expensive, foreign symbols while with a congregational string tying ceremony--the point is made, however, that we need to be "binding up" our brothers and sisters in the faith. If almost rampant growth is considered a symbol of success (not to mention God's favor), the sheer numbers of new churches (around 200, last I heard) and believers (several thousand) speaks well of this culturally relevant approach.

7. HeRD #300.

8. From [JM].

Date: Sat, 30 Nov 1996 21:11:35 +0700 (TST)

From: [JM]

To: Herbert R. Swanson

Subject: Re: HeRD #300 - "The Crypto-Christian Question" III

Sorry about these late comments. I sent this letter to Herb personally some time ago and after meeting with him was planning to forward it to the rest of you with some corrections. Sitting in Bangkok traffic jams took away the energy I intended to give to this project.

It is correct that within the early Christianity there were different approaches to Jewish faith and Jewish culture. However in my understanding it is very problematic at this point to compare Buddhism and Judaism. All those who believed in Jesus Messiah in the Early Church were aware that the Old Testament was the background for their faith and that Jesus was the fulfillment to the promises of the Old Testament. The faith in Jesus and the Old Testament were on the same continuum. The center was the faith in God of the Old Testament who sent His Son.

One of the crucial problems here is obviously the role of the Old Testament. Buddhism differs here radically. There are no concept of almighty God in the same sense as in the Bible. On that level both Jewish and Christian faith are incompatible with Buddhism. The whole concept of religion is different. It was much easier for the early Christian to deal with the Jewish culture because there was a common monotheistic understanding about God.

I think that maybe more relevant than the relation to the Jewish culture for us here in Thailand might be the way how the "Greeks", Christians with Hellenistic background, dealt with their own culture. I am referring to men like Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria etc.

As you see, my starting point is little bit different than in HeRD #300. One reason for my comments might be that we are working with new Christians with very little Christian background. It is quite surprising for me that quite often people who come from Christian families or have been Christians for a long time are more reluctant to employ the Thai cultural forms like Thai music, dance and drama than the missionaries. At our Institute it is compulsory for every student to study Thai music together with different kinds of Thai dance. We are also using quite much North-Eastern music.

With best regards

[J]

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