

HeRD 1998

Herb's Research Diary

HeRD #491 - Happy New Year

Happy New Year! The Swanson household has had a merry Christmas indeed with Neela, a freshman at Berea College in Kentucky, home for the holidays. It's a good time to start up HeRD again.

Veteran HeRD recipients will have observed that HeRD in '97 continued to become more theoretical and less anecdotal, an evolution that it's been going on for some time now. Looking ahead, that trend will continue over the next few months. I'm pushing to finish a text on early church history in Thai church historical perspective, and so there'll continue to be a strong emphasis on the early church and its lessons for our situation in Thailand. If all goes according to plan, I'll be spending 5-6 weeks in March and April with the Karen churches of the Musikee District. Karen church history in Thailand, thus, will probably contribute a fair number of 1998 HeRDs. In June, I'll begin teaching a course on research methods to M.Div. students, this in preparation for their working on their "ministerial theses" for the McGilvary Faculty of Theology. We can expect that the research these students do for the course and for their theses will contribute a great deal to HeRD later this year and in early 1999. The topics they're considering are exciting and represent the frontiers of church-based research in Thailand. All in all, it should be a fun year. As always, your contributions and comments are a welcome, important part of HeRD.

HeRD #492 - Defined by Cult

Judaism occupied a unique and not entirely comfortable position among the religions and social communities of the Roman Empire. Wayne Meeks in his book, *The Moral World of the First Christians*, argues that it wasn't theological beliefs that distinguished the Jews from other communities. Others believed in a single God, and the Jews themselves generally believed in a whole range of divine higher powers below God, powers not unlike the gods of other peoples. Meeks writes, "What made Jewish monotheism unique--and difficult for other people in Roman pluralist society to understand--was the social embodiment of their belief. One God alone must be worshipped; the cults of all others must be shunned. The exclusivity of cult corresponds to the boundaries of the Jewish communities as resident aliens in the cities of the empire." (p. 92) Cultic practices, thus, rather than theological beliefs defined Jewish relationships with their neighbors.

Thai Protestantism stands in a similar relationship to its neighbors. Any serious study of classical Buddhism and classical Christianity will turn up numerous, profound parallels. Study of Thai culture-Buddhism and Thai culture-Christianity will yield its own crop of parallels. What distinguishes Thai Protestantism is its insistence on generally rigid boundaries in cultic practices. And just as in the case of Roman Empire Judaism, those exclusivistic boundaries define Protestant communities as "resident aliens" in the cities and villages of Thailand.

HeRD #493 - Christian Animism Revisited

In HeRD #480, we summarized Edwin Zehner's article in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (September 1996) on "Thai Protestants and Local Supernaturalism." Zehner argues that Thai Protestantism's understanding of traditional animism has become dualistic. It brands animistic powers and beings as evil and opposed to God. If Zehner is correct, Thai Protestant

dualism represents an important departure from Thai animism generally. In this light, the following comment about first century Jewish and Christian animism from Wayne Meeks' *The Moral World of the First Christians* is worth our notice. Meeks writes, "Jewish sources from Palestine in the Roman period picture this superhuman world in a rather more dualistic pattern than we find in the literary sources from pagan authors. That is, there was a fundamental moral division in the divine world, on the one side God and his angels, on the other, Satan or the devil and his angels, or 'demons.' The early Christians, insofar as our sources reveal, shared this dualistic vision." (pp. 100-101) Early Christians, that is, joined with Judaism in transforming the animistic world of the first century with their dualistic world view in a process that seems striking similar to the one described by Zehner.

It seems likely that there's a direct, if distant connection between ancient Jewish-Christian and latter day Thai Protestant dualistic animism. Western Christendom has been a "carrier" of ancient Persian-Jewish dualism to such an extent that the Western world view is centrally and essentially a dualistic one. Presbyterian and other Protestant missionaries introduced this dualistic heritage to their converts. Thai Protestantism embodies that dualism in, for example, the way in which it walls itself off from general Thai society. It, apparently and not surprisingly, has also introduced this dualism into its understanding of the spirit world, and it's done this in ways that parallels ancient Jewish thought. That too isn't surprising, since Thai Protestant dualism is the great, great grandchild of Jewish dualism, many times removed.

HeRD #494 - Christian Asceticism

There was a heavy strain of asceticism in the earliest church, and the Gospel portraits of Jesus clearly reflect that asceticism. It was, however, an asceticism that didn't detach itself from the larger world. Wayne Meeks in *The Moral World of the First Christians* writes about the disciples whom Jesus sent out to preach his message (see Mark 6:6-11), "Notice that the radical separation of Jesus' messengers from the ordinary person's rootage in place, family, and livelihood requires for its fulfillment unqualified dependence on the charity of strangers. The 'asceticism' of the messengers is not the means of their salvation, so to speak, but the means for their mission." (p. 105)

Jewish restoration movements, such as the Jesus Movement (the earliest church) adopted one of two general strategies in their attempts to restore Israel to God's favor. Some withdrew to form puritan communities. Others, like the followers of Jesus, engaged the world through teaching and proselytization. Each strategy was risky. Withdrawal preserved purity at the risk of irrelevance and sterility. Engagement preserved relevance and vitality at the risk of impurity. Without trying to decide which approach is "better," it's worth noting that the earliest church decided to risk its integrity and identity for the sake of its mission. And in doing so, it claimed to be following the example and commands of the Master.

HeRD #495 - A Great Deal of Trouble

"It is not only our ignorance and distant angle of vision that make defining the [early] church problematical: the early Christians themselves had a great deal of trouble deciding just what their movement was out to become."

from Wayne Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* , p. 120

HeRD #496 - The Essence of the Church

Over the next several HeRDs, I'd like to "wrestle in public" over a central issue in the study of early church history, that is the "essential" nature of the church itself. This issue has, I think, important implications for the study of Thai Protestant history. It focuses on the very earliest years after Jesus. Was the earliest group of believers in Jesus the "church"? Traditional church historiography generally has held that the church began at Pentecost. More recent scholarship has discarded that notion in favor of a more complex model, the "Jesus Movement" model. The "church" began as a Jewish restoration movement, gradually separated from Judaism, and eventually became a distinct religious movement of its own. Over a much longer period of time, it then became a fully institutionalized religious organization. The history of the early church is the history of the institutionalization of the original Jesus Movement.

That framework makes early church history clear and shows a general direction. But, it doesn't feel "right" somehow. The distinction between movement and institution isn't that neat, not in actual practice. The very earliest Jesus believers formed groups, had distinct rituals, recognized certain leaders, and otherwise *organized* themselves as a separate social-religious entity within Judaism. They had organizational structures, however true it is that those structures were ill-defined and various. Much later, when the church was supposedly an organization rather than a movement, one still finds strong elements of the fluidity and enthusiasm of a movement present. The 2nd century ascetics in Syria, for example, functioned outside the structures of the churches and yet still had an important role in church life. Revivals of interest in the Holy Spirit (usually identified with the "movement era") appear over and over and over throughout church history. The early churches, it seems to me, combined various characteristics of movements and institutions in various ways. They could be more "rigid" or more "fluid" in structures, and they could shift back and forth from rigidity to fluidity (within limits) depending on many other factors.

We need to re-examine this movement-institution model, both in terms of the early church and the Thai church.

HeRD #497 - Brunner On Movement & Institution

HeRD #496 questioned the "movement to institution" model of early church history. Emil Brunner in his book, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (1960), is a particularly lucid advocate of that model. Brunner states, "...the *ecclesia* of the New Testament is a communion of persons and nothing else. It is the Body of Christ, but not an institution. Therefore it is not yet what it later became as the result of a slow, steady, hence unnoticed process of transformation: it is not yet a Church. The Church...is distinguished from the *ecclesia* above all in this--that it is no longer primarily a communion of persons, but rather an institution, and...understands itself as such." (p. 74, emphasis in original) Brunner doesn't use the term "movement," but it's clear that he has the concept in mind. He insists, thus, that the *ecclesia* is essentially different from the church. It has a purity and integrity in its communion or fellowship that the church as an institution doesn't have. Brunner's reconstruction of early church history is primarily a theological reconstruction and only secondarily a historiographical one. His understanding of the *ecclesia* is premised on its being the body of Christ, associated with Christ, composed of those who knew Christ personally and received his instruction directly. Brunner's task is to try to understand how the *ecclesia* became the institutional church, esp. how it became the highly structured, formal, ritualized, and rigidly institutionalized Roman Catholic Church.

When New Testament historians and scholars refer to the "Jesus Movement," they have something like Brunner's theologized description in mind, though few would accept the assertions of purity and integrity assigned to it by Brunner. But they would agree that there is something essentially different between the Jesus Movement and the later church. It was more

expressive of Jesus' message and intentions than the later, institutionalized church. It was egalitarian and loving. It was thrilled by Christ and committed to him. It was Spirit-filled. It was a Movement! And, progressively, over the decades and centuries this essential nature of the Jesus Movement was lost as it became the church.

Two points of doubt: first, the church emerged as a separate religious organization because it intentionally started taking in large numbers of Gentiles. Once that happened it couldn't possibly have remained within Judaism. This has nothing to do with processes of institutionalization. Second, as mentioned in HeRD #496, the earliest church already had marks of an institution and, even two centuries later, it still showed elements of being a movement. There's no question it changed significantly over that time, it's just that I'm less and less convinced that the movement-institution dichotomy helps us understand that change.

HeRD #498 - More Thoughts on Movement vs. Institution

HeRDs #496 and 497 raised doubts about the interpretation of the early church that sees it as a movement that developed into an institution. The concepts of "movement" and "institution" imply that clear distinctions exist between the two and that one can classify human social groups as one or the other. Thus, we have the academic convention of using the name, "Jesus Movement," to describe the followers of Jesus before the Christian church emerged as a separate entity. The term suggests that the Jesus Movement was only loosely organized at best and that it was a movement within Judaism. Only over a period of decades did the Jesus Movement slowly transform itself into the church. The movement-organization dichotomy also implies an inherent tension between the two.

Wayne Meeks, however, in *The Moral World of the First Christians* argues that the followers of Jesus from the very beginning placed a high value on unity. This emphasis on unity was highly unusual, if not unique, among the religions of the Roman Empire. Meeks argues, furthermore, that out of that drive for unity emerged the empire-wide structures of the Catholic Church. What this means is that the later organization of the institutionalized church was a flowering of its movement era. One of the Jesus Movement's most cherished values led naturally to its becoming an institution. Now, what does that mean? I'm still not sure I know, but if Meeks is correct the early history of the church is partly an unfolding of certain inherent tendencies rather than a process of slow ossification (death by organization rather than strangulation!). There isn't a tension between the characteristics of being a movement and of being an organization. The early churches, that is, weren't schizophrenic in their emergence as separate, increasingly structured religious bodies. The movement-organization paradigm, in sum, seems to be of limited value at best.

HeRD #499 - In a Nutshell

In all of these musing on the distinction between movement and institution, the point I want to make is this: there's no point at which the early church, suddenly or gradually, started being an institution. There is, likewise, no point at which it stopped being a movement. The movement-institution paradigm doesn't give us a correct view of the birth or historical development of the early church.

HeRD #500 - The Movement-Institution Model & Thailand I

The "movement-organization" model for interpreting church life is extremely important to our interpretation of Thai church history. I'd like to deal with two points, one in this HeRD and one in the next. The assumption that these two categories are mutually exclusive has itself

been a factor in Thai church history. Since the 1920s, the rationale for Thai Protestant revivalism has been that the churches are largely lifeless organizations, all rules and regulations and procedures and no Holy Spirit. Western Pentecostal missionaries, in particular, have until recently resisted church organizational structures as being deadening and dangerous. Organization kills the Spirit. In many quarters, I suspect, missionaries and church leaders would agree that Thai churches need to be less of an organization and more of a movement than they are today. The models of movement (positive, dynamic, Spirit-filled) and organization (negative, rigid, Spirit-denying) influence the way in which individuals, missions, and churches frame their work. Although not generally stated in so many words, the drive for renewing Thai churches and giving them a more movement-like character is a major theme in Thai Protestant history since at least the 1920s.

But, what if the model is a false one? What if these two "things" can't be distinguished from each other in any clear way in the real world? That would seem to call the whole rationale for the way a number of missions and churches work and think about their work into serious question. In order to exist at all, churches have to be both organized to one degree or another and have a sense of energy and liveliness ("Spirit" in theological parlance) to one degree or another as well. Some may be more organized and less energetic. Some may be more energetic and less organized. If Hope of Bangkok Church is any measure, others may be both more organized and more energetic. If any number of tiny congregations scattered across the country is any measure, other churches are both poorly organized and lacking in energy.

Using categories like "lively" or "energetic" instead of "movement" changes the whole way we talk about the nature of church life. A movement, by definition, can't be organized. Once it's organized, it's no longer a movement. But alive, energetic churches can be (and almost certainly will be) organized churches as well.

HeRD #501 - The Movement-Organization Model & Thailand II

In HeRD #500, we saw that the movement-organization model has been influential in the history of Thai Protestantism. It has also been influential, on me at least, in interpreting Thai church history. In my (draft) history of Protestant pastoral care in Thailand, I describe in some detail how the 19th-century Presbyterian missionaries in northern Thailand essentially defined "the church" as an "organization". To them, a church had to have a list of members, a set of officers, and a building. The implication in the book and in my classroom interaction with the students is clear. Their view was "bad". Embedded in this interpretation is the further assumption that the missionaries had a dead, static view of the church. That assumption, in turn, emerges from the hidden assumption that movements are good and organizations are bad and that the two categories are mutually exclusive. If, however, we were to go back to the records we'd find numerous indications that the 19th-century missionaries did not have an entirely static, organizational view of the church. They, for example, measured the strength of their churches by their *rate* of membership growth and by their enthusiasm for evangelism. They took pleasure in lively churches and worried when churches seemed to languish.

The concept of "movement" needs to be carefully thought out. In terms of early church history, I'm beginning to think there never was such a thing as the "Jesus Movement". There was a loosely structured grouping of people, what we might call a sect, who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and, for some at least, more than "just" the Messiah. Perhaps the best term is simply "followers of Jesus." The concept also needs to be thought out in terms of Thai church history. It probably should be discarded entirely.

HeRD #502 - A Last Thoughts On Movement vs. Institution

Some will, I suppose, see all of this movement-institution "stuff" as a tempest in a tea pot. There are some important issues involved, however. If, as I suggested in HeRD #501, there never was a "Jesus Movement" then what were the earliest believers in Jesus? Were they already, in fact, "the church"? And if they were the church, that means that "the church" is not necessarily or essentially the distinct organizational body of a separate religion. It once existed, for example, within Judaism. If that's true, it would seem to me that such a thought could have important implications for evangelism in Thailand. Protestant missions are premised on the firm conviction, never questioned, that the church must be the *Church* --separate, distinct, apart, and on its own. But, *if* it didn't start out that way 2,000 years ago is it necessary to have it start out that way in Thailand? Is a church within the structures of the Three Gems of Buddhism possible?

Protestant missions, furthermore, is premised on the hidden assumption that salvation is to be found only in the separate and distinct church. But if the church was originally located within Judaism, what does that mean for our claims of an exclusive salvation apart from other religious traditions?

HeRD #503 - Convergence & Divergence

HeRD #502 raised the question, in light of the relationship of the earliest church to Judaism, whether its necessary for the church to exist as a separate organization in order to be the church. It made the point that the answer to this question is potentially important to how Christians might carry out evangelism in Thailand.

Eduard Schweizer's *Church Order in the New Testament* offers further insights into this question. Schweizer points out repeatedly that the earliest church never intended to divide from Judaism and never saw itself as anything but a part of Judaism. The church, he insists, "...continued in its Jewish national and religious associations." (p. 34) Indeed, it took Jerusalem, rather than Galilee, as its center to make the point that it was the true Israel. The temple and its rites belonged to it. He concludes, "The tradition shows nowhere any revolutionary attempt to build up a rival organization beside Israel; even the most radical group round Stephen contends only in support of the Old Testament, regarding the rejection of the temple as fidelity to the history, properly understood, of God's dealings with Israel--no deviation from the Old Testament is even suggested anywhere." (p. 46) There was, in other words, a great deal of convergence between the earliest church and Judaism. Schweizer, however, also points out that there was an important point of divergence. The earliest church could no longer give primary significance to the law, the temple, and the synagogue, however much it might honor them. Jesus was the point of divergence. Ultimate importance was given to him, rather than the law.

In Thailand, Protestantism has presented Christianity as a radical divergence from Buddhism-animism. It hasn't so much denied the existence of convergence, historically, as it has simply failed to see that there could be any convergence between Thai Christianity and Buddhism-animism. Any convergence that existed has been judged as dangerous. There is convergence, however, and probably far more than we realize. What would have happened (and could still happen) if that convergence were seen as a "natural" part of the emergence of faith in Jesus in a new cultural setting? For some decades there existed a Jesus-Judaism. Is a Jesus-Buddhism possible?

HeRD #504 - Moore on Jesus

"If the life of Jesus does not, for me, put up any questions of the sort that the life of Napoleon, of J. F. Kennedy, of Gautama Buddha, of Hughie Long, put up, then I am a docetist. My Christ has not a real human. He is a theological construct. He never existed. If you have

never seen Jesus, in your mind's eye, as faced with inescapable political social and personal integrity options, then you are a docetist. Your Christ never existed. He is a puppet in a theologians' puppet show."

from Sebastian Moore "The Search for the Beginning," in *Christ: Faith and History* (eds. Sykes & Clayton), p. 84.

HeRD #505 - Moore on Christianity

"Trying to be as honest as I can, and invoking all that I know of human psychology, I am more and more deeply convinced that the birth of this faith is unaccountable for in ordinary psychological terms."

from Sebastian Moore "The Search for the Beginning," in *Christ: Faith and History* (eds. Sykes & Clayton), p. 88.

HeRD #506 - Anthropologist vs. Missionary

Cornelia Ann Kammerer's article on the Akha tribal Christians of northern Thailand in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (September 1996) compares and contrasts "traditionalist" Akha feelings about Akha culture to those of Akha Christian converts. She documents how the converts largely reject and ridicule not only Akha traditional religion but also traditional Akha culture more generally. The converts no longer find their identity in these things. At a number of points in the article, Kammerer betrays feelings of antipathy towards missionary Christianity and its consequences for the Akha people, traditionalists as well as converts.

This article suggests the need for a dialogue between anthropologists such as Kammerer and conservative Protestant missionaries. Commenting on how the missionaries project their own fear of heathenism onto their converts, she writes, "As an anthropologist, my opinion differs from that of these foreign missionaries. The Akha traditionalists with whom I did fieldwork do not fear their ancestors, who are the spirits to whom they make annual offerings at their household altars. Instead they see themselves as caring for these ancestors, who, in turn, care for them." (p. 331) Conservative missionaries should listen to Kammerer. Many Akha people are entirely at peace within their traditional structures of belief. Angry, judgmental assaults on those beliefs builds barriers that hardly reflect the Christian message of a loving, compassionate Saviour. By the same token, Kammerer, however, also needs to listen to the missionaries (or, better, the converts themselves). Not every Akha experiences traditional structures as benevolent. Some find them burdensome and worse than useless. Christianity, thus, is a viable religious alternative for contemporary Akhas.

Anthropologist and evangelical missionary, in sum, have something to teach each other. It's a dialogue not likely to happen, though. I doubt that either believes there's much they can learn from the other.

HeRD #507 - Schweitzer, Jesus, & Thai Church History

Albert Schweitzer in his seminal study, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1954), justified the role of historical study in the church by writing, "Historical truth not only creates difficulties for faith; it also enriches it, by compelling it to examine the importance of the work of the Spirit of Jesus for its growth and continuance. The Gospel cannot simply be taken over; it must be appropriated in his Spirit. What the Bible really offers us is his Spirit, as we find it in him, and in those who first came under its power. Every conviction of faith must be tested by

him. Truth in the highest sense is that which is in the Spirit of Jesus." Schweitzer adds, "The faith of the Protestant Church is not in the Church, but in Christ. That lays upon it the necessity of being truthful in all things. If it gives up the fearless pursuit of truth, it becomes but a shadow of itself--useless to Christianity and to the world." (p. xvi).

If Schweitzer is at all correct, it follows that the study of Thai church history itself becomes involved in the quest for the historical Jesus. It, in a sense, begins with Jesus and can't be understood apart from him. That isn't a faith statement. It's a statement of historical fact. However we might judge the church's faithfulness to Christ's original vision and teaching, the history of the church is a continuing commentary on its origins. Christians, including Thai Christians, have always taken Jesus very seriously, and those who study church history, including Thai church history, will also have to take him seriously. In a deeper sense, the churches today are themselves engaged in a dialogue with Jesus. That dialogue is central to their existence and integrity. It behooves them, then, care about the truth of Jesus and the truth of their own past and present, and the search for these truths is partly a historical search. Historical study is a useful tool in obtaining a measure of the truth necessary to the church's life and integrity.

The quest for the historical Jesus, in sum, is part and parcel of the quest for the historical Thai church. They aren't two unrelated fields of study. They are two sides of the same coin or two aspects of the same reality.

HeRD #508 - Two for the Price of One

ONE . In a discussion on Adolph Hitler's personality and political program, Joachim Fest in *Hitler* (p. 532) observes, "History, Paul Valery once remarked, is the most dangerous product ever brewed by the chemistry of the human brain; it makes nations dream or suffer, impels them to become megalomaniacal, bitter, vain, insufferable. The hatreds and passions of the nations during the first half of this century have been stirred by false history far more than by all the racist ideologies or by envy or desire for expansion."

TWO . In an article on the problems related to research on global warming, William F. O'Keefe writes, "Every serious analyst knows that a problem poorly defined is a problem poorly solved. Or in the words of that great philosopher, Casey Stengel, 'If you don't know where you're going, you'll wind up someplace else.'" (in *An Energy Program for the United States* , National Textbook Company, 1997, p.53). [[Casey Stengel was a successful American baseball manager.]]

ONE means that a correct understanding of the past is an extremely important matter. It's a matter of life and death. TWO means that if we don't achieve that correct understanding, there's not much we can do to achieve viable solutions to the problems the past poses for the present.

HeRD #509 - Convergence & Divergence Revisited

HeRD #503, drawing on Eduard Schweizer's *Church Order in the New Testament* , argued that the very earliest church was Jewish in religion as well as ethnicity. It tended to converge with Judaism. Followers of Jesus attended the temple, kept the law, and otherwise behaved as any good Jew would. It also tended to diverge. Those very elements and precepts of Judaism that the Christians still observed had lost their centrality. Jesus had become central.

Schweizer follows his arguments about the church's convergence with and divergence from Judaism to a paradoxical end. It's the church's sense of openness that led it to not only

continue within Judaism, but that also led it to accept uncircumcised Gentiles into its circle. To enlarge on Schweizer's point, the earliest Christians' concern for *all* of Israel, including Israel's most despised, impure marginals led the church, finally, to accept the great multitudes of despised and impure Gentiles. This acceptance, in turn, forced the church to withdraw from Judaism. If Schweizer is correct, it was the very Jewishness of the church, centered on the Jewish Good News about Jesus the Jew, that eventually led to the emergence of a distinct Christian religion. Being part of "another religion" wasn't a problem, difficulty, barrier, or obstacle to that emergence but integral to it. Christians owe a profound faith debt to Judaism.

Protestantism has entirely eschewed the possibility of a parallel process for Thailand. Without expecting that the Thai process could be more than vaguely similar to that of the church's emergence from Judaism, it would seem that the experience of the early church would have encouraged missionary Protestantism to take a less antagonistic stand towards Buddhism and animism. There is a great deal in Jesus, the Asian mystic and compassionate one, that makes sense within Thai religious traditions. Suppose Protestantism had allowed Thai piety its integrity and sought to work out who Jesus is from within that integrity. What might have happened?

A thesis for further reflection and debate: Only when the Thai followers of Jesus have come to see that they owe a "profound faith debt" to Buddhism will Jesus become Good News for more than a tiny minority of the Thai people.

HeRD #510 - - The Resurrection as Event

It's impossible to write a history of the earliest church without coming to terms with the Resurrection. Christianity emerged because Jesus' followers believed he rose from the dead. Discovering what the Resurrection meant to first century Christians, however, is no simple matter. We tend to focus on the revivification of a corpse, but it's not at all clear that they did. Paul experienced the resurrected Jesus, but no revived body was involved. In I Cor. 15:35ff Paul describes his understanding of resurrection and states bluntly, "...what is made of flesh and blood cannot share in God's Kingdom, and what is mortal cannot possess immortality." (15:50 TEV) He talks about a "spiritual body". There is some evidence (inconclusive) that suggests that the church only came to insist on a physical bodily resurrection at a somewhat later date. Is it possible, then, to say that there was a Resurrection but no revivification? Would a first century world view have allowed for and accepted as true such an interpretation?

Something did happen. There was a well-documented Resurrection. The problem is in what we mean by Resurrection. It seems entirely possible that a few of Jesus' closest followers had intense mystical experiences that convinced them utterly that Jesus had Risen. As they shared their experience with others, a similar conviction arose among those others as well. Some Thai Christian converts have a deep conviction in the reality of a personal God based upon personal experiences, often prayers that were answered beyond all expectation. There's nothing "objective" or "empirical" involved in their witness to the reality of a personal God, but they most certainly can't be charged with lying or trying to deceive others when they assert the reality of the Christian God. In the first century world, where religious experiences were as real as stones and trees and where the divine interfaced with the mundane in numerous ways, is it not possible and even likely that there was a Resurrection without a revivification? Finally, we don't know because our sources don't tell us. It is worth noting, however, that none of those sources describe the revivification of Jesus' corpse. Historical data, that is, confirms the Resurrection and is completely silent concerning a revivification. The Resurrection is historical fact. The revivification of Jesus' corpse is not.

HeRD #511 - Mark Notes

Over the last two years, I've given a fair amount of time to preparing a course on of early church history at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology. I took on this particular task for several reasons. First, early church history is important in and of itself. Every church historian should study it. Second, that history provides insights into the development of all church history. Understanding the beginnings of any history is vitally important to understanding the whole of that history, and the early church is church history's "Mother of All Beginnings". Third, the early church provides us with important comparative insights.

In the natural course of things, I've had to spend some time with the Gospels since they're key primary documents for the study of the early church. I've focused on the Gospel of Mark because most of the "experts" generally take it to be the earliest of the Gospels. Beginning this month, I'd like to share with you some of the things I've learned from studying Mark as a historical document. I confess that I'm undertaking these notes on Mark's Gospel with "fear & trembling.". The study of the life of Jesus and the disciples is in a great deal of ferment these days, and an amateur treads these grounds at his own risk. At the same time, there are a number of HeRD recipients who are far more qualified in New Testament studies than I ever hope to be. The opportunities for "going astray" are legion.

On the other hand, if we pursue the limited and focused task of "mining" Mark for information about the earliest beginnings of the church we can avoid at least a few of the pitfalls ahead of us. Many of the scholars tend to try to look behind the Gospels to find the "real Jesus". They seem to view the Gospels themselves as an obstacle to that quest. They obscure the data the scholars seek. Granted that, I think it's still useful to view the Gospels as significant secondary sources that provide us with their own insights into earliest church history. Those of us who aren't trained New Testament historians can still learn a few things from them for ourselves. So, let's just say that HeRD is taking a holiday in the Holy Land. It should be fun. We might learn something about our own historical situations as well. That's my hope.

HeRD #512 - Good News isn't History (Mark 1:1)

Mark starts out according to the Today's English Version (TEV) by stating, "This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (1:1) This sentence plunges the historian into all sorts of problems, most of which revolve around the words "Good News." Mark isn't a history about Jesus Christ. We don't have any of the footnotes, bibliographies, or other scholarly conventions that go with history. At the same time, this isn't a primary document. It doesn't purport to be an eyewitness account of the events it records. Mark is the first-century equivalent of a published secondary source. The author is obviously writing about the past but not the way historians write about it. How, then, does this "good news" (gospel) treat the past? How did the author accumulate his material and how did he decide which parts of that material to include in the gospel? The author cared about the veracity of the story. So, how did he decide what was the truth about Jesus? What standards for the inclusion of material did he adhere to? How does a gospel approach to the past differ from the historian's? How do their understandings of the truth of the past differ? We're going to have to infer some of the answers to these questions, admitting from the beginning that final answers aren't possible.

There's more we'd like to know. We'd like to know just what primary sources the author did have available. Did these include eyewitness accounts? We can assume there were written documents and accounts (see Luke 1:1-2). Just what form did Mark's written sources take? How many sources were there? How many different traditions about Jesus did they represent? There's no way to answer these further questions, but as we go along we'll find that it's important to keep asking them. In any event, if we're to learn anything of historical value from Mark it's vitally

important that we reach some conclusion, however tentative, about how the author conceived of the past and used oral and documentary sources to recreate it.

HeRD #513 - God's Associate (Mark 1:2-3)

It's frequently very difficult to know where a historical event begins. For the author of Mark, the Jesus Story began with Old Testament prophecy. Jesus' story was thus rooted in the larger story of Israel and linked specifically to Israel's prophetic tradition. This is hardly a startling observation, but we should remember that the Christian church has historically ignored its Jewish roots and all but denied that its Lord and Saviour was a Jew. Mark doesn't ignore these facts. The Gospel opens, rather, with a vivid desert image involving Hebrew messengers, Hebrew paths in the wilderness, and Hebrew corvée laborers straightening those paths for the convenience and safety of their King.

What's the author's purpose in opening this way? The quotation, in part, reminds Mark's readers of Jesus' prophetic connections, and it also suggests that God's direction and purposes are involved. The author affirms that this is a divine event. Citing Isaiah's prophecy also associates Jesus with God in a special way. John is the messenger and the one shouting. He wasn't the one, however, who traveled on the straightened path. God, the divine King, was the one for whom all that work was done. But what about Jesus? Mark clearly implies that John was the messenger shouting orders to prepare Jesus' path. Doesn't that associate Jesus with God?

We're going to find that Mark isn't very clear about just who Jesus was. The author seems to be inviting his readers on a search for Jesus, and he himself presents a mixed picture. His answer is only a suggestive, tentative one. What we may have here is a broad hint that somehow Jesus was associated with God and walked on the path intended for God. In the author's interpretation, then, Jesus is no ordinary man. If I'm correct then the rest of the Gospel is but commentary on 1:2, telling the reader what the author knows about this man with divine associations who was sent by God and foretold by the prophets.

HeRD #514 - John (Mark 1:4-8)

In Mark 1:2-3, the author of Mark put the Jesus Story on its largest stage, Israel and Israel's prophetic tradition. This next passage sets the more immediate stage, the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist. HeRD #434 dealt with John, and I'll only summarize its points here. Passages from the Gospels and Acts suggest that Jesus may have been connected to John before his baptism and may even have been a disciple of John's. Jesus held John in the highest respect and only began his public ministry after John was imprisoned. Jesus associated himself with John's message of repentance and forgiveness.

Jesus didn't come onto the Jewish stage out of nowhere. He was linked to a contemporary prophetic tradition. It's probable that John had a deep influence on Jesus. If Luke 1:36 is correct, Jesus and John were relatives. Jesus could well have had a long association with John, who was only a few months older. Something, in any event, happened between John and Jesus that brought Jesus to the Jordan River for baptism. I think that John had some kind of direct spiritual impact on Jesus. It may well have been formative. In HeRD #434, I wrote, "Perhaps it was John who first awakened Jesus' deep religious concerns and faith. Or, again, perhaps John first helped Jesus articulate such concerns, wherever they may have originated. This all isn't quite pure speculation, because all four of the Gospels and Acts point to a special relationship between Jesus and John. It does help us, furthermore, to appreciate more fully the human side of Jesus. He, like the rest of us, was influenced by his culture, society, and particular individuals he knew." I'd only add here that Mark's attempts to put Jesus in his religious context increases the

historical credibility of his gospel portrait of Jesus. If Mark had claimed that Jesus came out of the sky and was without human antecedents, his gospel would have been diminished in value for the historian. This way, we have a sense that there was an actual person who was born into a real world of complex historical associations. We know distressingly little about those associations, but Mark at least informs us that they existed and that they're associated with Israel's prophetic tradition and with John.

HeRD #515 - John's Baptism (Mark 1:9-13)

Mark 1:9 (TEV) says that Jesus went to the Jordan "not long" after John started baptizing. Mark 1:14 states that after John was imprisoned "Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News from God." Mark, we're going to find, has at best an obscure chronology. His sources, apparently, didn't tell the author much about Jesus' comings and goings. It could also be that he wasn't much interested in a precise chronology. But, Mark does imply that Jesus was with John for most of John's ministry, from close to the beginning until John was jailed. This is more circumstantial evidence suggesting a close relationship between Jesus and John, again leaving us with the possibility that Jesus was originally John's disciple.

Jesus' baptism was clearly a significant spiritual event for him. Mark states that Jesus had a profound experience with the Holy Spirit, one accompanied by visions. It seems, in fact, to be an entirely human pentecostal experience. If we set aside for a moment the later Christian belief in Jesus' full divinity, what we have is Jesus accepting John's call to confess his sins, repent of them, and be baptized. Jesus may have been in a state of some tension and agitation, for it's frequently in such a state that people have profound spiritual experiences. Note, also, that Jesus seems to have experienced God's forgiveness. What else could God's words, "I am pleased with you" mean in this context? Mark's Jesus was, thus, subordinate to God the Father and apparently felt himself in need of divine forgiveness.

We should also take note of Jesus' relationship to the Spirit. In 1:12 Mark states that the Spirit "made" Jesus go into the desert (TEV). Other translations (RSV, JB) use the word "drove" instead of "made". Language like this simply doesn't fit the later Christian dogma about Jesus being fully God-fully human and a co-equal Person of the Trinity. Jesus is clearly subordinate to the power of the Spirit.

HeRD #516 - How Did Mark Know? (Mark 1:9-13)

History depends entirely on reliable information. The more the historian has the better her history will be. Does the same rule apply to gospel writers? More specifically, how did the author of Mark obtain the data reported in this passage? What source did he use to learn that Jesus saw a vision and heard a heavenly voice? How did he know that the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert or that Jesus was tempted there by Satan? Jesus could have been the only source for this information. Even so, we still don't know how the information reached the gospel writer. How was the data "massaged" in the process of transmission, if in fact it originated with Jesus? I think we can be confident that the author himself believed these events took place as he reports them, but we shouldn't suppose that means they were historical events in a modern sense. Indeed, the contents of visions and experiences with Satan aren't historical by definition. They aren't things that a historian can verify. The most the historian can say is that Person X believed she saw a vision and Person Y felt himself under attack by Satan. So, the question is whether or not Jesus believed he had a vision and was tempted by Satan. And how did Mark come to possess this information?

Mark isn't a fabrication. It isn't the product of an over-exercised religious imagination. Whatever it is, it isn't myth in any recognizable sense. The author firmly believed he was writing the truth about the past. It was, for him, an "empirical" past, though one determined by gospel rather than historiography. This means there was some connection with Jesus and the disciples as the ultimate source for much of what he wrote. If that's the case, then we're dealing here with a first century Jewish mystic who saw visions, wrestled with the devil, and believed that he had a special relationship with God--if we can trust Mark's sources. I think we can, at least at this point. It's highly likely that the early church thought Jesus saw dovish visions and the rest of it because Jesus shared this information with others and that information, in one form or another, reached the author of Mark.

HeRD #517 - Back to Galilee (Mark 1:14-15)

As mentioned in HeRD #514, Jesus didn't begin his public ministry until John was imprisoned. And it's interesting to note that he wasn't even in Galilee when that event took place. He had to return there. Assuming this sequence of events is correct, we have no way of knowing Jesus' reasons for rejecting a Judean ministry or a desert ministry in favor of a Galilean town & country ministry. A number of things are possible. Jesus, being Galilean, may have felt more comfortable at home in his own setting. We can assume that Galileans had their own foods, their own speech-ways, and a host of other mores familiar to Jesus. He may, on the other hand, have wanted to dissociate his own style and message from that of John, which would have been harder to do if he'd stayed in Judea. Funding may have been an issue. Jesus may have had sources of financial support in Galilee that he didn't have in Judea. We'll see that Marks' Jesus tried to remain semi-covert in some ways, and that may have been easier to do in Galilee than in Judea. All of this is purely speculative, of course, and all that we know for sure is that, if Mark is correct, Jesus consciously decided to initiate his own ministry in Galilee. It's also interesting to note that there was an interval of some time between Jesus' baptism and his ministry. The text implies that he stayed on with John, which again reinforces our sense that Jesus was John's disciple.

HeRD #518 - - Immediate Response (Mark 1:16-20)

Picture it. A bunch of Galilean fishermen are working at their trade. Jesus walks up, tells them to follow him, and off they go. This happens twice. The dialogue in Mark is bare bones and the description of details minimal at best. The passage seems to contain a paradigm for discipleship. Discipleship brings an end to daily, conventional life. It is a demanding call. Being a disciple takes priority over everything else. It changes one's relationship to society, including family. The emphasis is clearly on the immediate response of the four disciples. In 1:20 James and John literally "down tools" and walk off immediately and without further ado, leaving their father and all else. Why did the disciples leave immediately when Jesus came? And, why would a gospel writer tell the story in this way? There could be a number of reasons:

ONE, the author wanted to emphasize Jesus' supra-human powers and attraction. Jesus, thus, could walk up to complete strangers and compel their immediate discipleship. Or, TWO, these four men already knew Jesus and had indicated their willingness to be his disciples. Jesus was just picking them up. THREE, or, they had already heard Jesus preach and were receptive to him. Perhaps they'd even talked about joining up with him. Or, FOUR, there wasn't a real event like this. The story, rather, defines a model for discipleship for Mark's own time and readership. FIVE, this is a composite of the experience of the earliest church's sense of what it meant for the disciples and for they themselves to follow Jesus. It distills the larger experience of the earliest church. SIX, this is a political statement establishing the primacy of these four men among the leaders of the earliest church. SEVEN, this story affirms the central significance of membership

in the Jesus Circle (and, by extension, the earliest church). Jewish society was a familial, patriarchal society, but here the first disciples reject family and father for joining with Jesus and his new community.

In the original draft of this HeRD, I opted for numbers Four and Five as being most likely. Now, well down the line, I'm not so sure. All seven options are speculative, and I have to admit that Two and Three are entirely possible choices. If I had to bet, I'd probably still go with number Five, but it's entirely possible that this is a composite picture based on actual events in the life of Jesus and his circle of disciples.

HeRD #519 - Beyond Historical Recovery (Mark 1:16-20)

At this point we should give some attention to the way Mark handles chronology and transitions. In 1:14 Jesus returns to Galilee. Then, in 1:16 he's suddenly walking along the shore of Lake Galilee. How long afterwards? A day? a week? ten years later? There's absolutely no way of knowing. My sense is that the author either wasn't much interested in establishing a correct chronology and time frame or his sources didn't provide him sufficient information to do so. It's likely that both of these factors are at work. Strict chronology is essential to the historian and of little consequence to the gospel writer. These abrupt transitions, which abound in Mark, simply move the story along. We don't know the actual sequence of events that lay behind Mark's gospel. The author arranges them, as we'll see, thematically not chronologically. This means that we don't know, from Mark's gospel anyway, how long Jesus' ministry actually was. There is a general consensus among mainline New Testament scholars that it's not possible to reconstruct from the Gospels a chronology of events in Jesus' life between his baptism and his final journey to Jerusalem. This is a frustrating situation for the historian, one that closes some doors to the treatment of Jesus' life historically. Indeed, in the strictest sense, it seems that a biography of Jesus isn't possible. The best we can do is to dig out historical data, such as there is, without hope that a coherent biography of Jesus will result.

HeRD #520 - Mark's Sources

HeRD #518 point towards some of the problems Mark poses the historian. First and foremost among those problems is the question of sources. What sources did the author have and how reliable were they historically? There's no way of knowing for sure, but we can make some informed guesses about Mark's sources. They would have been of several kinds. First and most certain would be the church's oral traditions. Mark was only a generation or a little more from Jesus, which means that those oral traditions were still fresh and almost certainly still informed by the memories of older members who had first-hand, or near first-hand knowledge of the events of Jesus' life. Second, and almost as certain, were the written records already extant. Historians feel relatively sure that there were compilations of Jesus' teachings already in existence by the time Mark was written. It's likely he had access to some of them. Third, it may be that Mark actually interviewed original members of the Jesus Circle, though this is less certain. If Mark was written in Rome, as most scholars believe, there's no reason why some of them might not have moved to Rome. Or, perhaps, Mark was well-traveled enough to have met early disciples elsewhere. Four, besides these three more specific sources of information, the author's own personal Christian experience would have been an important source of what he (or she?) included in the gospel. Five, and by extension, the author's Christian community would have influenced the writing of the gospel through its shared general perceptions about Jesus. It would be incredibly helpful if we knew which of these sources the author actually had and in what combination.

HeRD #521 - Further Speculation on Mark's Sources

From a historian's perspective, the issue of Mark's sources requires constant attention. It's a serious frustration to the historical study of Jesus that the Gospels' evidential base is so obscure. It seems possible to me, however, that Mark's author does give us a hint as to his sources. From the time Jesus called his first four disciples (Mark 1:14-20), the author constantly reminds his readers of the presence of the disciples. They were, as the author tells it, Jesus' constant companions. Is the author of Mark reminding his readers of his "ultimate" source? Can we assume that the author believed his sources were derived from the disciples? That's possible. It at least presents us with the possibility that this gospel rests on fairly solid evidential ground and included sources close to the actual events of Jesus' life and ministry. It's even possible that *if* a historian had had these same sources she could have written a credible biography of Jesus. That's pure speculation, but it's not entirely out of the realm of possibility either.

My own sense is that the author of Mark had good sources for his purposes, which was to tell the gospel truth about Jesus. We should constantly remind ourselves that gospel truth doesn't necessarily contradict historical truth. It just doesn't pay attention to historical issues. In other words, there lurks in the gospel truth about Jesus data for the historian, data obscured by gospel conventions and concerns but valid data none the less. That data, finally, comes from eye witnesses, though not directly or "purely" so.

HeRD #522 - God's Holy & Amazing Messenger (Mark 1:21-28)

This passage makes two declarations about Jesus, one human and one demonic. Jesus' human auditors were amazed by him. First because of the authoritative manner in which he taught. Second, because of his authority over evil spirits. The human view of Jesus contains no hint that Jesus was anything other than a highly unusual individual, a teacher and exorcist of notable authority. It's an evil spirit that recognizes in Jesus something greater. Most versions have the demon declaring that Jesus is the "Holy One of God," but the Today's English Version (TEV) translates the Greek as "God's holy messenger." The TEV makes explicit what's implied in the other translations, namely that Jesus is of God, but subordinate to God. Jesus is "set apart" (holy). Mark, again, associates Jesus with God but doesn't state he's divine. Jesus is under the power of God and, if the TEV is a proper translation of the Greek, a prophetic figure.

It seems significant that Mark puts the declaration of Jesus' "semi-divinity" or divine associations in the mouth of a non-temporal, spirit-world being. Things about Jesus were apparent to the spirit-world that weren't evident in the human world. (This seems even more clearly expressed in Mark 1:34). In a sense, Mark here acknowledges that the gospel Jesus isn't the same as the historical Jesus. The historical Jesus was a man of authority and skill. The gospel Jesus is a man and more than a man. The author of Mark may not have had the words and concepts to express that "more-ness", but already just a generation after Jesus he was groping towards an understanding of Jesus that would ultimately make of Jesus the Second Person of the Trinity. I'd emphasize, however, that the Gospel of Mark isn't Trinitarian. Jesus, here, is fully human. He isn't fully God. The fact that Mark seems to make a distinction between human and extra-human perceptions of Jesus is hopeful from a historian's point of view. It suggests that the author probably was at least somewhat sensitive to the distinction between theological and non-theological interpretations of Jesus. He might be less likely to mask the human Jesus with a divine overlay.

HeRD #523 - A Healing Touch (Mark 1:29-31)

Peter's mother-in-law was ill with a fever. Jesus and the disciples visited her home. Jesus took her by the hand and she was healed. The image created by this episode is a striking one. It points to Jesus' power of healing. The story itself doesn't explicitly claim a miracle, and we

could imagine a situation in which a person with the aches and pains of a low grade fever could have taken to bed and, then, found healing comfort and strength in Jesus' presence and felt better. We could also argue that Mark seems to constantly compress events into shorter-than-life time frames. Maybe Jesus actually took time to tend to her fever and in the process she got better. Beyond such speculations, the author's point seems obvious but also important. Jesus had a power for healing. His touch was healing. We glimpse here the profound impression Jesus made on those around him. We sense, as well, his compassion for others.

We should also remember the spiritual implications of his healing. Jewish ideology held that the ill were deservedly so. They'd done something to displease God. For Jesus to heal people then wasn't only a matter of bringing physical comfort to them, as important as that was. He was also reconciling God to people who believed they were living under divine judgment and punishment. In a world hardened to human suffering and divine wrath, Jesus of Nazareth must have been an incredible person, indeed.

HeRD #524 - A Minor Detail of Some Importance (Mark 1:29-30)

Commentators note that Mark has a terse, sparse literary style. The author doesn't give us very much information in his stories. The story of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law is no exception. That's why it's fascinating that the author does give us some historical detail. This healing took place in Peter and Andrew's home, which suggests that the disciples didn't entirely "down tools" and leave everything behind. They, at least, still frequented their homes. Even more interesting is the fact that Jesus' healed Peter's mother-in-law. Nothing in the story requires that little detail, and Mark's healing episodes seldom contain such personal information. Now, if the author had either an oral tradition or an oral history source, this is about as much information as we could expect. Oral history interviews seldom illicit precise details, because people forget much of that "background stuff." They remember (and often disremember) a few salient points that stuck in their memory. This passage "feels" like that same type of thing. Because of the personal details of location and person healed, I'd almost bet this story came from one of the participants or someone who heard the story from a participant. It might be second hand, but I doubt if it would be any more distant from the event than that. It's entirely possible, then, that this event took place in the "real" world of the empirical past and that the author received his information many years later from an oral source close to the event.

HeRD #525 - He Prayed (Mark 1:35-39)

This passage is incredible. It affords a glimpse of the empirical Jesus that two thousands years of Christian piety has increasingly obscured and even denied. One, Jesus had just spent, according to Mark, a long day intensely involved in peoples' sufferings. Jesus believed that he'd also confronted demonic powers. So, the next morning he went off to a lonely (TEV) or solitary (NIV) or deserted (NRSV) place. Mark doesn't say a word about fatigue, but the sense of it is there. Two, this human Jesus prays. It seems significant that Matthew doesn't report this incident at all and that in Luke (4:42-44) Jesus doesn't pray. A Jesus who prays contradicts the view of high christology, which may already been current in Luke's time. If Jesus was divine why would he pray to the divine? The way Mark's author treats Jesus, as we've noted before, places Jesus in a position clearly subordinate to God and emphasizes Jesus' human qualities. Three, another difference between Mark and Luke is that in Luke 4 the crowd pursues Jesus, but in Mark 1 it's Peter "and his companions" who go looking for him. This seems more plausible historically. They knew Jesus and probably guessed where he'd gone off to. It suggests that the disciples had a somewhat complex role, and that they sometimes acted not only as Jesus' representative to the people but also spokespersons for the people as well. They also appear somewhat insensitive to Jesus' personal spiritual needs. One has the feeling that they broke in on his prayers. There's

even a bit of an accusatory tone here, as if Jesus shouldn't be wasting his time off by himself when there was so much need to be met. You can almost feel the pressure on Jesus, not only from the expectations of the populace but also from those of his friends.

HeRD #526 - Chronological Break (Mark 1:39-40)

Mark 1:21-38 is a chronological unit. It covers two days in Jesus' life. A Sabbath and the day after. In those two days, Jesus preached in the synagogue, healed a man there, healed Peter's mother-in-law, healed many others, and went off to a lonely place to pray. He stayed in Peter and Andrew's home. Now, if the author would only carry on with such careful chronicling of events, Mark would give us a good biography of Jesus. He doesn't. In 1:39 Jesus goes off to preach and do exorcisms all over rural Galilee. At some indeterminate point thereafter a man suffering a "dreaded skin disease" (1:40, TEV) comes to see him. We've totally lost the thread of any chronology. This is no minor matter for the biographer of Jesus. On the one hand, it is highly unusual to have so much information about one day in the life of someone who lived 2,000 years ago. On the other hand, there's no way to fit that day into a larger, credible sequence of events. And, we have the problem that the author puts things together sequentially by theme. There's no reason in the world why he might not have pasted these events together into one day. Mark provides important gospel data on Jesus. He doesn't have to stick to an empirical sequence of events to do so. We, therefore, can't be at all confident that these events actually happened on the same day.

HeRD #527 -The Problem of Silence (Mark 1:40-45)

This passage introduces us to a major puzzle (or headache, as the case may be) in Mark's Gospel. Why did Jesus tell the man he'd healed to keep quiet about the matter? This happens fairly frequently in Mark. Why? One can think up any number of reasons why Jesus might enjoin silence on those who proclaimed his name or praised him for his healing powers, but most of them don't make sense. For example, Jesus told people to keep quiet because he didn't want to get in trouble with the authorities. Trouble is, he kept doing highly provocative things in public venues where he knew his enemies were present. Why, then, would he bother to tell others to keep quiet? Or, again, maybe he thought the time wasn't "right" to be spreading word about himself. But, then, why did he start his ministry by proclaiming that the "right time" had come (Mark 1:15)? In this particular case, it's even more difficult to see why Jesus would tell the man to keep silent. Jesus must have cured skin diseases before this. He already had a reputation as a healer. So, why the silence? Some commentaries suggest that Jesus may have been wanting to avoid further crowds, but that seems so obviously futile that one wonders how a man as insightful as Jesus clearly was could have been so obtuse on this point. The commentators' proposed solution doesn't fit the gospel portrait.

The obvious answer to this puzzle is that this is a literary device. Mark's author progressively unveils a Jesus of power and authority, a man puzzling to others. His question is, "Who is this man?" Having Jesus enjoin silence at various points highlights the theme. The empirical Jesus didn't instruct people to be silent. The Marcan church, however, was going through its own process of discovering Jesus so that this literary device captures an important gospel truth. Jesus' identity wasn't obvious. It had to be discovered. The author's approach on this matter of silence, furthermore, would point to an important historical truth as well. The empirical Jesus was obviously a man, but there was also something about him that pointed beyond the human. The reader, if I'm correct, is then being invited on this gospel search for Jesus. This is all speculation, and certainly a case could be made that Jesus did enjoin silence on some people and spirits. The problem is that this forces his private words (to spirits and individuals) and his provocative public actions into contradiction with each other. Perhaps we

have to conclude that we don't know if Jesus told people to keep quiet about him, but whether he did or not, it fits the author's purposes to have him do so and to emphasize the point.

HeRD #528 - Holistic Medicine (Mark 1:40-45)

This is another powerful image. A man with some kind of ugly, possibly leprous skin disease went to Jesus for healing. The man recognized Jesus' power to help him and asserted as much to Jesus. As Mark has it, Jesus felt pity (TEV, NRSV) or compassion (NIV) for the man, and said that he did want (very much, we feel from Mark's economical prose) to heal the man. And he did. Jesus then went an important step further, one that tells us about his socio-religious context and also shows how aware he was of it himself. Jesus instructed the man to go to the proper authorities and carry out the proper rituals so that he would be ritually purified as well as physically healed. Jesus, thus, didn't just cure the man, but he also liberated him from the oppressive social condition the physical deformity put him in. We need to constantly remember that illness wasn't a matter of being sick. The ill were ill because they'd displeased God. Their illness was, in a sense, karmic, and Jesus released them from that karma. Jesus, in sum, healed the man in three ways. Physically. Socially. Spiritually.

HeRD #529 - Mark & Polyphonic Historiography

One way in which music historians describe the development of Western music is through its "texture". Western music before roughly 1000 CE was "monophonic". In monophonic music, "...the melody is heard without either a harmonic accompaniment or other vocal lines. Attention is focused on the single line." (Joseph Machlis, *The Enjoyment of Music*, p. 307). Between 1000 and 1600 Western music was largely "polyphonic" by which it combined two or more lines of melody. "Here the music derives its expressive power and its interest from the interplay of the several lines." (Machlis, p. 307). After 1600 Western music became increasingly "homophonic," the kind of music Western people are most used to today. There's one dominant melody, but there are also "blocks of harmony, the chords that support, color, and enhance the principal part." (Machlis, p. 308). On the piano, for example, the right hand plays the melody and the left hand plays the supporting chords.

Historical writing can be conceived in a similar way. Monophonic historiography is those monographs that focus entirely on a single subject and ignore the context of the story. Professional historians have little use, generally, for this type of history. Homophonic historiography follows that same single subject but surrounds it with a rich fabric of social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. Monophonic history isolates the subject from these contexts while homophonic historical writing places them in it. Professional historians largely practice the homophonic variety. Polyphonic historiography is the field of comparative historiography. It looks at two (or more), usually related, histories to see how "listening" to each enriches our understanding of the other. This is how I see our tour of Mark. The gospel gives us a second melody that we play in counterpoint to the melodies of Thai church history.

HeRD #530 - Counterpoint: Jesus & Thai Church History

One way to view the history of the earliest church is to see it, centrally, as a search for and a commentary on the person of Jesus. Mark makes this theme starkly evident. Jesus' humanity is in full display. His divinity is a matter of speculation. Discovering his true identity requires a search. As a consequence, early church historians can't avoid a keen interest in the history of theology in general and christology in particular.

Thai church history doesn't appear to be so centrally focused on the person of Jesus. In a strictly formal sense, furthermore, the Thai church has inherited its christology from the West. There isn't, in consequence, the sense of search and discovery that we find in Mark. Overtly, thus, the early church presents a striking contrast to the experience of the Thai churches in their various cultural settings. This overt contrast says a great deal about the nature of modern Protestant missions in Thailand. One, however, could argue that the ways in which the Protestant missionary movement and the Thai churches have viewed Jesus reveal a great deal about their approach to more mundane and supposedly secular subjects and activities. Protestant christology in Thailand, thus, would show important parallels to the way in which the church relates to society and to the forms of concrete activities it carries out. As we're working through Mark, it's important that we keep before us the question of how Mark's Jesus is similar to and different from the Thai church's Jesus--and how those similarities and differences help us understand the church here.

HeRD #531 - Counterpoint: Judeo-Christian Karma

Historians have to make judgments about the past. One of the eternal headaches of the profession is assembling a meaningful and neutral set of standards that are widely acceptable and not prejudicial. It seems to me that church historians, when writing for Christian audiences, can find in the biblical portraits of Jesus just such a standard.

An example of how we might take Jesus as a standard for the study of Thai church history comes from the Jewish concept of "karma". In HeRD #528 we used that idea to describe the socio-religious understanding of illness in Jesus' time. If you were sick or poor or otherwise suffering it was because you had offended God. That's why the Pharisees and scribes appear to be so unfeeling in the Gospels. They believed that the ill deserved their illness. In Mark 1:40-45, after Jesus healed the man with a deforming skin condition he sent the man back to the priests to get the proper documentation that he was cleansed. He told the man, furthermore, to carry out the appropriate rituals to confirm that fact. Jesus didn't try to change the man's belief in karma or even tell him he shouldn't believe in the concept. Jesus liberated him from his own personal karma.

In Thai society, traditionally, people believed that similar conditions were a result of having lived a corrupted former life. Illness, poverty, and suffering were deserved. Belief in karma has been an important Thai belief, and it still has a strong, if less religious impact on peoples' thinking. Studying the differences in Jesus' understanding of karma and that of the Thai church would be an interesting and instructive research enterprise. It would help us gain new perspectives on issues of indigenization. And it would provide the Thai church with an opportunity to reflect theologically in a manner at once biblically and theologically relevant.

HeRD #532 - Counterpoint: Lessons for Church Historians

Studying Mark is a good experience for a historian whose own field of research is apparently far removed from the early church. On the one hand, there's the discovery of new themes in and perspectives on church history. We've looked at a number of these in HeRD. On the other hand, there's the major difficulties involved in obtaining even minimally reliable historical information on the life of Jesus and related events. Early church history is a much more difficult field than Thai church history. We have a vast evidential base, by comparison, and we don't have to be constantly questing after the reliability of the historical data it contains, at least not to the extent or depth of early church history. The fact that Mark is gospel rather than history makes using it for historical purposes a tricky, complex matter. It's hard to find solid ground. Thai ecclesiastical records contain their own pitfalls and tendencies to give

misinformation but they are patently historical materials. They're the sort of thing historiography was invented to deal with. Mark, thus, reminds other historians of the importance of the critical historical method. Studying it sharpens their exercise of that method.

Early church history provides the rest of us with a warning as well. I will confess to you that I look somewhat askance at the way the Jesus scholars and other New Testament historians pile mountains of theory and interpretation on a tiny evidential base. They sometimes (frequently?) transform speculation into fact. On page 1 they state that "if this then it follows that..." and by page 10 the "if" has disappeared. "This" is established fact and "that" follows on for another 300 pages. The fact is that historians in other fields do the same thing, so that studying early church history provides a good reminder to the rest of us. Don't turn speculation into fact! All of this speculation has another side to it, however. New Testament church history is incredibly alive today. It's where the action is, a hotbed of ideas. Everything is up for grabs. Church historians generally, thus, would be wise to obtain some sense of what's going on in early church history. Wouldn't it be grand if so much talent and thought were poured into Thai church history!

HeRD #533 - Counterpoint: Beyond Literalism

Fundamentalist biblical literalism remains a potent force in the Thai church, as it does in the church throughout the world. Reading Mark for historical details, however, is a striking experience, one that demonstrates in a fresh way the power of Jesus' ministry. One doesn't need to believe in a literal, every-word-is-true Bible to experience that power. The Gospel of Mark is a fascinating document. It reflects a real life that was lived by an actual person. It makes a strong, historically plausible case that this Jesus had a profound ability to feel the pains of others and actually do something about their pain. Through the process of searching for the empirical Jesus embedded in the gospel portrait of him, we begin to understand why a whole new religion eventually sprang up from him. He was an incredible person.

Biblical literalism is a stumbling block to discovering the Jesus who lived and healed in Galilee. It denies the distinction between gospel and history. It prevents wrestling with the nature of Mark as gospel. It demands that one accept the literal truth of Mark's words rather than dig for oneself, as the author of Mark intended, into what sort of person Jesus must have been. That's dull. It doesn't stimulate one's mind or heart. It doesn't allow Mark to make his case for Jesus. It shuts us off from the earliest church's own struggle to understand this person. It's no wonder we don't have a clue as to who Jesus is within Thai society. The dominant trend is a biblical literalism that shades into bibliolatry. We're left with the early church's words but not its search, its struggle to comprehend, and its attempts to invent words and images and tell stories that illuminated the real things the actual Jesus did and said. Biblical literalism means: No questions allowed. No doubts entertained. Dead, binding words rather than an alive, liberating search. The term "biblical literalism," if Mark is any measure, is a misnomer. Literal it may be, but biblical it surely isn't.

HeRD #534 - Jesus At Home (Mark 2:1 & 3:20)

The general image of Jesus is that he was a wandering, homeless itinerant who, unlike foxes and birds, had no place of his own to stay. Mark 2:1 appears to contradict that image, depending on which translation you read. Today's English Version (TEV) reads, "A few days later Jesus went back to Capernaum, and the news spread that he was at home." The New International Version's (NIV) translation agrees: "A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home." The New English Bible (NEB) and New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) also agree, but other translations are less clear. The Jerusalem

Bible (JB) states, "When he returned to Capernaum some time later, word went around that he was back..." Still, apparently the majority of translators do agree that Jesus returned to his home in Capernaum after he'd been out teaching and healing for an indeterminate period of time. A second passing reference to Jesus' home in Mark seems to confirm this picture, although there the various translations are in less agreement. TEV still refers to Jesus' home, but the NIV says only that Jesus "entered a house." JB, interestingly enough, translates the Greek here as "home" and the American Standard Version (ASV) notes "home" as a variant reading for "house". Still, all of the major translations agree, either in 2:1 or 3:20, that Jesus had a home. Mark, furthermore, doesn't contain that famous statement by Jesus that foxes have holes and birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest (Matthew 8:20, Luke 9:58).

So what? It seems to me to be no small matter that Jesus, if the author of Mark is right, wasn't a homeless itinerant preacher. He worked out of a home base. He apparently owned, in fact, a home. In 3:21, Jesus' family heard what was going on in his home, where large crowds had gathered to be healed, and they "set out to take charge of him." Clearly, Jesus wasn't living with his family, and his home was his own. IF this was the case, then Jesus apparently practiced a form of semi-itinerant ministry based out of his own home. This is a form of ministry well known to Thailand and one widely practiced since missionary and Thai evangelists started doing rural evangelism. Itinerant evangelists, working from a home base, would go out for varying periods of time to evangelize rural areas. Not infrequently, they would also take simple medicines along with them. Among the missionaries, Daniel McGilvary in the North, was the premier model and practitioner of semi-itinerant evangelism. Although far well less known, the Rev. John A. Eakin, another Presbyterian, also conducted an extensive program of semi-itinerant evangelism during his years in Phet Buri in the 1920s and 1930s. More on this subject in the next HeRD.

HeRD #535 - The Ideal Christian Life Re-examined (Mark 2:1)

The idea that Jesus may have owned a home (see HeRD #534) and used it as a base for conducting his ministry is striking. It gives us an entirely different model for living the Christian life from that of Luke and Matthew, where Jesus is a classic wandering itinerant teacher and healer. The Jesus of Mark is a model much more reasonable and obtainable for the overwhelming majority of Christians who lead lives according to the ways of their society. The idea that Jesus had a home could also put the manner in which his earliest disciples just walked off to follow him in perspective (Mark 1:14-20. See HeRDs #518 & 519). He called them to be his companions when he was on the road, not to leave their homes and families permanently.

New Testament historians point out that the early church included a class of wandering evangelists who dedicated their whole lives to their task. They were homeless. And their form of Christian ministry, as reflected in Matthew and Luke, became an important model for other Christians. There was, evidently, a certain amount of tension between the itinerants and the rest of the earlier church because the itinerants took themselves to be the "true followers" of Jesus. I'd like to offer you the possibility that the author of Mark stood outside the itinerant tradition and used sources that reflected something more closely akin to the actual way in which Jesus worked. This is speculation. Only two things commend it: first, Mark points to it. Second, it's the way evangelists in Thailand conducted themselves, in conditions in the 19th century not entirely unlike those in which Jesus lived.

A couple of further thoughts. If Jesus had a house, he had to have an income of some sort for upkeep. Undoubtedly it was a small house and probably didn't cost much to maintain. (Utilities were really, really cheap in 1st century Galilee). Still, Jesus had to be involved in the everyday economic and social life of a neighborhood and a community. So, where did his income

come from? It's also worth reflecting that a home-owning Jesus was more fully incarnate in his world than the no hole, no nest, and no home Jesus. It's fun to play with the idea that Jesus the Christ, the Fully God Second Person of the Trinity, owned a home. Finally, Mark changes our view of what it means to live a Christ-like life. If Jesus was a home owner, we are more (not less) challenged to live the Christian life within the every day structures of society. And living such a life can be an ideal Christian life, such as it can never be if we accept the homeless Jesus as our ideal.

HeRD #536 - First Challenge (Mark 2:1-12)

This passage contains the delightful story of the four friends who carried a paralytic to Jesus to be healed and had to break into the house through the roof. We should note here something modern day preachers never mention, namely that in Mark it was Jesus' own home they broke into. That puts an interesting twist on things. The story, more largely, highlights Jesus' deep compassion for human suffering. The commentaries point out that his compassion was focused primarily on spiritual rather than physical suffering, hence Jesus at first forgives the man's sins and only secondarily heals him physically.

One of the central themes of the Gospels concerning Jesus is the fact that he came into deep, eventually fatal tension with the over class. According to Mark, Jesus went out of his way to provoke that tension, as we can see in this story of Jesus' first confrontation with members of that class. In full view of these powerful individuals, Jesus makes statements that they couldn't possibly have judged other than blasphemous. Even so, they keep quiet, maybe because they were guests in Jesus' own home or maybe they feared speaking up in front of the crowd. So, Jesus doesn't leave well enough alone but brings the confrontation out into the open and criticizes the teachers of the Law in public and to their faces. Not only that, but he almost seems to heal the paralytic physically out of spite. It's as if he felt he had to do it or lose face. One could even accuse him of showing off.

Why would Jesus do this? Mark's Jesus is clearly a perceptive individual. He must have known the consequences of challenging the over class in this way. Was he betting he could ride this particular tiger? Did he think he had the crowd on his side and so could challenge power with impunity? That's hardly likely. Historians point out that there were plenty of messiahs running around in those years and that violent death was their common lot. Jesus was nobody's fool and only a fool would have thought he could get away with what Jesus was doing. Maybe Jesus was so overcome with compassion for the paralytic that he spoke without thinking. But, why would he then compound the mistake with an open critic of the teachers of the Law? On the face of it, Jesus knew exactly what he was doing and calculated that the possible advantages of challenging authority outweighed the risks involved.

HeRD #537 - It Coulda Happened Just This Way (Mark 2:1-12)

There's no way of knowing if this event actually happened as Mark reports it. It's not likely, historically, that it did, not in just this way. Mark's account, on the other hand, feels very much like the real world that Jesus lived in. My own guess is that the passage is historical to the extent that Jesus did openly and intentionally challenge the over class. They did believe him to be blasphemous, but they didn't voice that opinion too loudly at first. And most certainly the point of tension came over Jesus' incredibly different manner of dealing with the poor and the sick. Modern-day Jesus scholars point out that in the context of first century Palestinian Judaism, Jesus' whole approach was a challenge to religiously-based political authority. The over class held its power, partly, on the premise that they were in God's favor. This, of course, is

always the ideological position of those holding power. They deserve their power...because God loves them more...or because they're better at getting votes...or they led a better past life.

The four men cutting into Jesus' roof is a good story, and it may have its roots in a particular event. There's no way for a historian to know. But, I think we can reasonably accept as historically accurate the larger contents of the story. Frankly, this is another one of those points where the whole interplay of forces and personalities "feels" historical. It wouldn't surprise me at all if the whole thing happened something like Mark's account has it happening.

HeRD #538 - How Old Was Jesus? (Mark 2:5)

When Jesus heals the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12, he addresses the man as, "My Son" (TEV). If Jesus was only 30 or so, as Luke 3:23 claims, why would he have addressed this man as "son"? (The Jerusalem Bible translates this verse even more strikingly as "my child"). In a patriarchal society, this address puts the healed man in a relationship of being a generation younger than Jesus. Jesus was claiming to be old enough to be the man's father. Now, it's true that life spans were much shorter, something around 30 years, and it's barely possible that the paralytic was a very young man, a youth of 13-15. Jesus, being 30, could (barely) have been old enough to be his father. It's also possible that Jesus was older than 30. Crossan in *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (pp. 21-23) points out that Jesus could have been born at any time during the reign of Herod (37-4 BCE) and died at any point while Pontius Pilate was Prefect of Judea (26-36 CE). The general opinion that Jesus was born close to 4 BCE, that is at the end of Herod's reign, is an educated guess. Now, if we speculate that Jesus was born about 10 BCE and that his ministry took place towards the end of Pilate's time, say around 35 CE, then Jesus was about 45 years old at the time of his ministry. Even if we accept the date of 30 CE for Jesus' death, the one most often given by scholars, Jesus would still have been about 40 at the time of his ministry. In this case, it makes much more sense for him to address the paralytic as "son". At 45 Jesus would have been nearly a grandfather figure anyway. All of this is sheer and pure speculation. Note, however, that it fits the general parameters of Crossan's "educated guess" just as well as a somewhat later birth and an earlier death does.

To those who would argue that we can't even know if Jesus said these words or this event happened, I would agree. But, the author of Mark saw no problem in having Jesus address the paralytic as "son," and he must have had some notion of Jesus' age. It's very unlikely that the author himself had any idea of how old the paralytic was, which means that he had Jesus calling a man of indeterminate age "son". The notion of a young Jesus calling another man of unknown age "son" in a patriarchal social context seems unpersuasive and questionable.

HeRD #539 - Second Challenge (Mark 2:13-17)

In this story, Jesus called Levi, the tax collector, to be a disciple. In the course of events, he sat down to a meal in Levi's home with a large gathering of socially objectionable people. (2:15) He did this in a public way and was seen by a group of Pharisees, who questioned his disciples about why Jesus ate "with such people" (2:16 TEV). For the second episode in a row (cf. 2:1-12), Jesus chose to confront representatives of the over class rather than ignore them. They didn't voice their criticisms directly to him, and he could have ignored them if he'd wanted to avoid a direct confrontation. Jesus chose to challenge them.

In HeRD #527, we raised the issue of Jesus' ordering demons and certain individuals to keep quiet about his identity. Jesus' actions in Mark 2 seem in clear contradiction to his words in Mark 1. In this chapter, Jesus is going out of his way to show his power and his attitudes towards the "sinners" and "saints" of his society. Jesus didn't enjoin silence to cover up his message or

intentions. Is it possible, then, that when he ordered silence he was trying to deliberately point away from himself and towards his actions? Could he have been saying, "Don't focus on my person. Focus on my message, given in actions as well as words"? It's quite possible that this is exactly what Jesus (Mark's Jesus, at least) was doing. If he truly believed in the importance of humility, it's likely that Jesus practiced humility himself. If he believed his message was divinely inspired, furthermore, it's likely that he would have been concerned to have people focus on that message.

HeRD #540 - Jesus & the Agents of the Over Class (Mark 2:13-17)

For 20 centuries Christian preachers have been castigating the tax collectors of Jesus' time as bad people--really, really bad people. Evidently, we've had good reason. Tax collectors were the oppressive agents of the over class. They made large, entirely legal profits by taking more from the people than they paid into the government's coffers. OK, they were "sinners," but they were wealthy oppressors, They did the over classes' dirty work for it and, in that sense, made the whole rotten, corrupt Roman system possible. They collected the money that paid the bills of oppression.

Thus, the Pharisees' question in Mark 2: 16 is a fair one. Jesus, the exorcist and wisdom teacher, was supposed to be on the side of the people. So, what was he doing making up to the likes of tax collectors? To do so was unpatriotic. It also made him ritually unclean. Now, why would a supposedly pious man do such a thing? They must have suspected that Jesus was finding a way to fund his operation and pay the expenses on his home. His approach and bad attitudes weren't going to get him any funds from the pious wealthy. The poor didn't have much, if any, money. That left the dirty tax collectors as a viable source of funding.

Assuming that Jesus' motivation wasn't pecuniary, as hardly seems likely given the kind of man he was, then we're thrown back on Mark's explanation. Jesus trafficked with these sinners out of a sense of compassion for them. This, in spite of the fact that they were the minions of the over class. Jesus' compassion for the tax collectors provides, possibly, an explanation as to why Jesus openly challenged the pious over class. He did it to try to communicate the gospel to them as well. He apparently thought that he could do that only through daring acts of public compassion and by challenging the Pharisees and others to learn new ways of thinking.

HeRD #541 - The New Community (Mark 2:13-28)

There are three stories included in this long passage, and they all follow on one connected theme. Jesus, through his actions, was defining the rules of behavior for his disciples in distinction from the social and religious norms of their society. It's important to note that the disciples are a constant presence of some importance in each story. In 2:16 the Pharisees ask them why Jesus ate with sinners. In 2:18ff their own behavior (failure to fast) is subject to question, and again in 2:23ff the behavior of the disciples (picking wheat on the Sabbath) is criticized. What we have here, in a sense, is a charter for the very earliest church. The Jesus Circle, according to Mark, maintained close social contact with social marginals and even includes them in its numbers. It defies conventional expectations concerning pious behavior (2:18-22). And, it doesn't assign ultimate significance to keeping the Jewish Law (2:23-28). The author makes no attempt to link these events chronologically. They are, rather, linked by the common theme mentioned above.

It's not clear at all that any of these events actually happened as such. They represent, I think, remembered values, sayings, and stories about the sorts of things Jesus did. Most of the details in the stories are generic rather than specific, excepting the name of Levi, the tax

collector, and the fact that Jesus ate in his house (2:14-15). My own feeling is that in these verses we're located as much or more in the author's own time than in Jesus' time. He's defining, if I'm correct, the nature of Christian community for the church itself. He's describing and defining the church's identity, both to explain why the church is different from other religious entities and how church members should behave. Mark 2:21-22 (new patches and new wine) highlight the theme that the life of the new community is different from the social and religious norms of society. The church contains new wine (Jesus? the Holy Spirit?) and it requires a new wineskin. What we have here, in sum, is quite possibly a second generation Christian saying, " *This* is who we are. This is *how* we became who we are."

HeRD #542 - Gospel Husk (Mark 2:23-28)

I'm fairly sure that this passage never happened as Mark described it. First, the author gives no specific time frame and offers no specific details, such as would lead us to feel there was an actual event involved. Second, why were Pharisees out walking in wheat fields with Jesus and his disciples on the Sabbath? Seems unlikely. Third, the whole scene must have taken place close to where Jesus and the disciples were lodging. Sabbath travel laws were strict, but the Pharisees didn't criticize the disciples for traveling on the Sabbath. But, if they were close to home and it being the Sabbath, would they have been likely to eat the wheat? Why didn't they just return their lodgings and eat there? What they did couldn't have been done casually, in spite of Mark making it seem that way. They transgressed the Sabbath Laws in a serious manner. The author may have made the story up entirely as the context for Jesus' teaching about keeping the Sabbath, specifically the statements in verses 27-28. Or, he may have pieced the story together from scattered fragments of his sources' memories and writings. Fourth, the whole sequence of events in 2:13-28 is artificial. Mark doesn't disguise that fact in any way. He's clearly presenting a line of argumentation. The story fits too neatly to be taken as an actual event.

Now, of course, one can invent a logical set of reasons why this story could have happened as Mark tells it. But those reasons have to be fairly complicated and aren't the sort of thing likely to have survived a generation of failing memory to reach Mark's time. What I'm saying is that there are none of those little details that have given other Marcan stories a sense of specificity and probability.

Note: I haven't since come across information that, in fact, Jesus himself rejected the idea that picking grain on the Sabbath was a violation of it. The matter, evidently, was in dispute in his time, and he took a less strict view. Thus, an actual historical dispute is reflected here, and it's quite possible that the disciples actually did pick and eat the grain quite casually, knowing Jesus approved.

HeRD #543 - The Plot Thickens (Mark 2)

Mark isn't just telling a story. He's presenting gospel data and lines of argument. In HeRD #541, I argued that most of Mark 2 contains a definition and description of the nature of Christian community. At the same time, Mark is also pointing to a progression in the tension between Jesus and the over class. That theme runs through this chapter. In 2:7, the Pharisees are critical of Jesus' forgiving a man's sins, but they don't actually voice their thoughts. Jesus read their minds, as it were. In 2:16 the Pharisees voice their criticisms of Jesus' eating with sinners, but not directly to him. They go to his disciples. Finally, in Mark 2:24, the Pharisees voice their criticisms of the disciples picking wheat on the Sabbath directly to Jesus. On one level, the whole sequence seems entirely artificial in its construction. It's much too neat for the real world. At another level, however, I suspect that Mark is pointing to something that did happen. The more the over class came to know about Jesus the more openly critical they became of him. I can

just hear some informant telling the author of Mark, "At first, you know, the Pharisees didn't say much. They mostly just listened. But we knew they weren't happy about things. And Jesus kept egging them on, kept criticizing them to their faces. And he encouraged us to do things that only made matters more tense. After awhile they started to question us and question Jesus more and more openly. Things soon got really bad." This is completely speculative, but if the author did use oral sources and was told things like this, then we can see him crafting his raw data into gospel data, a set of stories that capture several intertwining themes and carry the gospel story forward with dramatic effect. In any event, there's no good reason why the author's gospel description doesn't contain strong hints as to historical realities.

HeRD #544 - Crossan's Mark (Mark 10:13-16)

Let's jump ahead a long ways, to Mark 10, and look at how one of the "name" Jesus Scholars treats Mark. In his book, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (pp. 63-64), John Dominic Crossan devotes a couple of paragraphs to Jesus' blessing of the little children. His approach offers an interesting contrast to what we've been doing in HeRD.

First, Crossan divides these verses into the words of the historical Jesus and the words of the "historical Mark." According to Crossan, the actual words of the empirical Jesus were, simply, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." (Mark 10:15 NRSV) The rest of the text was written by Mark. It's what Crossan calls the "framing situation". He points out that the words "touch," "took in his arms," "blessed," and "laid hands on" are "...official bodily actions of a father designating a newly born infant for life rather than death, for accepting it into his family rather than casting it out with the garbage." He then states that the "Marcan church" "must have been" debating, like Jesus against the disciples, whether it should adopt abandoned infants.

Crossan's treatment of Mark 10:13-16 is very much in the tradition of the Jesus scholars. They hold that the Gospels contain only a smattering of Jesus' actual words. These words are embedded in a dominating overlay that mixes mythological and literary themes. Each Gospel, then, is a mythic-literary response to Jesus, one based primarily on the experience of the authors' own churches. We have to work very carefully and very hard, almost like an archeologist, to discover anything about the empirical Jesus. The Jesus scholars have, to date, focused largely on rediscovering Jesus' actual words and not given much attention to his actions. I'd like to share with you some critical comments on Crossan for our next HeRD.

HeRD #545 - Contra Crossan I (Mark 10:13-16)

In HeRD #544, I summarized briefly John Dominic Crossan's treatment of this passage in *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (pp. 63-64). It's a good example of the approach of the so-called Jesus Scholars, who are trying to reconstruct the empirical Jesus through historical methods. There are a number of things here that leave me feeling uneasy about that approach. It's disconcerting, for example, how easily Crossan seems to divorce Jesus' words from events. Crossan assumes, apparently, that Jesus' words, although not remembered exactly, would have more likely survived than his actions because Jesus lived in an oral culture. He also seems to assume that the author of Mark would have worked only with "oral traditions" or written texts, documents that mostly preserved Jesus' teachings. The Jesus scholars, furthermore, think that the mythic component of ancient Greek and Roman thinking also had an impact on the Gospels.

Admitting that Crossan has some points (and that he's the expert!), we could still take a different perspective on things. *First*, the author of Mark doesn't seem to be consciously writing myth. Luke and Matthew's Christmas stories, yes, OK, they contain mythic elements. But Mark

seems bent on exposing the human Jesus. Let's give the ancients some credit for brains. They knew when they were augmenting events with mythic themes. As far as I can see, the author of Mark eschews such themes and isn't interested in turning Jesus into a deity. *Second*, Mark wrote only 30 years or so after Jesus. That's just a generation away, and there were still people living who knew Jesus personally. Others had died only recently, having left their memories with friends and relatives as they told and re-told their experiences with Jesus. From an oral history perspective, Jesus was still very much within living memory. It's as if Jesus had died in about 1968, which in terms of oral history is no big deal at all. I've interviewed people with memories that go back to before 1910. A person who is 60 will have adult memories going back to the mid-1950s and childhood memories back to before 1945. It's even possible that the author of Mark was himself a witness to some of the events he reports. The empirical Jesus wasn't nearly so distant a figure from Mark as the Jesus scholars seem to think. There's no way of knowing whether Mark consciously did oral history interviews, but in any event there was a lot of oral data available to him informally. Given his perspective on Jesus, it's hard to believe he didn't make use of that data. *Third*, people remember events more clearly than they do words. This is just as true for an oral culture as it is for a literate one. It's true that there were Jewish scribal oral traditions that preserved the teachings of important rabbis. There were probably some such scribal memories of Jesus' words. But there's no reason to throw out the existence of informal "people's-traditions" that more likely preserved memories of Jesus actions than his words.

Mark, I think, is closer to the empirical Jesus than Crossan allows for. He likely had better data than the Jesus Scholars think. At those points where we have discrete, specific facts presented in story form, we need to take those facts more seriously than they seem to do.

HeRD #546 - Contra Crossan II (Mark 10:13-16)

Following up on HeRDs #544 and 545, there's one other thing that leaves me distinctly uneasy about Crossan's treatment of this passage in his book, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (pp. 63-64). In the scholarly tradition of recent Jesus scholarship, he assumes that the story "overlay" about Jesus calling the little children to him is an invention of Mark that addresses a contemporary problem. Crossan argues from one quotation, taken from 1st century Egypt, that newly born girl infants were sometimes (often?) left to die. He then asserts that the Marcan church "must" have been debating whether or not it should take responsibility for such children.

Crossan's use of the word "must" creates an impression that has to be rejected out of hand. He's engaging in sheer speculation. If the truth be told, he has no idea who the author of Mark is, where he wrote, or which church's life he participated in. There is no way of knowing whether exposing infants was practiced where he lived unless we assume a cultural uniformity for the first century Roman Empire that didn't exist. Even if the practice was wide spread, there's no way of knowing whether a particular, unknown church in a particular, unknown location was at all concerned with the issue. Early churches accepted slavery as a matter of fact. The Marcan church may have done the same with infant exposure. There is absolutely no way of knowing. Crossan's passing off his speculations with the word "must" is just plain bad historical method. On a scale of historical probability, it's more probable that Jesus did something like Mark reports him doing; and that Mark reports the event to remind his readers of an important gospel fact concerning Jesus.

HeRD #547 - The Empirical Jesus Revealed (Mark 3:1-6)

Interpreting events in Mark is complicated. This passage, for example, seems both contrived and real at one and the same time. On the one hand, it contains no specific little

details. It follows very neatly on 2:23-28 and elaborates the subject in that passage. If Jesus, furthermore, had attended this synagogue previously, he'd done so without healing the paralytic's hand. What made his enemies think he'd do so this time? If he hadn't visited this synagogue, how did they know he would? Why, again, did they think he'd heal this man this time? Or, was there a "truth squad" following Jesus around to try to catch him doing something wrong? As it stands the event is too neat and doesn't quite ring true, historically. There's the added problem that Mark reports Jesus as feeling both angry and sorry for his enemies (3:5 TEV). Now, how would the author of Mark know what Jesus was feeling? Did Jesus say to the disciples, "Boy, did I have mixed emotions about those Pharisee guys"? And then the disciples remembered that and somehow the data got to Mark. Seems farfetched.

On the other hand, the event is vintage Jesus: His compassion for a member of the under class. His attack on the dehumanizing aspects of the Law. His open defiance of his enemies, which we can take as his attempt to communicate with them. The evolving plot to assassinate Jesus (a continuation of a theme in Mark 2). Even his reported mixed emotions, a very human response that still manages to convey Jesus' compassion for the over class. This story, in all probability, summarizes in gospel form important elements of the empirical Jesus' personality, behavior, and message. It probably recalls, stereotypically, things that happened in the empirical Jesus' life.

HeRD #548 - Mark's Data Reconsidered

Following on HeRD #547 and a number of other recent HeRDs, we're still faced with the problem of how Mark collected, collated, and recorded his data. We've noted a number of clues. The constant presence of the disciples, for example, may be a "footnote" telling us something about one of his sources. In Mark 2-3, we have what may be another clue, the progressive growth of the over classes' animosity towards Jesus. In HeRD #543, we noted that in Mark 2 the over class went from harboring ill thoughts about Jesus to openly expressing their negative feelings to him directly. By 3:6, they're plotting to kill him. On the one hand, the sequence of events is too neat and doesn't leave room for mixed feelings about Jesus or for those of the over class that may have sympathized with him. Still, as I noted in HeRD #543, Mark does capture what must have been actually happening, that is that the more the over class heard and observed the less it liked Jesus. By whatever research method he may have used, the author of Mark knew that the over class didn't automatically reject Jesus. It took time for their antipathy to form and grow. The author was aware of historical processes and portrayed them in gospel form. It seems possible that his data included a number of incidents in Jesus' life, as remembered by his informants. Some of the stories themselves may have suggested the historical developments that took place, and Mark may have shaped them and re-worked into his own gospel drama.

The point I want to emphasize here that Mark very probably reflects with some accuracy historical processes that took place in the life of Jesus. He even seems to have some degree of sensitivity to a time line, in which a series of events is made to reveal the progressive unfolding of such processes. If the story line has some basis in history, isn't it possible and even likely that the individual stories that compose that line also have some basis in the actual past? And, again, if Mark is sensitive to historical changes that took place in the events of Jesus life, wouldn't that suggest that he was using some historically reliable data to shape his gospel? Let me emphasize, as always, that we're playing here with speculation and probabilities. But, in any event, I don't think we can dismiss lightly the possibility that Mark offers us some clear windows on the empirical Jesus.

HeRD #549 - The Crowd (Mark 3:7-12)

The crowd is important. It's an active, important participant in the gospel reconstruction of Jesus' life. This passage recalls that theme. It focuses our attention on the crowd of people who swarmed to Jesus, and it alerts us to changes taking place in the nature of that crowd. First, it's clearly growing in size, and one senses from Mark's narrative how overwhelming it was becoming for Jesus. It threatened to crush him (3:9). It contained, especially, many suffering people in need of his healing touch (3:10). Second, it was a more international crowd. Jesus' fame had spread beyond Galilee and beyond the larger Palestinian region. We should note here that people were coming to him from non-Jewish regions as well, according to Mark's list in 3:7-8. Nothing is said of it, but the implication seems to be that Gentiles were now numbered among those attracted by Jesus.

This last point is extremely important from a church history perspective. The first great crisis the church faced, after the Resurrection, was the "Gentile Problem". An important part of the earliest church felt that it should admit into its numbers only those Gentiles who underwent circumcision and converted to Judaism. The bulk of the church eventually rejected that viewpoint. It may well be that the author of Mark is here reminding his readers that the Gentiles began coming to Jesus early in his ministry. He was their teacher and healer/exorcist too.

In any event, the crowd was growing in size and complexity. Again, I'd like to note that while the particular event described here seems generic rather than specific, the underlying developments revealed through the story seem to have historical weight. Jesus' ministry, over time, attracted more and more interest in an ever expanding geographical region. Communications and travel conditions were quite good so that news about Jesus could spread quickly, and it wouldn't have taken all that long for people to travel to Galilee from surrounding territories to find out about Jesus for themselves.

HeRD #550 - Keep Quiet! (Mark 3:11-12)

his passage dove tails quite neatly with Mark 1:21-28, which we looked at in HeRD #522. In both of these passages, people possessed by evil spirits declare Jesus to be either God's holy messenger (TEV wording) or the Son of God. In both, Jesus orders the demons to keep their mouths shut about who he is.

From a strictly historiographical perspective, all of this is problematical and outside the bounds of the historian's competence. Assuming Jesus didn't carry on public conversations with the demons (since he was ordering them to silence, it would be a silly contradiction to think he did so in public), we can't verify that he actually did order demons to silence. Demons, in any event, are a phenomenon historians can't study. The best we can do is to say that either the author of Mark had sources that believed Jesus did such a thing, or he made up this theme for his own gospel purposes. This theme does, however, highlight the fact that Jesus was seen to be an unusually powerful exorcist, a man who could converse with and exercise authority over evil spirits. Beyond that fact, it still seems that Mark is using this theme to reflect one other fact, namely that Jesus wasn't obviously the divine Second Person of the Trinity and he never declared himself to be holy or divine. The crowd is testimony to the fact that Jesus' compassion, authority, and power were evident to his contemporaries. The demons are testimony to the fact that other people didn't see in him an essential divine-ness. It takes even his disciples all the way to the end of Mark 8 to figure out that Jesus is something beyond the average human, and even there Peter declares Jesus to be only the Messiah, that is God's agent, not God (8:27-30).

I think we have to take Mark's gospel interpretation seriously. In other ways the author is apparently sensitive to historical themes, such as the growth in the size and complexity of the crowd and the growing antipathy of the over class to Jesus. It seems likely that the empirical

Jesus didn't strike most of those who knew him as anything other than an unusual, powerful individual.

HeRD #551 - Organizing the Jesus Mission (Mark 3:13-19)

In HeRD #549, we saw that as his ministry developed Jesus faced increasingly large and complex crowds of people. Mark 3:1-12 suggests that the demands placed on him, both emotionally and in terms of time, had become a heavy burden. In this passage, we find Jesus taking steps to deal with that burden. He called twelve "apostles" and commissioned them to be his companions, to preach, and to perform exorcisms.

New Testament scholars generally emphasize the fact that Jesus called 12 disciples, arguing that this number is symbolic of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Some argue that it was the later church that "invented" the idea of The Twelve to demonstrate that the church is the true heir of Israel. Others contend that the fact that Jesus appointed The Twelve is so widely attested to in early church records that it is all but certain he did establish an inner circle comprised of 12 disciples. Assuming he did, it then becomes reasonable to argue that Jesus himself took the first steps towards the organization of the church. Although there's no evidence to suggest he had a larger purpose than to respond to the pressing needs of his own ministry, he did lay the foundations of what became the church. He selected those who later became the church's first leaders. In this sense, there's a clear line of continuity between the pre-Easter Jesus Mission (or Jesus Movement or Jesus Community) and the post-Easter church.

One can also argue, furthermore, that in choosing an inner circle of 12 disciples Jesus also intended that his movement and ministry be taken as the True Israel. He took this opportunity to assert once again that he faithfully represented the God of Israel. His followers were the true heirs of the nation. This was yet another bold challenge to the over class, which also took *itself* to be the real heirs and would have rejected out of hand the idea that fisher folk and their ilk could truly inherit God's favor. Jesus conceived the embryonic church, then, as an alternative nation centered on his message of divine compassion for the under class.

HeRD #552 - Eyewitness Testimony (Mark 2:1-12)

In his commentary on Mark, entitled *Mark* (p. 63), Lamar Williamson Jr. observes that Mark 2:1-12 is "unusually detailed and vivid," which leads "some commentators" to take these vivid details as evidence for eyewitness testimony. As has been clear in previous HeRDs, I'm increasingly convinced that those who think Mark availed himself of first hand oral history data are correct. It seems entirely likely that Mark actually interviewed people in assembling his gospel. There was a tradition in the later early church that the author of Mark received his information from Peter. There's no way to assess now the truth of that tradition, but it could be that the early church was recalling, at the very least, that Mark was based on oral sources close to the events recorded.

If the author of Mark relied on oral data, that reliance has important implications for the historian's use of Mark. On the one hand, oral historical data is notoriously unreliable because it's dependent on fallible human memory. People remember even important events incorrectly. They get details wrong or can't remember them. It's the bane of church historians in Thailand that they have to rely heavily on oral data for studying Thai local church history. In the case of Mark, one can account for the confusing mix of concrete details and broad generalizations as being partly a consequence of having to rely on oral data.

On the other hand, judiciously used, oral history data reveals the texture of the past in a way difficult to obtain from written records. Imagine the opportunity Mark may have had in interviewing people who knew Jesus intimately. Their experiences with Jesus would have given him a vivid sense of who Jesus was, how he spoke, and the impact he made on others. And, again, we find in Mark just such a vivid, startling account of the man Jesus.

HeRD #553 - Tertium Genus

HeRDs #496 to #502 criticized the historiographical model that describes the emergence of the early church as a process of the institutionalization of a movement. The underlying premise of that model is that the progressive birth of the church was a corruption of the "pure" Jesus Movement. Those HeRDs questioned the premise that the assumed characteristics of a movement and an institution can be distinguished in reality. Movements have organizational structures. Institutions have life. In the case of the early church, its emergence as a separate institution was already implicit in Jesus' ministry. Jesus, one could argue, initiated institutionalization when he called the Twelve.

How then can we conceive of the birth of the church? From my reading of Eduard Schweizer's *Church Order in the New Testament*, it's evident that the church only gradually became aware of itself as an entity distinct from Judaism and from the Gentiles (a "tertium genus"). Schweizer charts this emerging awareness through the New Testament. A possible way to describe the birth of the church, then, is say that it came into existence only as the believers' in Jesus began to conceive of their groups as a distinct entity. Studies in the modern phenomenon of nationalism suggest that there is no objective measure for nationality. People are said to be a particular nationality only as they themselves feel themselves to belong to that nation. We can apply the same principle to the early church. It became the church as it became aware of itself as the church. This approach lets the early church tell us when it was born rather than imposing an artificial, modern description of its birth on the past.

We can also apply this measure to the Thai church. The Thai church wasn't born on a particular date, depending on the denomination in question. It's still coming to birth as it becomes conscious of itself as both distinctively Thai and distinctively Christian. It's an emerging tertium genus, different from other Thais and different from other Christians. My sense is that the Thai churches are still "in process" on this and aren't yet fully born. Different groups and denominations are at different points in the birthing process.

HeRD #554 - More Evidence (Mark 2:13-17)

Gerd Theissen's insightful treatment of the calling of Levi and Jesus' eating with sinners in this passage, in *The Shadow of the Galilean* (p. 127), brings into focus the issues we've been wrestling with concerning Marks' use of evidence. On the one hand, Theissen states, "A story was needed in early Christianity in which Jesus ate together with toll collectors and sinners. This could provide justification for Gentile and Jewish Christians eating together, even if the Gentiles did not observe Jewish food laws. The problem became acute at the end of the forties in Antioch. Did the story come into being in order to solve the problem?" On the other hand, he notes that the story presupposes a frontier toll station by the Sea of Galilee. In Jesus' time the area in question was a border area and there could have been a toll station. That boundary disappeared after 39 CE. There was no boundary again throughout the first century. Theissen writes, "In other words, the story of the toll collector's party presupposes conditions which only existed in the time of Jesus, and no longer held after AD 39. This brings us to a time in which meals shared between Jews and Gentiles in the early Christian communities were still no problem." He concludes, "So could it be that the tradition of the toll collector's party contains a historical

reminiscence? There is no doubt that it was used later to solve problems about eating together in the community." Theissen leaves unanswered questions concerning the historicity of the event.

We have, then, an incidental historical fact that came from Jesus' own time, or shortly thereafter, embedded in the story. It's impossible to believe that the author of Mark inserted the fact to fool his readers. There's no reasonable doubt that the story with its embedded fact came together. If this is the case, the story came from Jesus' day. It's at least possible, perhaps even likely, that what we have here is the memories of a witness to the event who told the story as she or he remembered it. The telling including as a matter of course a detail that most people at Mark's time wouldn't have known. None of this precludes the author's having included the story because it addressed the problem of Gentiles and Jews eating together. That problem had arisen, in the first place, because of Jesus' habit of eating with sinners, and the story reflected the way the empirical Jesus acted and quite possibly also recalled an actual event in his life. Theissen's remarks, in any event, lend just a tad more credence to the possibility that the Gospel of Mark is based on oral data collected from people who knew Jesus and the events of his life personally.

HeRD #555 - Eyewitness Accounts in New Testament Times

In an article on Jesus' resurrection as history, Wolfhart Pannenberg makes the following observation about Paul's evidence for the resurrection: "...Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15, did not think a mere demand for faith was enough, but he gave the list of the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. This is a proof as it was commonly used in legal proceedings. The Greek historians, for instance Herodotus, also gave their proofs in such a way. Historical evidence was obtained by an interrogation of the eyewitnesses. It is not without reason that Paul emphasized the point that most of the witnesses were still alive and could still be submitted to an interrogation (I Corinthians 15:6). The proof Paul gave was for his time a historical proof, a first-hand proof beyond doubt."

What I've been arguing is the possibility that the author of Mark based his History of the Life & Times of Jesus of Nazareth, in part, on "an interrogation of the eyewitnesses." Pannenberg's observations, assuming they're correct, makes that possibility yet more credible. Oral evidence had a certain legal standing in Roman times. Ancient historians made use of such data.

Those observations also throw into doubt the distinction between gospel and history. It's possible that the Gospel of Mark is a historical work, although one written according to the conventions of ancient rather than modern historiography. That is an intriguing possibility. It suggests that Mark's account just might take us closer to the "historical Jesus" than many scholars have allowed. It may also mean that the author of Mark took a view of the past not that dissimilar from our own. He didn't simply make up fictionalized accounts to package the "sayings tradition" of Jesus that, in turn, solved problems in his home church. He was, instead, communicating to his readers important information for their time and place about the meaning of events that really did take place in a past time and place.

HeRD #556 - Ancient Research Historian

The common view among mainline academics seems to be that the Synoptic Gospels were cobbled together by "editors" whose main task it was to integrate oral and written traditions about Jesus into a coherent unit. Their creativity as writers was largely limited to the choices of material they made, how they combined that material, and the order they gave to it. Many would argue that it's incorrect to consider the Gospel writers as authors. Others see those writers as

creative individuals, worthy of the title of "author" but still as mostly re-working the traditions they relied upon.

We need to think more about this. The author of Mark was a highly creative individual. He may well have invented the gospel genre. He has a central theme, namely the unfolding the divine identity of the man Jesus. He shows a clear awareness of historical developments. His sources didn't just appear magically on his writing table. He had to go out and collect those sources. He might have conducted interviews in the process. It's very difficult to believe that the author hadn't gone through a personal discovery of who Jesus was for himself. That experience would have had a formative influence on how he wrote his Gospel. Isn't it possible that what we have here is, in fact, the original work of an ancient research historian, based on his sources as any history must be but still an original work? I think so.

HeRD #557 - Crazy Exorcist (Mark 3:20-21)

Although we have no dates, it is clear that Mark contains a chronology of events. By the time of this passage, Jesus' popularity among many was increasing even as the over class was increasingly opposed to him. Jesus' popularity is underscored by the fact that the crowd that assembled at Jesus' home (TEV, RSV, JB, Goodspeed, & AV as a variant reading all state that Jesus "went home") made such great demands that both he AND his disciples "had no time to eat." (TEV) Even with the addition of the Twelve as preachers and exorcists (see HeRD #556), Jesus' popularity had become an even greater burden than before.

Jesus' reputation, however, was a mixed one. There were those that were convinced that Jesus had gone mad. Mark, typically, gives us no details as to what caused them to think this way. Perhaps his teaching was so outlandish that many couldn't accept it. Or, again, it may have been Jesus' penchant for attacking powerful interest groups that caused some to doubt his sanity. In any event, the rumor spread that Jesus had become mentally unbalance until it reached Jesus' family in Nazareth.

It is significant that neither Matthew nor Luke contain this passage. Only Mark reports the impression that Jesus was crazy. His purpose in doing so might have been to reinforce even further the idea that Jesus' divine identity wasn't apparent to those around him. Those who knew Jesus saw him only as a man. I'd like to return to this point in the next HeRD and speculate on why the author of Mark may have been so insistent that Jesus wasn't obviously anything more than a man.

HeRD #558 - Theological Disputation Over the Person of Jesus

The Gospel of Mark insists that Jesus' divine identity was hidden from those around him. It also portrays Jesus as trying to keep things that way by ordering demons and those he healed to keep quiet about himself. What's going on here? It's hard to understand why a gospel writer would want to proceed in this manner, and certainly both Matthew and Luke rejected Mark's approach even as they availed themselves of his information. Mark, in short, wanted to inform his audience that Jesus' divine nature wasn't historically evident. It seems only logical that Mark's audience must not have realized the hidden nature of that identity. If they did there'd hardly be any reason for the author to write in this manner. That audience, furthermore, could hardly have been non-Christian. It would be ridiculous for Mark to engage in an evangelistic approach that emphasized the difficulties in discovering who Jesus was. The author wrote for a Christian audience that believed that Jesus' divine nature was self-evident.

It could be that the author of Mark disagreed that Jesus' divine nature was so entirely clear. It could have also been that this author felt it was incorrect to overlook the human side of Jesus' person and ministry. Do we have, then, a historical work that intended to restore balance to the early church's interpretation of Jesus? Was the author using historical data to resist a theological trend that tended to overlook Jesus' humanity? Historically, Greek-influenced factions within the earliest Jewish church began to emphasize the divine aspects of Jesus' person and works almost from Pentecost. It could be, in sum, that the author of Mark felt that those who over-emphasized Jesus' divinity were forgetting the realities of his person and ministry. Perhaps the author feared that they were turning belief in Jesus into a groundless superstition. Why else would she or he be so insistent on emphasizing the humanity of Jesus and the fact that Jesus' divine nature wasn't self-evident?

HeRD #559 - Actions Not Words (Mark 3:22-30)

Mark's Jesus was an exorcist and healer. Through the first three chapters of Mark, we learn almost nothing directly about Jesus' teachings. What teaching he does give is in the form of refutations of his doubters and enemies. On a larger scale, there's nothing comparable in Mark to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount or Luke's Sermon on the Plain. Jesus is first and foremost an exorcist and only secondarily a teacher. The passage in Mark 3:22-30 reinforces this emphasis on Jesus the exorcist. So closely is he associated with exorcism, that his enemies charge him with being in league with the devil.

The Good News of Jesus Christ wasn't captured essentially in Jesus' words, then, as it was in his actions. The liberation he brought wasn't so much from ignorance as it was from captivity to evil powers, both human and extra-human. If we assume that the author of Mark based his portrayal on primary oral sources, we can conclude that the thing that people most remembered about Jesus wasn't his formal teachings. What they remembered most clearly was the dramatic, liberating way in which he healed the under class. He convinced them that God did love them. Some scholars, at least, argue that Jesus gave his teachings in bits and snatches. He never systematized those teachings. Mark certainly doesn't contradict that opinion.

HeRD #560 - Spirit-less Gospel (Mark 3:28-30)

This is a difficult passage. I don't really see the connection between Jesus' parable about Beelzebul and this statement about the Holy Spirit. The author of Luke, evidently, also didn't see any connection because he removed the statement about the Holy Spirit (Luke 12:10) from the story about Beelzebul (11:14-23).

What is striking, however, is how infrequently Mark makes reference to the Holy Spirit. The only time the Holy Spirit is related to Jesus in a clear manner is found in the story of the baptism (Mark 1:8). Mark's parenthetical explanation suggests that Jesus was charging his enemies with attacking the Holy Spirit when they accused him of being him possessed. They were confusing the work of the Holy Spirit with the consequences of demon possession. But the whole thing isn't that clear. After this passage, Mark refers to the Holy Spirit only twice, once in connection with David (12:36) and once in relation to the disciples (13:11). This is in marked contrast to Luke and the Acts, where the Holy Spirit is centrally present. Some commentators consider the Acts to be nothing less than a history of the work of the Holy Spirit. We can only conclude that the Holy Spirit isn't very important in Mark and not very important to understanding the person and work of Jesus.

It's not likely that Mark's lack of interest in the Spirit was coincidental. The author, after all, did explicitly associate the Spirit with Jesus' baptism. It's more likely that a close

identification of the Spirit with Jesus was out of keeping with the author's purposes. Such an identification would suggest that Jesus had the very divine properties that the author wanted to keep from being obvious or prominent. The human Jesus, so important to Mark, would have been obscured or even lost.

HeRD #561 - Beyond the Pot

Last academic year it was my privilege to teach the M.Div. seminar in Thai church history at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology. The course focused primarily on pastoral care and the situation of local congregations in the CCT. Students were required to write a paper responding to some of the issues raised. One paper responded to my thesis that one of the most serious obstacles facing Thai pastoral care is the heavy Western influence on its forms and practices. The student is an experienced pastor, working in a CCT congregation near Chiang Mai. He writes, "Because of the Western influences on Thai pastoral care, we can compare the pastor to a potted plant. The plant's roots don't reach into the ground. The pastor should, however, have a new role. Pastors should seek opportunities to sink their roots into Thai culture. The pastor should be like the potted plant that sends its roots outside of the pot. When the plant grows the pot will naturally crack and finally break. What this means is that the pastor should take advantage of being a "child of two worlds" [Asian and Western] for the best interests of the church. The pastor can do this better than a Buddhist monk who has to live according to and is limited by a multitude of rules. The pastor, in contrast, should take this opportunity to effectively minister to the church according to the pastor's own potential."

Two thoughts. First of all, the image of the potted plant that outgrows the pot is natural to Thailand. It happens frequently. Second, this pastor sees advantages as well as limitations in being a "child of two worlds". It's confining in some ways and liberating in others. The image is a beautiful one. It captures both the sense that someone else put the plant in the pot and that the plant has the potential to outgrow the pot.

HeRD #562 - Jesus' Family (Mark 3: 31-35)

Members of Jesus' family arrived at his home (3:20), but they couldn't get in because of the large crowds. So they sent in word to Jesus that they were there. Jesus took the opportunity to teach the crowd about the meaning of family.

Did this event take place? There's no way of knowing. The whole passage is vintage Mark. No details. We don't know what happened afterwards. It's hard to believe that Jesus ignored his mother. What did they talk about? How did Mary express her motherly worries? How did Jesus respond? I think that we can take it, on the basis of Mark 3:20, that Jesus' family was deeply concerned about him and may have shared the fear that he'd become mentally unstable. It seems possible that they'd then taken the trouble to visit him. But we've no way of knowing any of this for certain, and it is just as likely that Mark took some fragment of historical memory and wedded it to Jesus' views on the nature of the family.

The interview the author took his data from might have gone like this: *Informant* , "Not everybody was so fired up about Jesus. Lots of people thought he was a little strange, maybe even mad. The big shot Pharisees thought he'd been possessed by some kind of an evil spirit." *Researcher* : "How widespread were these feelings?" *Informant* : "Pretty widespread I'd say. Even his family worried about him. There was that time when they came to see him." *Researcher* : "What did they say? What happened?" *Informant* : "I don't really know. Jesus was teachin' a bunch of people, and we were kinda surprised that he didn't just get up and go see his mother. I think they did go off and talk awhile. But, I can't remember exactly. I just

remember that they came to see him. They probably wanted him to go back to Nazareth and stop stirring things up so much. The Pharisees were gettin' pretty hot about Jesus by then. You should ask Peter about it. If anybody knows, he does."

HeRD #563 - Indigenization Jesus' Way (Mark 3: 31-35)

Some commentators give central importance to Jesus' views on the family. He lived in a patriarchal society in which the family was all important. It was the basic unit of economic production and life. It provided social security. Life centered entirely on the family. At various times, however, Jesus told people that following him meant they had to ignore their duties to their family. In Mark 3:31-35 he gave the rationale for his views. He redefined the very meaning of the concept of the family. But he did this in a positive way. Jesus didn't tell his hearers that they should reject the importance of the family. He, instead, redefined the meaning of family. He virtually moved the compassionate God to the center of the family system. God became the patriarch of the family of those who acted as God wanted them to act.

Jesus, I think, gives us guidance for how to indigenize Christian faith in Thailand. Thailand Protestantism, missionary and local, even today, generally proceeds by rejecting key Thai religious and social ideas. It attacks merit-making. It ridicules the Thai Buddhist understanding of ultimate reality. All of this in the name of Jesus, the Redefiner of Values and Meanings. His way was wiser. It was also gentler. It focused on bringing God's love and liberation to people in need rather than the imposition of new religious systems on people in need. How does Jesus redefine merit-making? How do we understand the Dhamma in light of Jesus?

HeRD #564 - Sabbath Animism

For the next several HeRDs we'll leave Mark and look at some themes from Karen church history. Most HeRD readers know that the Karen are the largest of the hill tribes in northern Thailand and that a significant number of them are Christians. The first northern Thai Karen Christian communities were founded in 1881 in Lampang State. During March-April this year, it was my privilege to work with nine Karen theological students, all attending Thai-language seminaries in Chiang Mai or Bangkok. Together we conducted oral history studies of four Karen Christian communities in the Musikee District of the Karen Baptist Convention (aka the 19th District of the CCT). In this and following HeRDs I'd like share with some of what we learned.

One student interviewed an older woman from the Temekala (Ban Nong Ched Nuey) Church who related how her family converted in the 1930s because of the failure of traditional Karen practices to heal a family member of a serious illness. Christian prayers proved a much more effective agency for healing, and her family and some neighbors converted to Christianity. She explained that Christianity had been an experience in liberation for her family. They had lived under considerable fear of the spirits. Christianity freed them from that fear. The interviewee then described how her small Christianity community led a very strict, even regimented Christian life. She explained that they were afraid to do anything that would violate Christian precepts because they believed that God would withdraw divine favor from them if they did. Therefore, they had to be careful not to offend God.

It seems clear that this Karen Christian family transferred its animistic fear of the spirits to the Christian God. It was liberated from the capricious rule of the spirits, but it retained the more central idea that one has to tread carefully in ones' relationship to higher powers. Keeping the Sabbath, thus, became an animistic practice that took the place of traditional forms of spirit

propitiation. It fulfilled the same function of placating higher powers, in this case the Highest Power. This Karen family, that is, practiced an animistic form of Christianity.

HeRD #565 - Karen Law

HeRD #564 argued that in the specific case of one family, Karen Christian converts retained central animistic themes in the practice of their new faith. Anders Hovemyr's study of early Karen church history in northern Thailand, *In Search of the Karen King*, suggests one possible avenue of interpretation of that case. Hovemyr notes that traditional Karen religion involved both ancestor worship, conducted by women, and worship of the "lords of the land," carried out by the men. He writes, "These 'lords' may be of friendly disposition, furthering the prosperity of a given village. They may, however, also be irritated or hurt, causing natural disasters, crop failure, epidemics, etc. The cause for irritation is usually the break of Karen law and tradition in certain respects by a member of the village community, the most severe transgression being illegitimate sexual intercourse." (pp. 76-77)

It seems possible that the conversion to Christianity may not have been as significant a change as it would first seem to be. The Karen religious genius may have made God over into a lord of the land, perhaps the Supreme Lord of All Lands, and continued to understand and relate to this Lord as it had to the previous lords. It quietly slipped old meanings into the new words of the new religion. It sang new songs but behaved in the old ways. This is all too simplistic, of course, and yet it seems entirely possible that some or many Karens unconsciously fit the Christian God and Christian practices into the traditional structures of Karen religious thought.

HeRD #566 - A Wedding at Cham Noi

On the last evening of the Karen students' training, we visited the home of one of the students, located in the village of Cham Noi. Before supper one of my colleagues and I toured the village with Ach. Chadtree Danpongpi as guide. Ach. Chadtree is pastor of the Temekala Church. We stopped off at the home of an elderly church member, where my colleague and I conducted an informal oral history interview. We talked about his wedding.

The interviewee was born in 1923 and married in 1954. He converted as an adult, and we asked him about his baptism. He told us that he had to wait for an ordained clergy from Burma to come over and perform his and a number of other baptisms. Even then he had to walk a couple of days to meet the cleric in question. We then talked about how he came to live in Cham Noi and about his marriage to a local girl. We asked him who performed the ceremony. He said, "Oh, the local church elder." It was a simple ceremony conducted seated on the floor of the elder's house. A few of his relatives came, but not all that many people attended. We asked if they had a manual of services, and he replied that they didn't. The elder just used the Bible. When I asked why a nearby pastor didn't do the ceremony, the reply came back that the pastor had a meeting and couldn't make it. In other words, our interviewee waited months and walked miles to be baptized but couldn't wait even a day or two to be married.

I'm not quite sure what to make of this, but it does seem evident that there was a qualitative difference in this Karen community's understanding of baptism as a rite and marriage as a ceremony. It's as if they distinguish between a sacred and a mundane realm. A convert's baptism is a different order of religious experience from a couple's marriage. It would be interesting to follow up on both the Karen church's understanding of baptism and marriage.

HeRD #567 - Noi Panya & the Karens

[GD] is the 15 year-old daughter of Acharn Esther Danpongpi, the Karen Baptist Convention historian who works with the Office of History. As she observed the nine seminary students taking part in the summer field work project mentioned in HeRD #564 she became interested and asked if she could join. After receiving the same training as the seminary students, she and I conducted a series of joint interviews with her grandfather, Th'ra Bonney Danpongpi, the patriarch of the Karen churches in the Musikee region.

From those interviews we learned that Th'ra Bonney was born in Ban Nok, Lampang Province, one of the very first Karen churches in northern Thailand. His grandmother was among the first 500 Karen converts, all of whom converted in 1881. In 1913, when Th'ra Bonney was 2, his family was one of five that moved to Chiang Rai province in search of better land. During the interview, Th'ra Bonney mentioned in passing that one of the five families was that of Noi Panya, a northern Thai convert who married a Karen women. It turns out that at some time well before 1913, this Panya heard about Christianity from a passing Presbyterian missionary and discovered an interest in the new religion. He was a monk at that point and, at some point left the temple and got in touch with the nearest Christians, the Karen Baptists at Ban Nok. He may have already spoken some Karen and was baptized by the Ban Nok Church. He eventually took a Karen Christian wife and entered fully into the life of the village and community. Th'ra Bonney remembers that Noi Panya spoke, read, and wrote Karen fluently. He also remembers that he, however, continued to read his own northern Thai Bible.

Panya's story provides enticing evidence of some degree of relationship in the early years of this century between the northern Thai Presbyterians and the Karen Baptists. The word "interface" might be better than "relationship". Panya first heard about Christianity from a Presbyterian missionary, and he must have established some contact with the Presbyterian churches in order to obtain a northern Thai Bible. Those Bibles were printed in relatively limited numbers and not available without some effort. Yet, Panya was baptized as a Baptist. He expressed his faith in the context of a Karen Christian community rather than a northern Thai one. He's the first northern Thai (as distinguished from Karen) Baptist that I've heard of, although there must have been other similar cases. If this one instance is any guide, thus, it could be that Baptist Karen history is more integral to the larger, Presbyterian-dominated history of the church in the North than has been generally recognized.

HeRD #568 - Noi Panya Again

Anders Hovemyr's thesis, *In Search of the Karen King* (p. 156), also alludes to a Noi Panya (See HeRD #567), who was an evangelist from the Mae Kwa Church, close to Ban Nok. According to Hovemyr, this Noi Panya was a "Karen speaking Laos" who was responsible for the first Karen convert in the Mae Sariang area. When provided with this information, Th'ra Bonney at first denied that Noi Panya was an evangelist, but on further reflection he agreed that it could be possible because Th'ra Bonney knew Noi Panya only when he was a child and Noi Panya was already in his 60s or 70s. Th'ra Bonney had no clear recollection of Noi Panya's death, but from the interview it appeared that he must have died before 1920. While we can't be entirely sure, it would seem that Th'ra Bonney and Hovemyr are recalling the same person. The name Panya, admittedly, was a common northern Thai name, and many Panyas had before their name the honorific, "noi". It seems unlikely, however, that there would be two Noi Panyas who both associated themselves with the Ban Nok area Karen Christians in the same era. It's much more likely that they're one and the same person.

Hovemyr goes on to speculate that this Noi Panya might have been the same person as the "'Laos Shan, familiar with the Karen language,' who studied at the Karen Theological Seminary in Rangoon in 1885..." Th'ra Bonney, however, was sure that Noi Panya never studied theology

in Burma or anywhere else. Several questions concerning Noi Panya's role in the religious leadership of his small community suggest that Th'ra Bonney is probably correct. Noi Panya did preach on occasion, but only in the absence of the community's ordained clergy. From Th'ra Bonney's recollections, Noi Panya wasn't a particularly articulate Christian. Our best guess, then, is that Noi Panya was a locally trained evangelist at one time in his life but wasn't theologically trained. Th'ra Bonney, in fact, remembered that Noi Panya did some trading and selling.

It's out of just such bits and hints and pieces that historians frequently have to reconstruct the past, as best they can. Noi Panya, as we've seen, is one example of how northern Thai Presbyterian and Karen Baptist histories interfaced in the North. Given the dearth of information available on the Karen Christian historical experience there, his case may not be as insignificant as it might otherwise seem.

HeRD #569 - The Women's Service

On a Sunday in late March, I had the opportunity to attend worship at the Ban Nong Daeng congregation, a half-hour's drive from Ban Nong Ched Nuey where I was staying. This village of something just under 100 houses is not very well off financially. As we walked towards the church building, I asked one of the student researchers responsible for Nong Daeng how the 17 Christian households compared to the rest of the community. He answered that they were somewhat better off even though they engaged in pretty much the same forms of labor as their neighbors. When I asked the student why this was so, he said that the Christians believed it was God's blessings them.

Leaving aside that theological interpretation, it seemed likely to me that there might be other factors involved. We entered the church building as the women's service was going on. KBC churches as a rule have a women's service prior to the main service. The women have entire responsibility for every facet of worship including presenting the message for the morning. So, for more than a half hour I watched as a parade of women came to the front to sing singly and in small groups, to read the Bible, to recite passages from memory, and to tell stories. One woman presented a credible meditation on the ways God cares for people. These women aren't educated. They're "just" village people. It seemed to me, however, that this service, repeated week after week, is an important training ground for Christian women. It encourages them to be literate, to take leadership, and it gives them the self-confidence of speaking before others.

So, I have a theory, which is that the weekly women's service imparts skills that make women more capable, productive members of their family. It encourages them to address every day life more confidently. Their role in worship gives them advantages their neighbors don't have. One reason, in other words, that Christian families are slightly better off than their neighbors is because their women are more competent and capable. True? Wouldn't it be interesting to know.

HeRD #570 - Women's Worship

HeRD #569 described, briefly, the woman's service at Ban Nong Daeng. As I sat in that service, I was reminded of a brief statement in Hovemyr's history of the Karen church in northern Thailand, *In search of the Karen King*. He writes, "While the Sgaw and Pwo [Karen] view the ancestors somewhat differently, positively/ambivalently or negatively respectively, the worship of them in both major sub-groups of the Karen is the sphere of the female, i.e. worship is pursued under the supervision of a female religious leader." Hovemyr goes on to note that men are responsible for the worship of the "lords of the land." (p. 76)

Is it possible that the wide-spread Karen Christian practice of having a regular woman's service reflects this traditional division of ritual spheres? As far as I know, there's no comparable practice among northern or central Thai churches. Women's groups do worship when they meet, but that worship isn't as institutionalized and formal as the Karen practice. This difference lends some weight to the thesis that women's worship among Karen churches is a carry over from earlier traditional patterns. It would be interesting to know, furthermore, if themes in Christian women's worship reflect any themes from traditional women's rituals.

HeRD #571 - Three Worries

From the data collected by the team of nine Karen students plus my own personal observations, it's clear that the Karen churches of the Musikee Association are facing three serious issues, all profoundly worrisome. First, the natural environment of the region continues to deteriorate rapidly. There is less and less water, less and less forest. The area seems to be on the way to becoming a mountainous semi-desert. In the decades ahead, will people be able to sustain a good life there?

Second, Karen culture also is deteriorating at an increasingly rapid rate. The elderly speak, read, and write Karen as their first language. Few can speak Thai and only some speak northern Thai. The middle generation speaks Karen as its first language, quite a few speak Thai and/or northern Thai, and they read Karen fairly well. They don't write the language much, however. Young Karen learn to speak Karen first, but a significant majority of them speak Thai as easily as they speak Karen. They read and write Thai. They can read only some Karen, and most of them can't write the language at all. Many in the half-generation between middle and young (those in their 20s and early 30s) read Karen fairly well and can write, but only with some difficulty. Other aspects of Karen life are facing similar deterioration, and present trends suggest that in two or three generations Karen churches will have little to distinguish them culturally from other churches. One of the great issues facing our world is the death of local cultures. The Karen seem destined, if present trends continue, to go the way of the northern Thai into quiet cultural death.

Third, the Musikee churches are facing a crisis with their youth. Young people, for whatever reason, are showing less and less interest in their churches. This is esp. true of educated young people, even when they do come back to live in the hills. The Karen church in this region in two or three generations may dwindle to insignificance, even if the hills and Karen culture survive.

HeRD #572 - An Image from the Hills

The following image comes from an evening session of the 44th annual meeting of the Musikee Association of the Karen Baptist Convention (a.k.a. District 19 of the CCT).

It's a cool March evening in the hills of northern Thailand. The Musikee Association is convened for an evening of worship, awards, announcements, prayers, and a Scripture memorization contest among its eight churches. Before this vast cavalcade of wordiness descends, however, the meeting begins with some songs to warm up the audience. Two women step up front, dressed in the traditional dress of the Karen woman. One is garbed in the reds and blacks of a married woman. The other is decked out in the single piece white shift of a single girl. Before them are two microphones. Backing them up is a four-piece band, consisting of three electric guitars and one set of drums. The musicians are all male and dressed in bright red or light brown Karen shirts...and blue jeans. The first two tunes are rousing evangelical ditties popular among the revivalistic-minded. Purely Western, but sung in lilting almost haunting

Karen. Hands clapping. Mouths working. Something neither exactly Western or Asian forthcoming. The brief songfest comes to an end with a Karen tune clearly not of foreign origin...but with the strumming electronic clash of the guitars carrying right on as before in their semi-melodious enthusiasm. In this way we sang to pass the time and praise the Lord in a cool Karen electronic, neon-lit, star-studded confusion of cultures and mores.

It's a mark of our times and theirs that the hot-shot farang historian was the only one who noticed and worried over the cultural mix and confusion. He, indeed, was the only one confused by it all.

HeRD #573 - So What?

Local culture as we've known it for many tens of thousands of years is dwindling away in the face of the rapidly expanding Electronic Global Village. So What? That is one of the central issues facing our world civilization today. What difference does it make that an identifiable northern Thai culture, once a proud and independent civilization, is hardly even a memory of the elderly? What does it matter that the Karen cultures of northern Thailand are dying away, being perhaps only a generation or so behind the northern Thais?

Five weeks among the Karen made me more aware than ever that local cultures are dying. It also made me less sure of what this might mean. Should these culture be preserved? What's lost when no one sings hymns in Karen anymore? What's lost when no one performs or even remembers the old Karen rites anymore? Most young Karen aren't all that interested in their cultural heritage. Many of them feel as comfortable in urban Chiang Mai as they do in the rural hills. They simply don't value their Karen-ness. So, does it really make any difference at all if their grandchildren hardly even remember that they're of Karen stock?

With the passing of the many local cultures, will the human race be any poorer? Will our quality of life be adversely influenced? Or, were those cultures actually oppressive to many, and it's just as well they're dying away? Or, again, is this loss just part of the price we have to pay for the advantages of the Electronic-Information-Global Village Age we're constructing? Is it possible that human ingenuity will construct new modes of local-ism and new varieties of local culture, ones comfortable with globalism and yet with an integrity of their own? Is it also possible that the two Karen women and the guitar and drums band of HeRD #572 were already constructing a Karen version of that local culture? Not exactly Karen and not exactly global?

HeRD #574 - Answers

One answer to the questions posed in HeRD #573 concerning the value of retaining local cultures, such as Karen hill culture, is that these cultures are repositories of knowledge and wisdom. When they die we don't lose just a cuisine or a way of dressing. We lose knowledge. We lose insights.

Two examples from Karen culture. The first comes from Jim Peters, a graduate student from the University of Wisconsin doing participatory research with local people on plant populations in the Musikee area. He pointed out to me that the Karen have a store of herbal knowledge and medical practices that are rapidly dying away. Older Karen can still heal a broken bone and cure a wide variety of diseases without recourse to Western medicine. Their practices are less physically intrusive than Western medicine. Young Karen are entirely ignorant of Karen medicine and even disdainful of it. Christians soundly criticize their older people, who still practice some forms of traditional medicine, because these forms include incantations and offerings to the lords of the land.

The second example is theological. The Karen use a double word for God (Kuesa Yua). Translated literally, they mean "The Lord who Flows Into Everything" or something along those lines. This concept of God isn't just Christian. It comes out of Karen culture more generally. It reflects, none the less, Christian insights into the way God flows into human life, esp. in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and parallels the Hebrew understanding of the Spirit as being like the wind. It's difficult to believe that a Karen understanding of God, rich in theological insights, can be retained apart from the daily life of Karen culture itself. If that culture dies, our human understanding of God is impoverished.

HeRD #575 - Christianity & Education

Ach. Meechai Santichaichan is an educated Karen Christian who teaches in a local government school near his home at Ban Kiew Pong. He's in his late 40s. In an interview, he observed that most of the government schools in his area are staffed largely by Karen Christians. He cited the examples of a school in Sun Muang where he taught ten years ago where four of the six teachers were Karen Christians. He's now at a school in Huey Ya where there are eight teachers. Five are Karen Christians. One is a northern Thai Christian. Ach. Meechai stated that until recently teachers from the lowlands refused to stay in hill schools for more than a year or two. The only educated people available to teach in hill schools were Karens, educated at the Christian Sahamit School in Ban Nong Ched Nuey. Government schools in the area, as a result, don't have Buddha images. In a number of cases, the Christian teachers hang crosses in their classrooms. Closing exercises often include Christian worship at which a local pastor preaches.

This situation, historically, isn't unique in northern Thailand. When the Thai government began to expand Western-style education in the North after the turn of the century, it frequently had to rely on Christian teachers trained in mission schools. So far as I know, there's never been an attempt to determine the percentage of Christian teachers, but it would have been substantial in quite a few areas. In Nan Province even today the number of Christian teachers seems to be much higher than the small number of Christians would warrant proportionally.

All of this is impressionistic and really requires much further study, but it does seem clear that Christianity has played an important role in the development of so-called "modern" education in northern Thailand. It is still a significant factor in some areas.

HeRD #576 - Agent of Death

In a further interview with Ach. Meechai (see HeRD #575), he shared his concerns about the future of the Karen churches. He pointed out that Karen young people are generally disinterested in the church. They resist going to worship. A growing majority of them take little part in youth activities. These young people aren't very interested in preserving Karen culture. His answer to why Karen Christian youth are drifting away from their cultural and religious origins is direct. Karen hill families understand that their children have to be educated if they're to have any kind of life. Hill schools, however, provide a generally poor quality education esp. in the upper grades. In any event, there's no education after Mo. 3 (9th Grade in the US). Students who want to complete high school have to leave the hills. Many families are sending even younger children down to Chiang Mai for their education. Three things happen in Chiang Mai. Culturally, the children become immersed in the Thai version of the Global Village. They think, read, hear, dress, eat, and live as Thais, not Karens. Religiously, they spend most of their time outside of a local cultural environment that places a high value on religion. They learn more secular attitudes. Church becomes boring. Finally, at the family level, children learn to look down on their less well-educated parents. They spend much of their lives away from the discipline of the home. Even at home, they tend to speak Thai with their siblings.

Again, I have no systematic data on this phenomenon, But whenever I asked people in the churches and Christian communities about church problems, they invariably began with their concern about the loss of the youth. In some churches, half or more of the children go to school in Chiang Mai. (I should point out that a trip to Chiang Mai usually takes four hours or longer. Public transportation requires 6 hours or more to get down to Chiang Mai.) What seems to be happening is a serious break down in the Karen family. Many children live in hostels where discipline is haphazard and where, apparently, drugs can be a problem. Parents are faced with cruel choices about their children's futures. Keep them at home and they will be more Karen but will be less educated and have less hope for a secure future. Send them to the city and they will lose a great deal of their culture and their religion, but they have better opportunities. The educational demands required for participation in the Global Village, in sum, are killing Karen culture, threatening the future of Karen Christianity, and putting Karen family life in peril.

HeRD #577 - Pastoral Care Then & Now

In the course of their field work research, the Karen students I was working with began to learn about pre-Christian Karen life from older converts now in their 70s and 80s. That life was different from what their Christian prejudices had led them to expect. One of the things two or three of the students found particularly striking was the role of the religious head of each traditional Karen community (called *heko*). He was always an older, respected individual. He was well-versed in both systematic and practical theology. When people had a need or were facing a problem, they'd come to him, and he'd resort to the proper ceremonies to meet their need. From the accounts they'd received, it was clear to the students that traditional Karen faith had been responsive to people's faith needs.

We discussed at some length the contrast between that situation and present day pastoral care in the churches of the Musikee District. Pastors are generally poorly educated. In some cases, they don't even have biblical training. They can give only a limited number of hours to pastoral care. People aren't in the habit of taking their problems to the pastor. Even when a family member is ill, families seldom invite the pastor to pray for the ill person. The students, in sum, have discovered that the churches of the district face an ongoing crisis in pastoral care, in striking contrast to the relatively effective system of faith care in traditional Karen religion. I suggested to them that it might be wise to explore traditional forms and practices to see how the Karen met their religious needs. Their own data suggests (but doesn't prove, by any means) that traditional systems of religious care were more immediately and effectively available to the Karen people. They might well offer insights into how churches can provide better pastoral care to their members.

HeRD #578 - Then Why Convert?

In HeRD #577, we described traditional Karen faith as one that seemed able to provide effective faith care for its adherents. It did this through the medium of local religious functionaries who were, evidently, responsive to the faith needs of those they served. Some will immediately respond that if the old system was so good why have so many Karens rejected it for Christianity. The answer is that Karens have converted for a number of reasons. Only a few, so far as I can tell, have done so in rejection to the traditional religious system as a system. Some ran out of chickens and pigs to offer to the spiritual powers, usually because of some family crisis. Others, frankly, wanted to become better educated and financially better off. Still others converted because wise Karen evangelists present Jesus as the *fulfillment* of traditional thought and practices. A number of elderly Karen converts even today are practicing some of the rituals of their former faith, usually to heal some ill person who can't afford Western medicines and medical care.

Two possibly provocative thoughts. One, today's Karen churches would be better off in every way if they'd paid more sympathetic attention to the way things were done among the traditionalists. Two, in general people in Thailand don't convert out of a rejection of their former faith. They only learn the "language of rejection" as a part of their socialization into the church after they've decided to convert.

HeRD #579 - Mo Che To and the Gospel of Mark

In the late 1940s, a Karen millennial figure named Mo Che To appeared in the hills above Chiang Mai. For a period of some three years, Karens in the Chiang Mai-Mae Hong Son region flocked to the village of Menyakee, near Amphur Bye, to make merit with Mo Che To. A whole system of worship and teaching grew up around him. The Mo Che To movement died away in about 1950 or 1951.

In the process of collecting information on this Karen movement, I couldn't help but think about the author of the Gospel of Mark and the series of HeRDs on the sources that author might have used. He or she wrote at a point about 40 years after Jesus. Here I was studying Mo Che To a little more than 40 years later as well. What was especially striking to me was that my five informants provided information, replete with stories of miraculous events, that is highly contradictory. One claimed that Mo Che To taught a millennial gospel in which God would come soon. Others denied that Mo Che To ever taught such a thing. They described the practices of his movement in different ways, although a few salient points, themes, and even details were the same or similar. At this point, I can't give a concise summary of the movement because of this multitude of unresolved questions. Yet another similarity between this little study into Mo Che To and the Gospel of Mark is that I don't have any clear, secure chronology for Mo Che To. I have a series of stories about Mo Che To, but most of them can't be dated at all. I can't fit them into a coherent time line.. That's precisely one of the issues we've struggled with in Mark, namely no clear chronology.

If my thesis that the author of Mark relied on oral data is correct, he must have faced a situation similar to what one faces in studying Mo Che To. Different people would have remembered Jesus and his teachings in different ways. The author had to sift through many contradictory recollections and decide which were more or less likely. Yet, out of that body of data certain general, important themes would have arisen. Mark, furthermore, may have had the advantages of interviewing individuals close to Jesus and of having some written sources available. My very preliminary research into Mo Che To has turned up neither. Even so, research into that movement does give us an appreciation for the problems the author of Mark faced in constructing a cogent, fair picture of Jesus.

HeRD #580 - Traditional & Christian Karens I

At the end of their field work experience, the nine Karen students held a one-day seminar attended by 15 church leaders, including four pastors. Their theme was "Karen Culture and the Karen Church." In the course of that seminar, the participants discussed how Karen Christians should view traditional Karen religion.

The participants expressed considerable respect for traditional Karen faith. The students had introduced this topic with a debate on the subject, "Christians should understand traditional Karen faith." They debated both sides equally. When it came time for the participants to speak, however, they largely rejected the idea that Christians shouldn't concern themselves with traditional faith. One of the first to speak stated bluntly, "I can't accept the idea that we should ignore traditional beliefs. That's not right." Another urged that their former faith lacked only two

things, the Bible and Jesus. Another remembered that, "When we were traditional Karens, we called on the name of God. We kneeled before God and paid our respects to God. We prayed to God in God's holy places." Still another observed that traditional and Christian Karens have a number of similarities in their ceremonies. He noted that funeral services of both, for example, had the same purpose of bringing comfort to the bereaved. Another participant argued that both forms of Karen faith are based on belief and on worship. It was also stated that both faiths have high ethical values and that those who fail to keep them can be excommunicated by either religion. One participant, however, articulated a different view. He reminded the seminar that he himself converted to Christianity because of the failure of traditional Karen faith to relieve suffering in his family. Christianity, he said, frees us from the prison of traditional religion.

The meeting, in sum, took a surprisingly positive attitude towards traditional religion. I'd like to share some thoughts on why in the next HeRD.

HeRD #581 - Traditional & Christian Karens II

In HeRD #579, we heard the views of a small group of Karen local church leaders concerning traditional Karen religion. Those views were more positive than one might have expected. Whether or not they're representative of the thinking of Karen church leaders more generally would require further study, but they do offer the intriguing possibility that some important segments of the Karen church take a relatively positive attitude towards traditional Karen faith. Protestants in Thailand, for the most part, hold highly negative views about their former faiths. Thus, it's a fair question to ask why some Karen don't.

There may be a couple of factors at work here. First, traditional Karen faith is theistic. Christian Karens remember that as traditionalists they worshipped both local gods and the supreme God (*kuesa yua*). It can be said, thus, that Karen Christians continued to worship God, just as they had before, only in a different way. Some older Karen Christians reject vehemently the charge that traditionalists worship evil spirits (*phi*). They insist that even the local "lords of the land" (*tikuecha kokuecha*) to whom the Karen give allegiance and worship, are related to the supreme God. Second, quite a few Karen Christians still believe that the Karen are one of the lost tribes of Israel. This belief originated with 19th century missionaries. It's difficult, then, to reject traditional Karen practices and doctrines as being entirely worthless.

It would be interesting and worthwhile to pursue Karen Christian attitudes towards traditional Karen faith. It is possible that Karen Christians would be more receptive to indigenization than other Protestant Christians in Thailand.

HeRD #582 - A Peoples' Theology of Culture

During their seminar on "Karen Culture and the Karen Church," the nine students who participated in the hot season field work project made a brief presentation on the demise of the Karen language among Karen Christians. They noted that Thai mixed with some English is being more and more spoken by Karen, esp. young Karen. They then led the seminar into what proved to be another lively period of discussion. Those discussions articulated what amounts to a theology of culture, one that would do credit to doctoral seminars in many a prestigious institution of theological obfuscation. Three important points were made. First, a pastor stated, "God gave us the Karen language. If we fail to use it, it's like looking down on God." Another participant elaborated by stating that God gave Karens their Karen-ness. The use of the Karen language confirms this gift and affirms that the Karen are Karen. Second, still another participant observed that the Karen language was the best language for Karen people to understand the Bible. Karens have to know how to read their own language well so that the Bible

will be useful to them. Third, the Karen language is important to the preservation of Karen culture and identity. "If we don't use it," one person claimed, "we'll lose our identity. And then we'll be something else. We won't be Karen."

Karen language and culture are under massive attack today, as we've noted. These three points have to be put in that context. The participants themselves are middle aged and older, people who grew up before the onslaught of globalization reached its present magnitude. They're deeply troubled by the demise of their local culture. They experience their culture as a divine gift, a blessing. They see it as the means for understanding and reaching God. They feel it to be a part of their deepest being. They answer the question of why local cultures should be preserved [see HeRD #573] by arguing that those cultures are part of God's created order. It's just as important to conserve them as it is the forest and its (formerly) abundant life.

HeRD #583 - The Flowing Lord

Karen Christians use two words for the divine. *Yua* means God. *Kuesa* (usually pronounced *Kuecha* by northern Thailand Karens) means lord or Lord. The two words are frequently combined as *kuesa yua*, the Lord God. The word *yua*, however, has another meaning. In combination with other words, it means "to flow" or "to flow out into". It was explained to me that *kuesa yua* could be translated as the Lord who flows out into the world. That's a striking image. Our English word, "God," is nebulous and abstract. "Lord God" is almost archaic and takes us back to the times of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. The Thai word we use for God, *phra chao*, removes God far away from us. It makes God into the Lord who is Holy, with some sense of God being outside the natural realm of things. The Karen name, however, lifts God up and still brings God into the world, with an image of life-giving, flowing waters. In English the idea of the Incarnation casts an image of God crossing a great chasm to reach into human life. In Karen the Incarnation is a natural, explicable part of God's "flowing-ness".

Karen Christians themselves, apparently, haven't reflected on the meaning-image of *kuesa yua*. They don't appreciate its potential as a keen-edged tool for constructing an indigenous theology. The image of the flowing Lord, however, captures something of the Old Testament conception of the Spirit of God as wind (*ruah* if I remember correctly). There's that same sense of God flowing into our world either as cool evening breezes blow through the Judean hills or life-giving waters flow through the Karen hills.

HeRD #584 - Why They Convert I

HeRD #578 claimed that, "in general people in Thailand don't convert out of a rejection of their former faith. They only learn the 'language of rejection' as a part of their socialization into the church after they've decided to convert." One HeRD recipient asked, politely but firmly, why I would write such a thing as that. In my response, I itemized five observations or sets of data that I think lend substance to the claim, and I'd like to share some of those items in this and the following HeRD.

My thesis is that in Thailand conversion usually isn't intend as an overt rejection of one's former religion. Thai Protestants only learn to reject their former faith later and as a part of their socialization process.

First, patterns of conversion, historically, in northern Thailand suggest that many converts met with some immediate personal or family crisis and found the resolution to their crisis in a Christian agency of one kind or another, most frequently medical. Now, I understand that there is an implicit rejection of the old in any conversion. My argument in response would be that that

"rejection" wasn't theological/ideological in nature. It was a positive response to the Christian agency. Converts didn't *convert* because Buddhism was bad or wrong. In terms of animistic practices, the issue is cloudier. In many cases those practices didn't work but Christian medicine did. Here, there was more frequently rejection of the old involved. I would offer you as a thesis for further study, however, that even here the rejection wasn't inherently ideological in nature. If Protestant Christianity had taught its converts that the old ways were generally good, but sometimes they didn't work, I think that the vast majority of converts would have accepted that line of thought. They were taught, instead, that their former religion is evil in all ways and to be rejected totally and out of hand. And many Christians, perhaps a significant majority, accepted that argument. In other words, my theory is that the language of rejection is a learned, socialized interpretation of their experience that isn't necessarily implicit in the experience itself. Other socialized responses were possible.

Second, in the CCT today, a large percentage of converts enter Christianity through marriage and other family contacts. Such converts seldom express negative attitudes about their former religion.

HeRD #585 - Why They Convert II

HeRD #584 began a brief series on the motivations behind conversion in Thailand. The thesis I'm arguing is that in Thailand conversion usually isn't intended as an overt rejection of one's former religion. Thai Protestants only learn to reject their former faith later and as a part of their socialization process. That HeRD gave two points. I'd like to add three more here.

Third, among the Karen, I found a very interesting pattern. Karen Baptist leaders express a highly negative, rejectionist attitude towards traditional faith. Indeed, they almost willfully misinterpret its nature. Yet, when we did oral history work among elderly Karen, we found many had a surprisingly positive attitude towards traditional religion. Some still practice traditional rites. Almost uniformly, they reject the leadership's view that traditional Karen religion is animistic. They insist that Karens have always worshipped God. Christianity is the fulfillment and completion of their faith rather than a replacement. Now, what's interesting here is that traditional Karen faith is theistic, at least to some extent, but the church leadership rejects it as being essentially animistic and satanic. Many younger Karen, apparently, accept the leadership's position, which is the one always expressed publicly. My point is that those closest to the power center and those raised as Christians are apparently more likely to reject their former religion than those further away or born as traditionalists. In other words, it's possible, even likely, that rejection of Buddhism among Christians often correlates with the intensity of one's church involvement. Those more involved are more rejectionist. Those, furthermore, more distant from traditional religion will also be more likely to reject it. In other words, rejection of other religions is a learned response most prevalent in those most socialized.

Four, one of the M.Div. students at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology is studying conversion patterns in the Nua Klao Church in Chiang Mai. She once observed that when people first convert to that church, they don't understand about sin and repentance. They have to be taught about these things before they "fully convert." It seemed to me that what she was saying, implicitly, was that the converts don't understand Christian dualistic language and concepts and have to be socialized into them. Rejection of Buddhism is part of that package. In other words, converts are taught that in their former life they lived in sin. Their former religion was part of that sin. It was a false way to God, one that tries to win salvation through merit and doesn't believe in a personal God.

Finally, it seems logical that Protestant rejectionist ideologies are learned ones simply because Thai people express their religious prejudices in ways quite different from Protestant Thais. Overtly, they hold that all religions are good. You hear this all the time. Covertly, of course, they believe that Buddhism is the better way. In other words, Thai Protestants display Western forms of religious prejudice rather than Thai forms. They had to learn to do so.

HeRD #586 - Power & Research

The sense that research should have a practical purpose is widespread, and there is a large number of different research designs that intend to build use into the total research process. There's some re-thinking going on, however. Much of the research intending to solve real-life issues is conducted with disadvantaged people. Its goal is to improve their lives. And that's precisely where the re-thinking comes in, for usually the researcher is an advantaged, well-educated outsider. She can easily become just one more outside power figure setting agendas for the poor. Even a sensitive researcher is going to misunderstand the people she's researching, make time demands on them they can't afford, using models that are inappropriate to their situations, and make other mistakes that are the consequence of being both an outsider and advantaged. In the end, the advice and directions coming out of such research can be worse than useless to those in need. There is a growing recognition, then, that such research has to view the relationship between researcher and researched as a power relationship. It has to find ways to balance that relationship so that the disadvantaged are given powerful, influential voice in the conducting of research while the researcher retains sufficient authority to carry out her work effectively.

It has been one of the central goals of the Office of History over the last decade to use church history research for the benefit of the church. While it has produced a substantial historiographical literature, we've largely failed to make history "live" at the local church level. We've been the powerful outsiders setting our own research agendas. Power issues, furthermore, sometimes lead those who might best use our insights to reject them. Accepting them would require changes the powerful don't want to make. What's happened is that over the last five years or so our office has become more and more involved in teaching research skills to others. Our frustrations and failures in using history for the life of the church, in short, have brought us the hard won insight that we should be equipping the saints rather than instructing them.

HeRD #587 - Indigenization and the Global Village

Following on the comments on power and research in HeRD #586, it's worth noting that indigenization is also involved. However the matter is accomplished, churches in Thailand need access to research skills and to the information that comes from research. The socio-cultural context of the churches is as much the Global Village as it is their own regional and local settings, and the essence of the Global Village is in the acquisition and use of information. Information determines wealth and power. Having adequate information, more to the point, is essential to those who would act effectively. However we feel about the Global Village, it is a reality. It behooves the churches, thus, to become competent producers and effective users of information. Which is to say, if the church is to live in the Global Village it necessarily has to learn how to use research of various kinds.

HeRD #588 - Bias

An article by Hammersley and Gomm entitled "Bias in Social Research" (from the electronic journal *Sociological Research Online*, v. 2, no. 1) raises the issue of the nature of bias in research. The authors point out that research theory has given surprisingly little attention

to the concept of bias itself. They then deal in some depth with the central problem facing those who want to understand the nature of bias, namely the problem of knowing anything at all with any degree of certainty. We live in an era where all knowledge is understood to be relative. Some take that to mean that all knowledge is inherently biased. This means, in turn, that anyone who doesn't like the conclusions arrived at by any piece of research has a ready-made weapon at hand. They simply brand it as "biased"! The authors argue for a more balanced approach to the concept of bias. They acknowledge that the knowledge produced from research is always limited and relative. That doesn't mean it's always biased. They define bias as being, "...systematic and culpable error; systematic error that the researcher should have been able to recognize and minimize, as judged either by the researcher him or herself (in retrospect) or by others." We can take this to mean that biased research has two sources: first, an intentional corruption of the research for self-serving purposes; and/or, second, poor research methodology as judged by the larger research community.

This definition is important. It acknowledges that human knowing isn't absolute. But it also acknowledges that we can know many things with a reasonable degree of certainty. Research, if well-conducted and well-intentioned can lead to trustworthy (not absolutely certain) conclusions. Those who judge any piece of research as "biased" must do so on equally reasonable, well-intentioned, and knowledgeable grounds.

HeRD #589 - It's All Relative

The article by Hammersley and Gomm mentioned in HeRD #588 makes a point worth pondering. Many today would have it that all human knowledge is relative. There are no absolutes anymore. The very statement, however, that there are no absolutes is an absolute which in and of itself contradicts its own claim. I take this to mean that it's illogical to claim that *everything* is relative. There has to be at least one absolute in order for us to state that "everything is relative". I take this observation that we can't logically state that there are no absolutes because the statement is self-contradictory as being something more than just a cute philosopher's word game. It points, rather, to the fundamental condition of all human knowing. It is partial, incomplete, and shares in the broken nature of humanity itself. Contradiction and inconsistency adhere to it at every point. Indeed, the statement that, "everything is partial and incomplete" may be a better way of pointing to the central nature of human knowing than the one that states, "everything is relative".

The knowledge we attain from research shares in the partial and incomplete nature of other forms of human knowing. To those cynics who would then ask, "Why bother to do research?" I would answer with the question, "Why bother to know?" By our very nature, we're creatures who stretch beyond ourselves, reach out to know beyond what we already know. And that's part of the joy of being human.

HeRD #590 - Conversion

Conversion can be looked at as either conversion from something or conversion to something. Richard Kieckhefer in an article entitled, "Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late Medieval Piety" in *Church History* (March 1998), observes that for the medieval European church, "Conversion in the late medieval sources is often not a turning away from sin or error but a discovery of inwardness or interiority and a corresponding transcendence of conventional pieties." A "conventional piety" is a religious faith in which exterior elements of social convention and the expectations of important, power-ful figures centrally shapes faith expression.

Protestantism in Thailand has largely emphasized conversion as being conversion away from sin and error with emphasis on the error element. In the process, thus, most Protestant conversion is the exchanging of one conventional piety (local) for another (foreign) rather than a turning away from conventional pieties.

HeRD #591 - Tuva Church

David Clark, a long-time recipient of HeRD, works for the United Bible Societies as a translation consultant. In that capacity, he travels widely through central Europe and Asia working with translation teams in formerly communist nations. One of those teams is located in the Tuva Republic, southern Siberia. David recently shared a report on a recent visit with me, and I pass an edited version of it along to you. It has nothing to do with Thai church history, but I thought you all might find it informative and fascinating.

David writes, " This report is from Kyzyl, in the Tuva Republic, Southern Siberia, Russia. Tuva lies just north of the western border with Mongolia, and its traditional religion is Tibetan-style Mahayana Buddhism. Tuva was under Chinese rule until 1912, when it sought protection from Tsarist Russia. It was independent from 1920 to 1944, when it requested incorporation into the former Soviet Union.

"On Sun 7 June [1998] one of the Tuvian translation team took me to the Pentecostal Church that she attends. This was most interesting because everything was in both Tuvian and Russian - except the Bible reading. The service was held in a house adapted as a church building, and was attended by about 150 people. An afternoon service attracts a similar number, but different people. About 75% of the congregation were ethnic Tuvians, and about 90% were women. The attitude that religion is a women's thing is quite widespread in Russia, apparently among the Tuvians also. There are two pastors in the church, one an ethnic Russian from Belarus and the other an ethnic Tuvian. Both are in their 20s, and single, though it seems unlikely that they could stay single long in such a group!

"The service consisted of hymns, times of corporate prayer, children's items, and sermons in both Russian and Tuvian. The whole service lasted about two and a half hours. I was given to understand that the general opinion is that the sermons are too long, a verdict with which I was inclined to agree. The main sermon began after the service had been in progress for an hour and three quarters already, and lasted for a further 45 minutes (including interpretation). After 15 or 20 minutes, not only was the congregation restless and inattentive, but the interpreter lost concentration several times, and even the preacher at one point forgot what he was going to say next.

"It was fascinating to see a large and thriving, yet infant church. I was told that those who have been believers for 3 or 4 years are beginning to tire of the constant evangelistic emphasis, and want more teaching. I have no means of cross-checking this, but if as seems likely, it is true, it means that the biggest need in the immediate future is for solid Bible teaching, and the more scripture that can be published in Tuvian the better.

"I understand that the Baptist church in Kyzyl also has a significant number of Tuvian believers, but nothing like the large preponderance in the Pentecostal group. I did not have the chance to attend a Baptist service. However, a Baptist lady showed me a scrapbook she has compiled which is a sort of pictorial history of the Baptist work since 1991, with many photos of visitors, and of baptisms in the River Yenisei (snow-fed, and cold at any time of year!). Before that, baptisms were performed secretly at night, so there were no photos. So far as I know the

Baptists do not use the Tuvín language in their services as much as the Pentecostals, and I suspect this is related to their relatively smaller numbers of ethnic Tuvín adherents.

"It will be fascinating to see how the Tuvín Christian community develops over the coming years. Since Pentecostals seem more generally open to women's ministry than Baptists, I would guess that they will take firmer root. But of course any number of post-Yeltsin political scenarios could turn the course of events in unforeseeable directions."

HeRD #592 - CCT Numbers

Reliable church statistics are a rare commodity in Thailand. Sloppy counting is partly to blame. Purposely inflated numbers are also a problem. The CCT in the last year has carried out a very careful census of its membership, using paid staff in conjunction with trained local volunteers. The results are worth noting.

In 1996, the CCT reported an official figure of 64,949 communicant members in 18 of its 19 districts. One district failed to report its membership. District 2, Chiang Rai, was the largest district with 16,000 members, followed by District 19, Karen tribal, with 13,455 members. District 9, Nakon Sritammarat, was the smallest with 441 members. The second smallest was District 8, Phet Buri, having just 604 members.

By comparison, the recent membership survey (95% complete at this time) turned up the following numbers: The 19 districts of the CCT include 26,236 families, 62,484 communicant members, and a total constituency of 101,851 members. District 19 is the largest district, with 13,392 communicant members. District 2 is second largest, having 8,819 members. District 8 turned out to be smaller than District 9, with 477 members in 8 and 574 members in 9. Those involved in the survey are striving for a 100% report back and feel that if they get it the total CCT communicant membership will be between 64,000 and 65,000. In light of this, it's interesting to note that the 1998 total figure is very close to the one reported in 1996, although many adjustments have to be made in individual district figures and we have to remember that the 1996 figure was short by one district (District 12, Chinese Baptist, which is listed with 5,172 members in the 1998 survey).

It is safe to say, in sum, that as of mid-1998 the Church of Christ in Thailand has a total communicant members of between 64,000 and 65,000. This figure is reliable to within that last thousand.

HeRD #593 - Finding the Real Jesus

John Dominic Crossan heads the prologue of his book, *Jesus*, with a quotation from Morton Smith's book, *Jesus the Magician*, that helps us understand how contemporary Jesus scholars interpret their task. Smith writes, "Trying to find the actual Jesus is like trying, in atomic physics, to locate a submicroscopic particle and determine its charge. The particle cannot be seen directly, but on a photographic plate we see the lines left by the trajectories of larger particles it put in motion. By tracing these trajectories back to their common origin, and by calculating the force necessary to make the particles move as they did, we can locate and describe the invisible cause. Admittedly, history is more complex than physics; the lines connecting the original figure to the developed legends cannot be traced with mathematical accuracy; the intervention of unknown factors has to be allowed for. Consequently, results can never claim more than probability; but 'probability,' as Bishop Butler said, 'is the very guide of life.'"

Marcus Borg, I think, does this best. Smith's description of the Jesus scholars' approach, however, makes too light of the difficulties involved. The Jesus scholars necessarily deal not only in probabilities, but they also deal in suppositions, speculations, and guesswork. They rely on ideas and bodies of interpretation developed in the study of other subjects without being able to be sure of how relevant they are to the life of Jesus. All of this is because they have no primary data and a depressingly small body of secondary sources to work with. I've made some of these points before, but they bear repeating here. With HeRD #594, we'll start in on Mark again. We've already seen that an historian's approach to Mark is primarily a struggle with the sources of knowledge Mark used and the way in which they were used by the author. Smith's quotation points to the nature of that struggle, if it somewhat underestimates the difficulties involved.

HeRD #594 - Pressure (Mark 4:1-2)

The opening verses of this passage recall one of the themes we discovered earlier, that of the growing pressure on Jesus by the crowd. Here we have that same sense of pressure. The crowd's density and eagerness to hear him forced Jesus to get into a boat and teach from there. If this instance is any measure, that pressure had a negative impact on Jesus' ministry. Consider how difficult it must have been to try to teach a milling crowd while standing in a boat, a situation still preferable to a hillside. Jesus had to try to teach above the noise of the crowd while avoiding too close contact with those who must have waded out to try to get closer to him. The situation pictured in Mark 4:1-2 is one of confusion and contention. The very eagerness of the crowd to hear Jesus, thus, became an obstacle to their learning from him. In this context, Jesus command to listen! almost sounds like a frustrated plea to quiet down.

To the historian's question of whether or not this event actually took place, there's no solution. This is the second time the author of Mark has Jesus climbing into a boat to escape a large crowd (cf. Mark 3.9). One can't help but feel that maybe something like this might have happened. It's the sort of thing people would remember. It also reveals a great deal about the pressures mentioned earlier. In any event, whether or not Jesus had to use boats to escape large crowds, Mark's portrayal of him having done so points to a larger context that is almost certainly historical. Jesus was popular. Large crowds gathered around him. His popularity put him under considerable strain and pressure. And, perhaps most importantly, his very popularity became an obstacle to Jesus' communicating his message.

HeRD #595 - He Taught in Parables (Mark 4:2)

Mark's Jesus has been traveling around the Galilean countryside for some time now, but this is the first time we hear that he used parables in his teaching. Now, why is that? Decades sermons of and Sunday school lessons have left us all with the impression that the parables were the primary medium for Jesus' teachings. The relevant scholarly and popular literature reinforces that impression. It would seem logical, then, that Jesus must have taught in parables from the beginning of his ministry. A look at a list of Jesus' parables, however, casts doubt on the matter. Mark 4 contains the first parables taught by Jesus in Mark. We have to go all the way to Mark 12 for the next ones. In Matthew there are a few parables before Matthew 11, but the great bulk of them come later. So, too, in Luke we don't begin to run into parables regularly until Luke 10 and following. Is it possible that all three gospels are reflecting an actual pattern in the development of Jesus teaching? Jesus, perhaps, didn't start his ministry teaching in parables.

Most New Testament scholars agree that the authors of Matthew and Luke used Mark as their key source for writing their own works. They generally follow Mark's chronology although each does change some things around. Mark's chronology, then, was taken by these other gospel

writers as being generally acceptable. We've already seen in earlier HeRDs that Mark shows some sensitivity to chronology. It points to Jesus' deteriorating relationship with the overclass and to the growing pressure of the crowd on Jesus. It seems possible, then, that the author of Mark was also sensitive to changes in Jesus' teaching method. IF that is the case, then we're left with the intriguing possibility that Jesus didn't start out teaching in parables. They came only later.

HeRD #596 - More Thoughts on the Parables

HeRD #595 speculated that maybe Jesus made significant use of parables as a teaching device only later in his ministry. The evidence, admittedly, is slim and relies on another supposition, namely that the Gospel of Mark is sensitive to the general chronology of important developments in Jesus' life. Let's suppose, for the sake of discussion, that Jesus, in fact, only started using parables in a significant way later in his ministry. Why might that be?

We can infer from the beginning that if Jesus changed his teaching strategy it was for a good reason. He must have felt some degree of dissatisfaction with the results of his more direct approach. This suggests that he felt that he wasn't communicating his message as well as he wanted. People weren't hearing what he was saying. The parable of the sower says as much. Jesus' use of parables, furthermore, reflects his growing dissatisfaction with the crowd, which pressed in on him and makes constant demands on his time. One suspects that the crowd valued his healing miracles more than his teaching, whereas for Jesus the miracles were only another way of communicating his teachings. Before we get all starry-eyed, in sum, about the parables, we should consider the possibility that they symbolize Jesus' failure to communicate his message, a failure that led him ultimately to the Cross and set the stage for the Resurrection.

HeRD #597 - Mean-spirited Messiah (Mark 4:10-12)

This passage doesn't make sense. Jesus, if the Gospel of Mark is any measure, was a bright, reflective, sensitive, and insightful individual. He impressed others as such. He cared very deeply, furthermore, that people heard his message. He committed himself to that end. Why, then, would Jesus inform his disciples that he taught the people in parables to keep them from understanding his message? The very premise that he would do so is inconsistent with Mark's own portrayal of Jesus. The NSV HARPER STUDY BIBLE (1991) comments on Mark 4:11 only add to the confusion. They claim that, "Clearly Jesus used illustrations or parables in order to hide the truth, not to reveal it." Huh? What kind of a messiah sets out to save his people and reconcile them to God by such a method? Whatever the author of Mark or Harpers says, Jesus was neither so hard-hearted or simple-minded as all of that.

So, what gives? It seems highly like that this passage is the author's interpretation of why Jesus' message didn't seem to reach the hearts of the people. Mark's reasoning might have gone like this: One, people didn't understand Jesus' message or, if they did, didn't respond to it effectively. (That's the whole point of the parable of the sower in 4:3-9). Two, if the people weren't accepting the message, then there must have been a reason. Three, the fault could ostensibly have been with Jesus. So, four and finally, the author had to come up with a way to absolve Jesus of any failure in this matter. One way to do that was to say that Jesus purposely obscured his message.

There are a couple of problems here. First, as we noted above, this solution doesn't fit the author's portrayal of Jesus in other regards. Second, if we skip ahead 20 verses, we find the author stating that Jesus used parables as the way to teach the people "as much as they could

understand." (4:33, TEV). Now, that makes more sense. Its Mark's understanding of Jesus much better. So, we're still left with the problem of the point to this passage.

HeRD #598 - The Very Beginning (Mark 4:10-12)

HeRD #597 questioned the purpose of Mark 4:10-12 in which Jesus is claimed to have said that he purposely kept the heart of his message from the public. That claim seems out of keeping with the person of Jesus and is contradicted and corrected by Mark 4:33-34 where Jesus is reported to have taught the people only so much as they could understand. I'd like to propose that perhaps the author is saying something else and that the point of the passage isn't who Jesus didn't teach, but who he did.

We'll remember that Mark charts the growing tensions between Jesus and the overclass. At the same time it highlights a growing tension between Jesus and the crowd. The parable of the sower (4:1-9) suggests that Jesus was beginning to realize that not very many people were effectively responding to his message concerning the Kingdom of God. A quick summary of Mark 3-4 shows that in 3:7-12 the crowd pressed in on Jesus until he had to climb into a boat and teach from there. Next Mark 3:13-19 has Jesus choosing an inner circle of twelve disciples, reminiscent of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. In 3:20-30 members of the overclass attack Jesus. These passages point to the tension Jesus was feeling with both the ruling class and the general populace. The next three passages form something of a sequence that builds on this context. In 3:31-35 Jesus declared that his family consists of those who do what God wants. In 4:1-9, the parable of the sower, Jesus noted that only some hear that message and bear fruit (cf. Mark 4:20). And, finally, in 4:10-12, the author has Jesus declare that his full teaching is intended only for a select circle, centered on the Twelve.

This sequence of passages points to an interpretation of how the church was founded. Jesus found himself increasingly isolated in terms of his message. People weren't hearing it. The overclass actively opposed it. These circumstances caused Jesus to re-think his strategy for communication the good news of the Kingdom and pushed him towards giving increased attention to his disciples. Jesus, thus, set in motion the formation of a new religious entity (a sect? a movement?) that eventually emerged as the Christian religion and church. That's the way the author of Mark saw it, and it's an interpretation that makes a good deal of sense. If my interpretation of Mark is correct, in these passages we're standing at the very beginning of the very beginning of what became the Christian church.

HeRD #599 - Trapped in Paradox (Mark 4:10-12)

Following on HeRD #598, is it possible to argue that Jesus was trapped by a paradox? The issue, I think, is that of Jesus the Miracle Worker. It was the miracles that attracted the large crowds, not Jesus' attacks on the overclass or his call to "turn away from your sins" because the Kingdom of God was near". (Mark 1:14). Jesus in Mark performed miracles partly out of a concern for suffering and partly as a validation of his message. The crowd wouldn't have paid any attention to a miracle-less prophet. So, Jesus had to perform miracles. But, miracles sent the wrong message to the crowd. It turned the crowd's attention to the person and what could be gotten out of that person. The message at the heart of the miracles was lost. Jesus would have been better off without the miracles except he had no choice but to perform them. He was trapped in an all too human paradoxical situation. It was this situation, apparently, that led Jesus to initiate the process of creating a specially chosen group as the focus of his hope.

Christians need to think about this scenario a great deal if it's anywhere near correct. We claim that Jesus was/is God, the Second Person of the Trinity, fully human-fully divine. What

that means is that God in the Person of Jesus wittingly entered into an insoluble, typically human paradoxical situation; and couldn't find any better solution to it than to start up another first century messianic sect! Is this what we mean by the concept of incarnation?

HeRD #600 - Those Who Refuse (Mark 4:10-12)

I'd like to follow-up on HeRD #598 just one more time. That HeRD entry argued the possibility that Mark 3-4 gives evidence for the very earliest stage in the process of the formation of the church. One of the implications of that argument is that Jesus himself had to find a way to deal with the failure of many or most to react effectively to his message. His own response was to form a band, a company of those responded positively. He made explicit the implicit differences between the ways in which people heard his call to repentance and belief, and he paved the way for institutionalizing those differences. Which is to say that the church from its inception has lived in an environment of rejection and exists because of that rejection. To state the matter in another way, when we look at the formation of the church we should give attention to those who stayed Outside, those who rejected or ignored the message, as well as to those who moved Inside in positive response to the message. The "outsiders" are as important a factor to the formation of the church as are the "insiders". Indeed, they're more important in one sense because the church wouldn't have come into existence (if my interpretation of Mark is correct) but for the existence of those who rejected, ignored, or misunderstood Jesus' call to repentance and entry into the Kingdom.

It's at this point that early church history brings us back to consider the historical experiences of the Thai church. In a very different time and place from that of Jesus, the church in Thailand has still had to make some of the same choices about those who don't listen or don't understand. One suspects that in spite of the many differences, the reasons for rejection are the same. The one great difference between there and here is that, whatever else he was, Jesus wasn't an alien. He was a Galilean mystic-prophet-miracle worker struggling from within Galilean contexts to bring about a profound change in the way people viewed their relationship to God. He had to figure out how to deal with rejection that was religious not cultural. The contrast to Thailand, as we've said before in HeRD, is striking. The study of early church history, in sum, impresses us with how utterly unlike the early church's culturally-incarnated life the life of the Thai church has been.

HeRD #601 - Making the Hidden Known (Mark 4:21-22)

The immediate context of Mark 4:21-22 is the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-9, 13-20) and the author's interpretation of why Jesus taught in parables, namely to keep the people from understanding his teaching (4: 10-12). The saying in these two verses, in that context, makes the point that the lack of comprehension won't continue forever. A bright lamp will be lit. It will expose all that's hidden.

This passage can be read in one of two ways. On the one hand, it could be that Jesus meant that the crowds' lack of understanding would come to an end. The lamp would eventually expose them to the light of understanding. Jesus' immediate audience, on the other hand, was a small, privileged group including the Twelve (4:10). Thus, Jesus could just have well as meant that this smaller group would achieve a fuller understanding of his message through his giving them the hidden keys to his message. That, I think, is what the author thought Jesus meant. Having told the Twelve he'd give them special instruction, Jesus here is all but promising that they will gain new insight from that instruction. Jesus is literally taking a lamp hidden under a bushel basket in a dark, dark room and bringing it out for the Twelve to see the true nature of the room. The "room" is the Kingdom of God.

HeRD #602 - Warning (Mark 4:23-25)

These verses are usually split into two paragraphs or even sections in English-language translations, but they seem to form a unit in terms of their content. In both verses 23 and 24 Jesus says, "Listen to what you're hearing!" In Mark 4:21-22 Jesus gave the promise of light. Now, he's informing the Twelve of the conditions of the promise. They'll only "see the light" if they listen and pay attention to what they hear. (We remember from Mark 4:10 that Jesus is addressing just the Twelve and a few other disciples).

Jesus warns them, furthermore, that they have to listen in a new way. They have to judge what they hear wisely because their judgment is reflexive. If they judge wrongly, they'll lose everything they could have gained. The wise listener, in other words, will gain more wisdom. The foolish listener will lose even what little wisdom she or he might have. Jesus, in other words, is reminding his student-disciples of what every good teacher knows: learning is, finally, not up to the teacher but to those doing the learning. Good methods or deep insights or challenging messages get no further than the ears of those who are sitting at the teacher's feet. If they don't listen attentively, all of the message and insight and method is lost; and, in this case, the consequences of failing to hear are immeasurably costly. There's a pithy little saying in Thai that can be rendered into English as "Do good, get good. Do evil, get evil." In this case, we might adapt it to read, "Listen well, get good. Listen poorly, get evil." It's at this point that we again confront the reality of the incarnation. Jesus' divine nature didn't transcend the limitations of his auditors, and all he could do was to virtually plead for their attention and warn them of the consequences of their failure to listen well.

HeRD #603 - Parable of the Seed (Mark 4:26-29)

If we put this parable into the political context of Jesus' time, it is a remarkable statement of a moderate political and religious program. It's at one and the same time peaceable and confrontational. Jesus believed that the Kingdom wouldn't come suddenly or in violence. He described its emergence as a natural process, largely hidden, and yet inexorable. Jesus' vision for the future is strikingly peaceful and confident. In the end the Kingdom of God must and will come. This parable points to the "middle way" of the "Jesus' Revolution". On the one hand, Jesus didn't openly challenge the political power of the overclass. He didn't call for the violent overthrow of the Romans. On the other hand, he most certainly did question the religious authority of the overclass. He rejected their understanding of God's relationship to the poor.

This parable has, however, a negative element to it as well. Jesus was admitting that the immediate response of the people and their leaders wasn't what he must have wished. The Kingdom would inevitably come; but it would take time. In some respects, this and the other two parables about seed in Mark 4 point to the failure of Jesus' ministry, not its success.

HeRD #604 - Another Seed Parable (Mark 4:30-32)

One might well ask why Mark has two seed parables, one right after the other. In fact, both Luke and Matthew dropped the first one (4:26-29) and kept only this second one, about the mustard seed. They may well have done so because it seemed to be redundant to keep both, but it's also interesting to note that there is a difference between the two parables. The parable of the growing seed emphasizes the process of the growth of the Kingdom and suggests that its emergence will take some time. As we noted in HeRD #603, the parable can be taken as pointing to the failure of Jesus' ministry to bring about the Kingdom. The parable of the mustard seed, on the other hand, emphasizes the results of the growth of the seed. What starts out as a tiny seed sprouts into a huge plant, one that provides shelter for the birds. That's an image of miraculous

and almost immediate success that the authors of Luke and Matthew surely must have found more fitting to apply to Jesus.

Why does Mark have both? First, Mark is clearly much less worried about implications that Jesus was less than perfect. The gospel, as we've seen, is littered with the human limitations of Jesus. Second, when taken together the two parables provide a fuller picture of what the coming Kingdom will be like. It's eventual flowering will seem almost miraculous. It will bring peaceful shade to the people. But this process doesn't happen over night. It takes time, and it's even hard to tell that it's happening. Mark, then, contains what we might call a somewhat different "philosophy of the future" from that of the other Gospels. It's as optimistic in the long-run but less so in the short-term. Looking back over the last 1,960-plus years since the death of Jesus, we have some cause to think that Mark's vision of the future (and, possibly, Jesus' as well) was more realistic than that of Luke or Matthew.

HeRD #605 - Forming the Jesus Circle (Mark 4:1-34)

Mark 4 contains the first body of Jesus' teachings recorded in Mark. The author, presumably, must have seen SOME connection between the individual teachings presented in this chapter and must have had SOME reason for putting them HERE in the narrative of Jesus' life. That reason isn't very clear, but I think it might be more clear if we assume that the author was sensitive to the general chronology of events in Jesus' ministry. After the calling of the Twelve (Mark 3:13-19), Jesus went home and had a confrontation with members of the overclass (3:20-30). Then his family arrived, and Jesus took the opportunity to redefine family as being those who do what God wants (3:31-35). After that we have Jesus' teachings, mostly in parables, in Mark 4.

Jesus stated that most of those who hear the Good News respond ineffectively (4:1-9). Therefore, he taught the general public only in parables, and only a privileged few were taught more fully (4:10-12). Then comes Mark's explanation of what Jesus meant by the parable of the sower (4:13-20). Some commentators think this section was added later. Next comes a series of shorter sayings that teach: [1] what's hidden will be made known (4:21-22); [2] you'll be judged as you judge others (4:24-25); and, [3] the Kingdom of God is like a seed (4:26-29 and 4:30-32). In 4:33-34, we learn that Jesus used many parables to teach the crowds and that, "...when he was alone with his disciples, he would explain everything to them." (4:34, TEV).

Mark 4:1-34, I think, describes Jesus' work with his inner circle of disciples in the period after he brought them together. They were his new family. They received special instruction. They were the "good soil" that would yield a great harvest. It was in them that the hidden would be revealed. They would be among those who had and would receive even more. Most importantly, they were the mysterious seed that would sprout into a mighty plant giving shade to the birds. After some period of time (Mark 5:1-6:6), Jesus sent the Twelve out to teach others (Mark 6:6-13). A few thoughts in the next HeRD.

HeRD #606 - Forming the Jesus Circle II (Mark 4:1-34)

HeRD #605 wound its way through a fairly convoluted argument concerning Jesus' teachings in Mark 4. It concluded with the argument that those passages reflect Jesus' earliest instruction of his inner circle of disciples. I'd like to add some thoughts here.

By and large, New Testament scholars have engaged in a massive literary analysis of Mark and the other gospels. Many of them have assumed that the author of Mark was more of an editor than an author, even when they claim otherwise. The consequence is that far, far more attention

has been given to individual passages, verses, parts of verses, and words than to the general work. My assumption is that the author of Mark really was an author and that in order to understand the contents of Mark we have to look at it more largely. Detailed, even minute literary analysis is important, but it fails to concern itself with the historical evidence contained in Mark and the larger arguments made by the author concerning the events in Jesus' life. I'm convinced that the contents of Mark are more reflective of the actual Jesus than much of contemporary New Testament scholarship would admit. We should thus give much more attention to how Mark tells its tale in general. Mark's handling and arrangement of source material isn't fortuitous.

In light of all of this, the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-8) takes on substantial historical importance. It's the justification and charter for the foundation of an activist Jesus Circle or Jesus Sect. Jesus self-consciously created the disciples as a community of those who would bear fruit. The rest of his teachings in this chapter present the rationale for taking that step. They were the light being brought out into the open. They would sprout like a mustard seed into a huge plant that would give shade and shelter. Jesus started off his new group with real hope that they'd prove to be the vehicle for his call to Israel to repent and believe. He saw in the disciples not simply a group of people to teach. He saw them as the active agents of his message. Eventually, he sent them out to preach and exorcise demons. Mark, in short, is claiming that Jesus was the founder of the church, and the parable of the sower is the earliest rationale for establishing the group that eventually became the church.

The issue of who founded the church and when is an important one, and the answers historians give varies considerably. The most widely held notion seems to be that the formation of the church began with Pentecost. That's not Mark's perspective. Mark, IF I'm correct, is presenting Jesus as the founder of the church and the instruction of his disciples contained in Mark 4 as the founding event in its life.

HeRD #607 - Mark's Sources Revisited

Earlier HeRDs (#s 516, 518, 520, 521, 524, 544, 546, 547, 552, 554, 555, 556, and 562) gradually developed the argument that the author of Mark used oral history sources. The Gospel of Mark, I've also argued, is an ancient historiographical work. We have to acknowledge that there's a lot of speculation involved in these arguments, but they at least have the value of challenging some commonly held scholarly notions about Mark. First, they reject the notion that the author was nothing more than a clever editor who pieced together swatches of Jesus traditions. Second, they reject the distinction between "gospel" as a literary form and historiography. The distinction to be made is between ancient and modern historiographical methods and understandings of what constitutes historical evidence. My argument is that Mark's author was a historian, conducted research, and published the results of that research.

As a historian, the first and most important thing I want to know about any source is how it handled ITS sources. Can I trust it to give me a reasonably accurate glimpse of its subject matter? Is it biased? Was the author competent in handling his or her sources? Historians necessarily cultivate a fair amount of skepticism about their sources. One thing that makes a historian an expert in a particular field is knowing which sources to trust and which to doubt. I came at Mark, again as best as I could, with this skeptical attitude. That wasn't hard. I was more than prepared to find in Mark an author who mishandled evidence and obscured more than she or he revealed about Jesus. What I believe I've found instead is an ancient historian who used good but limited sources, who lets me know something about those sources, and who has a good sense of the unfolding of larger events. My intuition and experience tells me that the author of Mark used oral history sources, but according to ancient rather than modern historiographical

conventions. I know that historians outside of the church would write off my changing attitude regarding Mark as just typical Christian pretense at objectivity, but I really have gained a fair degree of respect for the author of Mark as a historian. I think that with Mark we're closer to the actual Jesus than many contemporary scholars allow.

HeRD #608 - Papias on Mark's Sources

The church historian, Eusebius, writing in the 4th century comments on the Gospel of Mark by quoting Papias, an early church author. Papias, in turn, alludes to an unnamed figure called "the presbyter". Papias wrote, "This, too, the presbyter used to say. 'Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doings, for he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, one of Peter's. Peter used to adapt his teaching to the occasion, without making a systematic arrangement of the Lord's sayings, so that Mark was quite justified in writing down some things just as he remembered them. For he had one purpose only -- to leave out nothing he had heard, and to make no misstatement about it.'" (THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH FROM CHRIST TO CONSTANTINE, 3.39.14-17) If the presbyter was correct, then, Mark composed his gospel from what he heard Peter teach about Jesus. The gospel is somewhat disorderly because Peter taught in a disorderly manner, as the occasion demanded.

The question is can we trust this chain of citations that starts at the presbyter and ends with Eusebius? Papias wrote about 110 or so. That's roughly 40 years after the most widely accepted date for Mark. The presbyter, it seems, was a generation earlier than Papias, maybe something like 85-90, which means that we're back to within a decade or two of the gospel itself. That's close! Scholars, however, argue that Papias is an unreliable source. The article on Mark in the ANCHOR BIBLE DICTIONARY sums up the case against Papias by noting that Papias' comments on the Gospel of Matthew are patently incorrect (That's another story! We won't go into it here.). So, it's possible or even likely Papias is just as wrong about Mark. The fallacy in this line of thinking, of course, is that the fact that he made a misstatement about Matthew says nothing inherently about his trustworthiness concerning Mark. Now, if there was a pattern in which Papias frequently demonstrated himself incompetent, then we'd be justified in rejecting his data about Mark. But, since Papias' writings are no longer extant, we have no such pattern. It seems to me that we need to at least take Papias' statements about Mark seriously. Raymond E. Brown's INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT comes to a similar conclusion.

More in HeRD #609.

HeRD #609 - Papias on Mark's Sources II

Papias quotes the "presbyter" as claiming that Mark was Peter's interpreter and later wrote down (unsystematically) what he'd heard Peter teach and preach about Jesus. Scholars reject this claim because they find Papias' views on the Gospel of Matthew patently incorrect. So, where does this leave us?

Clearly, there's no way of ever finding out if the presbyter was right about Mark. But we can make some observations about his comments. First, this earliest tradition we have about Mark indicate that the gospel was written from oral sources. That doesn't prove they were, but the ancient Roman-Greek world does seem to have put some store in collecting data from oral sources. The early church's tradition about Mark's sources is in keeping with that method of gathering information. Second, those oral sources were very close to the events recalled. WHAT IF the gospel of Mark basically contains Peter's recollections of Jesus? Historiographically, that would lend considerable credibility to this document as a source of trustworthy information

concerning the empirical Jesus. Third, the early church tradition we have here is itself implicitly critical of the way Mark organizes the life of Jesus. It recognizes a certain lack of orderliness in Mark and blames Peter's evangelistic style for that lack of order. This tradition was sensitive to the limitations of the Gospel of Mark as a source for understanding Jesus' life. That's intriguing. It suggests that the tradition took a realistic view of the gospel and saw the limitations of oral sources!

My question for modern biblical scholarship is, is there a compelling reason to reject this tradition that comes to us from the presbyter, via Papias, via Eusebius? The reason given in HeRD #608 that Papias was wrong about the origins of Matthew so Papias was probably wrong about Mark isn't compelling. And, if I understand rightly, Papias didn't quote the presbyter concerning Matthew. Maybe, just maybe, Papias' sources for Mark are better! I don't think we know or ever can know the answers to these questions, but what I think we can claim is that the author of Mark quite possibly used oral sources close to the events recorded in the gospel. It's hard to see how some of the bits and pieces of data contained in Mark could have appeared where they do otherwise. Ancient legal and historiographical traditions relied on oral sources to obtain what was seen as credible data. The early church's had its own tradition that the author was named Mark and obtained his data through Peter. I may be entirely wrong in arguing for oral sources close to the events as the source of Mark's data, but I don't think we can just dismiss the possibility out of hand either.

HeRD #610 - Those Who Saw

Something like 80% of New Testament scholars agree that both Luke and Matthew independently used Mark as their major source. They both generally follow Mark's story line, although with modifications. The most important changes the other two gospels make, however, involve adding a significant amount of information about Jesus' teachings not contained in Mark. They also make important theological and political changes: eliminating or modifying passages that seem disrespectful of Jesus or that shed a bad light on future church leaders, such as Peter. Mark, nonetheless, was the most important source of information about Jesus for the other two. Why?

A clue may be contained in Luke 1.1-2. There the author writes, "...Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us. They wrote what we have been told by those who saw these things from the beginning and who proclaimed the message." (TEV). Unless the theory that Luke used Mark is wrong, Luke must have had Mark in mind since Mark was the author's single most important source. Luke seems to be saying here that Mark and other sources were based on eyewitness accounts unavailable to the author of Luke, who probably wrote a decade or more afterwards by which time many more informants would have died. The fact that Luke took over roughly two-thirds of Mark (Matthew took 80%) and largely retained Mark's order of events indicates just how important Mark was as a source of information about Jesus. We're left with the strong impression that the author of Mark used oral history sources that the other two gospel writers accepted as reliable, but only up to a point. Most scholars agree that Luke and Matthew were written around or after 80 CE, roughly 50 years after Jesus died and a decade or more after Mark was produced. The authors of both would have known something of the origins of Mark and independently of each other found his work generally reliable. What they found least reliable is precisely that which modern historians should find most commendable about the Gospel of Mark, namely that Jesus' humanity is clearly and fully documented there in a way that later Christians found theologically uncomfortable.

HeRD #611 - Sinclair Thompson Lectures I

On August 6-7, the Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture, Payap University, sponsored the 13th series of the Sinclair Thompson Lectures, an internationally recognized lecture series promoting inter-faith understanding. This series consisted of two lectures, delivered by Ach. Saeng Chandngarm and Dr. John Carman, respectively. The subject of both lectures was, "Religious Studies and Inter-Religious Understanding." Ach. Saeng delivered the first lecture.

In his lecture, Ach. Saeng, of Chiang Mai University, focused on the lack of understanding between religions. He identified seven causes for misunderstanding: [1] differences in doctrine; [2] dualistic thinking that divides the world rigidly into spheres of right and wrong; [3] the holier-than-thou attitude that grows out of numbers 1 and 2; [4] the attempts to undermine or even destroy other religions that grows out of numbers 1, 2, and 3; [5] interference with the religious life of people of other faiths; [6] human ideologies, such as nationalism and racism, that are linked to religion; and [7] the failure of people to properly understand their own and other people's religions.

Ach. Saeng identified the seventh cause as the root cause of all of the others. He then engaged in a Buddhist critique of contemporary Buddhist life in Thailand aimed at showing that Thai Buddhists generally fail to understand the teachings of their own religious tradition. His critique was nearly sarcastic in its clarity. At one point he entered into a chant and then suddenly slapped his wrist as if to kill a mosquito, demonstrating the way in which people can hear and repeat Buddhist teachings and yet violate the fundamental precept against taking life. One almost felt that the laughter in the audience was the laughter of self-recognition.

A few thoughts in our next HeRD.

HeRD #612 - Sinclair Thompson Lectures II

Ach. Saeng identified seven causes for religious misunderstanding (see HeRD #611) and then engaged in a brief critique of modern-day Thai Buddhist practices. A closer examination, however, suggests that Thai Buddhism wasn't Ach. Saeng's real target. In his hierarchy of causes of dualistic thinking, the second cause, occupies a key position. The first cause, doctrinal dissension, makes most sense in light of it. The next four causes--including a holier-than-thou attitude, attempts to destroy or interfere with other religions, and ideological tensions--are also rooted in the dualistic division of all reality into spheres of right and wrong, holy and unholy. That is to say that six of Ach. Saeng's seven categories are linked to a world view that is most clearly articulated in the West. Western thinking in its very heart of hearts is dualistic, both in the sense of Greek philosophical dualism and Persian-Jewish religious dualism. It is the Christian West that habitually divides the world into mutually exclusive spheres of white and black. Reagan's attack on the Soviet Union as the "Evil Empire" is symbolic of that way of thinking. Without saying so in so many words, Ach. Saeng seemed to be arguing that Western ways of thinking contribute fundamentally to religious misunderstanding.

Ach. Saeng's critique of Thai Buddhism, furthermore, confirmed that argument. He found Thai Buddhism lacking in only one regard, albeit the most important of his seven causes: Thai Buddhists don't understand their own religion. The other six causes of religious misunderstanding didn't come into play. When he turned to Christianity, Dr. Saeng at first argued that Christians share with Thai Buddhists the same failure to understand their own religion. He artfully juxtaposed the teachings of Jesus with current Christian behavior, observing at one point, "Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek. Christians turn that cheek with mighty battleships." In his lengthy critique of Christianity's failure to understand Jesus' teachings, however, it became clear that Ach. Saeng saw Christian misunderstanding as being related to the

first six causes of religious misunderstanding as well. He was criticizing Christians for their dualistic, closed attitudes towards other religions.

Christian can respond to Dr. Saeng's analysis of Christian attitudes about people of other faiths in a number of ways. It's impossible to deny, however, that Thai Protestantism has taken a largely negative, closed approach towards Buddhism and Buddhists. It's hardly surprising that articulate Buddhist thinkers resent and rebut that approach.

HeRD #613 - Sinclair Thompson Lectures III

Seeing the numerous monks and novices attending the Sinclair Thompson Lectures, one Christian seminary student was heard to observe, "There they are, the agents of Satan." Another seminarian asked, "Don't you think we compromise ourselves too much by taking part in things like this?" In his lecture Ach. Saeng stated, "Christianity teaches us to love our neighbor, but Christians are the neighbors we find hardest to love."

HeRD #614 - Sinclair Thompson Lectures IV

Although Ach. Saeng brought a sharp critique of his own religious tradition to bear, he didn't accuse it of causing religious misunderstanding. He clearly accused Christianity of doing so. At some points his arguments were telling, but at others they were wide of the mark. It was particularly fascinating to hear him reiterate one of the most ancient criticisms directed against the Christian mainstream. Ach. Saeng accused modern-day Christians of emphasizing the Old Testament over the New Testament, the result being that Christianity promotes materialism. He apparently shares that old, old view that the Old Testament is un-spiritual. It's a lower form of religion that Jesus transcended. We Christians fought this one out with gnosticism some 1,700 years ago, and it's been the inherited wisdom of the church ever since that the God of Jesus is the Genesis God who created our world and created it good. We're bound to the earth. Our corporeal being is an important and valued part of our total being. We're God's agents in caring for the physical world around us. Jesus, more over, was a real person, flesh and blood, Jewish, Galilean, the child of human parents. He was God, self-bound to the earth, who "came into the world" to bring humanity to reconciliation with God and with itself. In a positive sense, then, Christianity is inherently materialistic.

It's one thing to accuse Christians of complicity in promoting negative materialism, an accusation we can hardly deny. It's quite another to put the blame for that complicity on the Old Testament. If anything, Christian materialism is a denial of the Old Testament faith in the Exodus and Wilderness God, the God whose prophets attacked with surgical precision the "fat cows of Bashan." Indeed, the New Testament writers drew so heavily on the Old Testament as a source for their understanding of Jesus and their faith in him that it's impossible to distill out a "pure" Christianity devoid of its Jewish heritage. We have to listen, in sum, to Ach. Saeng's critique of Christianity. We also have to realize that his critique fails to understand important elements of our faith.

HeRD #615 - Sinclair Thompson Lectures V

Ach. Saeng brought his lecture to a close with an analysis of how religious peoples should relate to each other. At times it felt as though we were in the presence of a Buddhist sermon, even though Ach. Saeng used some Christian words and concepts. He argued that the dependence on a higher spiritual power as a necessary departure from true Buddhist teachings. Buddhists, in other words, aren't able to follow the teachings of the Buddha and so have to rely on higher

powers, just like the Christians and Muslims do. He implied that theism exists because of human weakness and is inherently inferior to a religion of self-reliance.

It became clear that Ach. Saeng saw in Buddhist-like practice the solution to inter-religious misunderstandings and the path to deeper religious understanding. His address didn't feel very dialogical in spite of the fact that his critique of both Buddhism and Christianity contained several telling points. We should listen. Somehow, however, his approach came back to a search for wisdom and an extinguishing of earthly desires that presupposed the Buddhist Dharma. That's fine. But it's not dialogical. Frankly, deep down inside I felt that Ach. Saeng was telling us that the problem of religious misunderstanding is essentially a Christian problem. The solution is Buddhist.

The tone of Ach. Saeng's conclusion, in fact, seemed to reflect an evangelistic agenda. He may not have been trying to "win" Christians over to Buddhism, but he did try to persuade Christians to change their ways of thinking. HeRD has argued a similar line, from a liberal Christian perspective, a number of times. The thing that left me uneasy with Ach. Saeng's sermon was that he treated his non-Buddhist audience in much the same way he earlier accused Christians of treating non-Christians. In an overtly dialogical context, he engaged in an evangelistic attempt to change the thinking of people of another faith. He placed himself on higher ground and reached out to pull non-Buddhists up to that higher ground. He brought a case (and it has some strong points) against Christians. He posited Buddhist perspectives as the solution to Christian weaknesses. That's not dialogue. That's not seeking understanding across religious boundaries.

HeRD #616 - Sinclair Thompson Lectures VI

Dr. John Carman, Harvard University, delivered the second lecture in the 13th series of the Sinclair Thompson Lectures. He told the story of a 1967 meeting that he attended in India. The issue under discussion was the teaching of comparative religion in Indian state universities. The Hindu scholars present argued that the universities were already teaching comparative religion within the framework of Indian philosophy, which emphasizes the unity of all religions. The scholars from India's other major religions, Islam and Christianity, strongly disagreed. They claimed that the philosophy taught in the universities was nothing more than Hindu philosophy. They wanted comparative religion courses that would show up the differences among the religions. The Hindus replied that emphasizing religious differences would be bad for national unity. Carman noted that this debate has continued unabated in India down to the present. He concluded that the vast amounts of time invested in the scholarly study of religion hasn't led to equally improved understanding between religions; nor has it led to a more peaceful world. This in spite of the fact that scholars are obligated to work for world peace.

Carman's observations inspire a number of questions. In spite of his story about contentious Indian religious scholars, are things as black and white as he suggested? Is it true that the scholarly study of religion hasn't contributed to world peace by creating a better understanding of religion? Is there research or other evidence to support that fact? How would one measure, fairly and with some objectivity, the effective contribution of the scholarly study of religion to world peace? Religious scholars have taught hundreds of thousands and millions of students. Have there been no beneficial results? Again, how would one measure the contribution to world peace of all of that instruction? And one can't help but wonder. In Thailand, some of our strongest voices for human rights, democracy, and economic justice are religiously educated, articulate Buddhists. Have they made no contribution to a more peaceful Thailand? Has a Gandhi, a Mother Theresa, a Martin Luther King, a Bishop Desmond Tutu, or many, many others trained by religious scholars made no such contribution?

When two people of religious persuasion seek reconciliation because of their faith is it to be assumed that there's no link back to religious instruction based on religious scholarship? Don't such acts, repeated many times over, lead to a more peaceful world? The American Anti-War movement of the 1960s and 1970s was heavily populated by people of a Christian persuasion, including no small number of seminarians. Was there no connection, in that movement, between religious scholarship and the search for world peace? The more one thinks about it, the less persuasive Carman's critique of religious scholarship appears to be.

HeRD #617 - Sinclair Thompson Lectures VII

Dr. Carman, in his lecture on religious study and religious understanding, noted that Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity share many characteristics and problems because they're all universal, missionary religions. As a result, there are many points open to them for dialogue. He suggested that in Thailand work with tribal peoples offers one such point. Tribal peoples don't have scriptures of their own, and traditionally they didn't have a script. Their religious beliefs and practices relied on other forms for expression. The preservation of those forms and their content could be an urgent matter, and achieving that goal would be a point at which Buddhism and Christianity in Thailand, for example, could cooperate and dialogue.

It was striking that Carman would hit on the preservation of tribal religions as a key starting point for improved inter-religious relations in Thailand. Much of current Protestant growth in Thailand is taking place among the hill tribes, esp. the Karen. To date Protestantism has taken a strongly negative attitude towards many elements of traditional tribal culture and religion. It would be a significant change indeed, if Protestants could enter into a three-sided dialogue in search of religious understanding with tribal traditionalists and Buddhists. It's something not likely to happen.

HeRD #618 - Images

Dr. John Carman not only delivered one of the two Sinclair Thompson Lectures, but he also gave an address at the opening ceremonies for Payap University's Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture. On both occasions, he relied on images associated with crossing rivers to explain his views on inter-religious relations. There are many ways to cross rivers. One can take a ferry, or wade across at a ford, or go across on a bridge. One has to find a means for crossing that is both expedient and reliable. Regarding bridges, Dr. Carman observed that at times one might view Christians and Buddhists as being on opposite sides of the bridge. In order to relate to each other, they'd need to cross from opposite sides and meet in the middle. Another scenario, however, would have both Buddhist and Christians resident on the same side of the river and better relations something they can achieve only by crossing the bridge together.

Ach. Saeng Chandngarm also presented an image. He urged that the various religions are like branches of the same tree. Although different in some ways, they are closely associated to each other, essentially subsets of the same larger category.

It's more than just a coincidence that Ach. Saeng, the Thai Buddhist, and Dr. Carman, the American Protestant, evoked these strikingly different images. The image of the tree captures the widely held Thai notion that all religions are alike. They all teach people to be good. Such an image posits inter-religious relations on their essential sameness. Religious understanding takes place, then, when We see the Other in Us and Us in the Other. Dr. Carman's images of the river focuses on the differences. Religious understanding involves a journey across barriers. It takes place when We and the Other transcend that which separates us.

HeRD #619 - When Openness Isn't

In HeRD #616, we learned from Dr. Carman that Hindu scholars in India want to emphasize the similarities among religions while Christian and Muslim scholars feel that comparative religion should focus on their differences. In HeRD #618, we saw that Carman himself tended to look at differences while Ach. Saeng clearly wanted to emphasize the essential oneness of religions. A cynic might note a political as well as a cultural agenda differentiates the two approaches. Hinduism and Buddhism are the dominant religions respectively of India and Thailand. Trivializing religious differences works very much in their favor against the other religions. It preserves the status quo and all but denies the identities of people of other faiths. One suspects, furthermore, that those who emphasize the sameness of all religions are frequently more willing to say "you're like me" than they are "I'm like you." Articulate Buddhist thinkers in Thailand, for example, vigorously resist Catholic attempts to place Buddhism within the framework of divine providence. Yet, when adherents of the dominant national religion urge the essential oneness of all religions isn't the same dynamic at work? In other words, purposely ignoring religious differences can in and of itself be a form of religious aggression. It can be a way of forcing other people's faith into one's own religious framework.

Reaching across religious boundaries is an incredibly difficult thing to do. As Dr. Carman noted in his lecture, it requires self-denial. Devout religionists of all faiths can take that to mean they have to deny their faith in order to engage in dialogue. Dr. Carman also noted that dialogue involves affirming the other, which the devout can interpret as condoning false systems of faith and practice. In truth, the 13th series of the Sinclair Thompson Lectures revealed the high barriers to open, fruitful dialogue as much or more than it pointed towards the possibilities or hopes for such dialogue.

HeRD #620 - Forgotten Last Names

Among that treasury of intimate information most of us couldn't possibly forget is our family name. That's true for Thais as well today, but it wasn't always so. Ach. Sukonrak Pannya, the Office of History's field researcher in Uttaradit Province, has recently come across two instances in which last names were changed because someone couldn't remember their original one. Last names were mandated by law at some point not too many years before 1920, but not everyone saw the matter as having any importance. Ach. Sukonrak was told by one informant the story of his father, who changed their last name because he couldn't remember it. The informant's grandfather, so the story went, had selected the family name. At that time the family lived in the village of Ban Dan. Some time later, the rest of the family moved away, excepting only Ach. Sukonrak's informant's father. Then, again, some years later (the informant was hazy on dates), the government began to issue house registrations, and every household had to register. Among the information people had to provide, naturally, was their last name. But our informant's father had forgotten his! And going to visit his relatives to find out would have involved a 4-5 day trip. So, he took his wife's family surname as his own, without bothering government officialdom with the inconsequential fact that it really wasn't his own. Another informant told a similar story. Again, the household registration process initiated things. A son forgot the family last name his parents had taken. There was no one handy to ask. In this case, he took as his own the family name of a well-known provincial family. Again, he didn't bother to inform the government officials involved about the minor fact that he wasn't related to that well-known family.

These stories provide a delightful insight into a time sixty or seventy years ago when the all-important surname wasn't all-important. In both cases, it wasn't just an individual who forgot his last name. A whole community didn't remember that individual's last name, maybe never

knew what it was. Having a last name seems so important and natural to us, that we tend to forget that Thais have them only because the Bangkok government decided they should. And the only time having a last name was useful was when they had to fill out some form or other for that same government.

HeRD #621 - The Burial of Jesus

Raymond E. Brown's article, "The Burial of Jesus (Mark 15:42-47)" in the April 1988 issue of the CATHOLIC BIBLICAL QUARTERLY takes us ahead in our study of Mark, but it also adds something to our appreciation of the author of Mark as a historian. Brown's article is concerned with the historical plausibility of Mark's account of the burial of Jesus. In Jesus' case, he argues, pious Jews would have taken two factors into account. First, according to the Law, after Jesus died his body had to be buried before night fall. Second, because of the nature of Jesus' crime, his corpse couldn't receive an honorable burial. Specifically it couldn't be bathed with the spices normally used in burial. Brown's question is, how does the account in Mark measure up to these standards? His answer is, quite well.

Brown emphasizes that in Mark, Joseph of Arimethea is never named as a disciple of Jesus (cf. Matthew 27:57 where he is claimed to be a disciple). He was a pious member of the Sanhedrin, the body that first condemned Jesus. Brown argues that Joseph had only one motivation for concerning himself with Jesus' dead body, which was seeing to its burial before sunset in accordance with the Law. There is no indication in Mark, furthermore, that anything honorable was done with the body, unlike in Matthew where Jesus receives an obviously honorable burial in Joseph's own tomb (Matthew 27:59-60). In Mark's account there's no indication that the tomb used was Joseph's, and Brown suggests that it was very likely a rough-hewn tomb reserved for criminals and close to the place of crucifixion. Which is to say, Jesus' burial as retold in Mark fits both of the basic criteria for the Jewish burial of a criminal. The body was buried before sunset, and it received a dishonorable burial.

Brown suggests, in conclusion, that Mark's account of Jesus' burial may well be closer to the actual historical event than either that of Matthew or Luke. We don't have enough evidence to prove this is the case and almost certainly never will have. But it's a good bet, I think.

HeRD #622 - The God-Fearers

One of the important issues in early church history is that of explaining the rapid spread of the Christian faith. The Book of the Acts provides one explanation, namely that there was a group of Gentiles who actively attached themselves to Jewish synagogues and believed in the God of the Jews. They were known as "God-fearers." For anyone of a number of reasons, they didn't actually convert to Judaism, but they frequently kept its laws and precepts. Over the years, scholars have from time to time objected that there's no independent evidence to prove that there ever really was such a group of Gentiles as the so-called "God-fearers."

Thomas M. Finn's article, "The God-fearers Reconsidered" (CATHOLIC BIBLICAL QUARTERLY, January 1985) reviews the evidence and concludes that there probably were Gentiles who involved themselves in Jewish synagogue life and faith, whether or not they were known by the name "God-fearers." He agrees with the doubters that Act's makes things far too simple in implying that the God-fearers were the single cause of the rapid growth of the early church. He notes that direct evangelism such as carried out by Paul was another important factor. On the other hand, contemporary Roman literary sources provide several examples, most notably in Juvenal, of Gentiles "enamored" with Judaism to the point that their children converted. There were also several Gentile sects that incorporated faith in the Most High God of the Jews. All of

which is to say, that Acts is still correct when it presents Gentile faith in Judaism as one bridge by which the Jewish Jesus Sect found its way into the Gentile world.

HeRD #623 - Why Four?

The Two Source Hypothesis holds that Mark is the earliest of the four gospels. Something I never stopped to think about until I read Graham N. Stanton's article, "The Fourfold Gospel," in the July 1997 issue of *NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES*, was the potential impact of Matthew, probably the second gospel. If Mark was written about 70 CE and Matthew 10-30 years later, what did this second gospel portend for the church's belief in One Gospel? Stanton points out that the gospels circulated widely and fairly rapidly through the churches, so that many that had been using just one gospel account suddenly had two. He also argues that the author of Matthew (as well as the authors of Luke and John) intended to replace Mark with a better, more complete gospel. What did it mean for local congregations, then, when one after another of these gospels (and others) appeared? Why did they accept four? How did they work out the doctrine of One Gospel, but four gospels? What was the impact of the obvious, sometimes contradictory differences between the gospels? How could they incorporate four disparate gospels into their emerging Christian scriptures? Stanton doesn't give a good answer to these questions, and there doesn't seem to be one.

What would be the value of four gospels? We can only speculate. The number four was an auspicious numeral in ancient times. Now, to us that seems like a ridiculous reason for four gospels, but maybe the matter's no more complicated than that! What made sense in the second century might not make sense any longer. Or, maybe the early church believed that each of these gospels had a valid pedigree, i.e. came down from one of the apostles. Each was in and of itself authoritative, and the fact that there are four is mere coincidence. Some may well have felt that it was better for the church to have a range of stories about Jesus and several perspectives. That, however, sounds like a suspiciously modern response. In any event, we take the existence of the Four Gospels so for granted that we forget that somehow the early church had to make a collective decision to accept these four, reject all others, and adapt the Christian faith in One Gospel to the existence of four gospel versions.

HeRD #624 - Impact of the First Gospel

HeRD #623 raised the issue of the impact that receipt of the Gospel of Matthew must have had on the early church, as the second widely distributed gospel. It raised a whole range of issues concerning the churches' understanding of Jesus and of the One Gospel about him. If we back up a bit, we can't help but wonder if the receipt of Mark, the first of the four generally acknowledged gospels, didn't have a major impact of its own. The *NEW INTERPRETER'S BIBLE* introduction to the Gospel of Matthew points to something of that impact. We should remember here that scholars generally acknowledge that Mark was written ca. 70 CE and that Matthew followed some 10 to 30 years later.

Writing about the Christian community that later produced the Gospel of Matthew, the NIB observes, "Some time after 70 CE the Gospel of Mark arrived in the Matthean community, was accepted as part of the community's own sacred tradition, and was used in its life and worship... The narrative of Mark became a fundamental part of the Matthean church's way of telling the Jesus-story, along with its characteristic emphases: Jesus the miracle worker, Jesus the crucified and risen one, Jesus the inaugurator of the Gentile mission. If the Gospel of Mark was already associated with Peter, this strengthened the emphasis on Peter as the leading apostle, already present in the Matthean stream of tradition, and facilitated Mark's acceptance as a normative Christian text for Matthew's church." (NIB, VIII, 95-96).

Prior to Mark, it appears that the churches depended on a mixture of sources of information about Jesus including oral and written sayings traditions and the living memories of his followers. It's possible that Mark's author grew uneasy with the fluidity of this knowledge, esp. in light of the passing of the First Generation. The result was a gospel that probably did for many other churches what the NIB suggests it did for the Matthean Christian community. It became an important resource for the life and worship of those churches. It contained authoritative teachings including the actual words of Jesus. It came to shape the very way in which the church remembered, understood, and told others about Jesus. It became so important, in fact, that a member of the Matthean community felt constrained to use it as the core of a new, improved gospel that preserved Mark's perceived strengths while correcting its supposed weaknesses. The author of the Gospel of Mark, in sum, made an incalculable contribution to the future development of the Christian faith.

HeRD #625 - Where Was Matthew Written? Does It Matter?

We've noted often enough in HeRD that New Testament scholars face a crippling problem in their lack of solid historical data. Now and again, this frustrating condition tempts them to creatively massage the data they do have and come up with more "facts" than is warranted. The ANCHOR BIBLE DICTIONARY article on Matthew provides an interesting case in point. After a sifting of the data, the article concludes that the Gospel of Matthew was composed in Antioch roughly 80-90 CE, and that this conclusion, "...has important consequences for understanding the origin of the gospel as well as the history of the early church. It enables us to plot the development of Christianity in one significant urban center in the first three Christian generations and thus to comprehend the problems and forces that led to Matthew's particular approach to the gospel tradition."

The process, however, by which the article decided on Antioch is troubling. It discarded a Palestinian origin for what seem to be good reasons; namely, the chaotic state Palestine was in after the First Jewish War ended in 70 CE. But it went on to reject other possible locales for the origin of Matthew for less convincing reasons. Alexandria, for example, was rejected because, "The origin and state of Christianity in Alexandria in the 1st century are unknown to us." (IV, p. 624). One has to object to such reasoning. We can't discard Alexandria (and other cities) simply because we don't have any data about them. It's entirely possible that the Gospel was written in Alexandria, our 20th century ignorance notwithstanding. Graham N. Stanton, in an article in INTERPRETATION (October 1992), states, "Although it has often been suggested that the Gospel was written in Antioch, there is no conclusive evidence, and the cumulative case is not compelling." Stanton goes on to say, "I do not even think we can assume that Matthew was written in an urban setting."

The ABD article's assertion, in sum, that knowing that Matthew was written in Antioch helps us understand both Matthew and Antioch has created information that may be entirely incorrect. We really don't know if the Gospel was written there, and to build an extensive edifice of historical "knowledge" on that assumption is dangerous and misleading. It's just such a process as this that those who study the past manufacture historical facts that aren't true.

HeRD #626 - The Third Entity Revisited

HeRD #486 introduced the concept of a "third entity" in terms of early church history. The early church, that is, increasingly came to understand itself as something distinct from both Judaism and the Gentile world. It saw itself as standing over again both. The NEW INTERPRETER'S BIBLE introductory article on Matthew points to this development in the so-called "Matthean community" when it states, "Matthew's church saw itself as the messianic

community, the eschatological people of God, distinct from all--Jew or Gentile--who did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Matthew continued the Jewish practice of using GENTILE in the sense of 'outsider.' Thus both his anti-Jewishness and his anti-Gentile bias are, in effect, expressions of his sense of belonging to the Christian community distinct from the non-Christian world, both Jewish and Gentile. The Gospel draws the line between believers and non-believers in Christ; it is Christ, not Jewishness, that divides people (10:21-22, 32-39)." (VIII, p. 98, emphasis. in original). The sense of being a third entity, in other words, was essential to the emergence of the churches as independent social and religious communities.

The concept of "third entity" raises a number of important questions for the study of Thai church history. Has the Thai church undergone a similar process? Should it? Becoming a third entity necessarily implies a certain degree of alienation from its Thai and its Western heritage. Does it actually express such alienation? What impact does that alienation have on its relationship to its larger society? It's also worth wondering how the early church managed to be both a third entity and to yet communicate its message so effectively, especially among Gentiles. What was the nature of the early church's alienation from the Gentile world that allowed it to still interact effectively with that world? Is there even a parallel between early the Jewish/Gentile context of the early church and the Western religious/Thai social contexts of the Thai church?

HeRD #627 - Agendas for the Study of Thai Church History

Suppose, just suppose we had major sources of funding, deep commitment among the churches, sufficient researchers, and the administrative wherewithal to engage in numerous long-term church history projects in Thailand. What would we study? Here's a few suggestions.

First and before all else, the history of 19th and 20th century Thai Catholicism remains mostly shrouded in darkness. Catholicism is half or more of the Thai Christian story, and we can never claim to know that story without far more intensive study of it. Second, there is a pressing need to engage in church history research among Protestants outside of the CCT. One day their churches will want to know their histories. It will be incredibly difficult for them to do so because of the negligent and irresponsible behavior of missionary agencies and church leaders of our generation. So, I'd rate the study of Protestant churches outside the CCT a close second to Catholicism as a priority. And first among those groups, I'd put the study of Thai Pentecostalism. A third pressing need is the study of the ethnic churches, esp. the Chinese and tribal churches. The study of Thai Chinese Christianity will be a daunting, fascinating journey into the vast complexities of Chinese church history itself. Thai Chinese Christians have made a significant contribution to the Thai church generally, but we don't understand that contribution very well. The tribal churches have been historically less significant, but they comprise an important element of the church's future in Thailand. Thus, we need to collect their histories now while many of those who helped found them are still living. Relatively speaking, we know far more about the Presbyterian role in Thailand than we do about any other single group or mission agency. Far more can still be done, however. For example, little attention has been given to the Presbyterian role in the South. The Bangkok-based Siam Mission, more generally, has yet to be treated fully. At the same time, there has been surprisingly little study of the early Protestant missions, the ABCFM, AMA, and Baptist missions. The Disciples of Christ work in Nakhon Pathom needs attention, as do so many other topics.

One could assemble other lists of research priorities that would also significantly contribute to our knowledge of the Thai church: the churches of the northeast, revivalism, social outreach, Christian education, worship & church music, theological education, etc.. Historians of the Thai church also need to study the experiences of other churches in Asia, the Catholic and

Protestant missionary movements, the early church, the Reformation, etc. Then there's the history of Christian schools, hospitals, relief programs & agencies, denominational departments, again etc. The possibilities for significant studies are virtually endless. Finally, however, whatever the particular field the central focus of Thai church history, by definition, has to remain on the churches. Local church studies are the heart the field.

HeRD #628 - A Case for Women Disciples

Discerning the role of women in the life of the earliest church involves difficult and controversial issues. There is real, if limited, evidence that women played a leading part in early church life, one quite out of keeping with the general social oppression of women practiced in first century Roman and Jewish cultures. Winsome Munro, in an article in the April 1982 issue of the CATHOLIC BIBLICAL QUARTERLY makes a strong argument that the leading role of women in the church started with Jesus. Women were an important element in his inner circle of disciples.

The Gospel of Mark, Munro observes, takes note of women disciples only at the very end of the gospel, beginning with 15:40. From that point through to the end of the gospel (Mark 16:8), women followers of Jesus are prominent. They witness the crucifixion. They observe where Jesus' body was entombed. The young man in dazzling white informed them of Jesus' resurrection. Munro takes 15:40-41 to be an important indication that women were close to Jesus from his days in Galilee and played an important role among his disciples. She argues that where it says there that these women looked after Jesus (NJB), the meaning in context could be taken to say that they were disciples of Jesus. To the question of why Mark ignores the women disciples for nearly the whole of the gospel, Munro suggests that the author (whom she assumes was a man) wasn't very happy about their role. He wanted to obscure it because admitting to a large role for women was socially embarrassing; but he finally had to reveal their significance because it was so important in the end.

Munro presents a strong case for the presence of women disciples among Jesus' inner circle. I'd like to suggest a slightly different scenario, no more or less speculative than hers. Is it not possible that a number of women attached themselves to Jesus' inner circle, but that in keeping with contemporary Jewish androcentricism their role was a secondary one? More largely, pious women formed a very important element in Jesus' support and acceptance; and he showed an unusually high degree of understanding towards women for a man of his day. It was only at the time of the crucifixion and resurrection, however, that the women disciples really came into their own. The men ran, the women stayed. They had the first visions of the resurrection, and they first proclaimed the Risen Lord.

HeRD #629 - Whose Bible?

The New Testament we read today is a modern "invention" assembled by scholars. Raymond E. Brown's INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT (p. 52) makes this fact abundantly clear. He notes that the Greek text used for translating the King James Version (1611) was based on inadequate texts and manuscripts. It wasn't until the end of the 19th century that biblical scholars succeeding in replacing them with more ancient and accurate ones. He says of those texts, "The one most familiar to students is the Nestle-Aland edition (constantly updated), which is also used in the United Bible Societies Greek NT edition. Admiration for the scholarship that has gone into that truly critical edition should not make us overlook an important fact: The text printed therein is eclectic, drawing on one tradition for one verse and another tradition for another verse. In other words before the first Nestle edition was printed in 1898, the Nestle-Aland text never existed as a unit in antiquity and was never read in any

Christian community. A corollary is that while NT books are canonical, no particular Greek text should be canonized; and the most one can claim for a critically prepared Greek NT is scholarly acceptance."

As many times as I've read this quotation from Brown I'm still not exactly sure what it means. It does seem to introduce a note of ambiguity into Protestantism's heavy reliance on the Scriptures. It makes belief in an infallible Bible even more untenable. At a deeper level, however, the process by which we Christians have been re-assembling our Scriptures over the last two centuries reveals a profound and continuing commitment to Incarnation. An ambiguous, constantly re-edited Scriptures fits very well with our faith in Jesus, the God-man/man-God who participated fully in the ambiguities of human life.

HeRD #630 - Brown's Dictum & Swanson's Corollary

Brown's Dictum: "...biblical studies are not helped by being certain about the uncertain."

Swanson's Corollary: Brown's dictum holds true for all historical study.

- see Raymond E. Brown, INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT, 596

HeRD #631 - The Essence of the Gospel

Some time ago, we hosted in our home two different groups of American college students visiting Thailand on what amounted to missions study tours. In each case, discussions about the experience of our local congregation in Ban Dok Daeng led to some rather "frank" exchanges on the question of the essence of the Gospel. Students from both groups firmly believed that only Christians are saved and that contextualization of the Christian faith must not endanger the essence of that faith. Most of the students also felt that the exclusive claims of the Gospel are a central element of that essence. I'd like to take a few HeRDs to reflect on this issue of the existence of an "Essential Gospel." It's a crucial one in Thai church history, and it's one that still divides Christians today.

We should also note that the concept of an Essential Gospel involves other concepts as well. If there is an Essential Gospel, then protecting the Purity of the Gospel becomes an important issue. Those who believe in an Essential Gospel generally hold that belief in it is necessary to Salvation. Some would use the terms "Full Gospel," "Fundamental Gospel," or "Believing in the Bible" interchangeably with the concept of the Essential Gospel. The issue, thus, is complex, and we can only skim the surface of it in HeRD. But, perhaps, even a quick once over will turn up some interesting points for reflection and debate.

HeRD #632 - Discovering the Essential Gospel

The argument we're considering is that we must be circumspect in contextualizing the Gospel in Thailand because Christians always face the danger of destroying the essence of the Gospel. There is, in other words, a "core" of Christian truth, a central deposit of meaning and content. If this is lost or weakened, the Gospel itself is lost. The Essential Gospel, for our purposes here, is that set of doctrines necessary to a saving knowledge of God as revealed in Christ and mediated to us by the Holy Spirit. Let's assume, for the sake of analysis, that such a set of essential doctrines exists. How do we know what they are? Even if we answer that they're contained in the Bible, we still have to discover where they're found. Or, again, even if we say it's the Whole Bible, we still have to define how the Whole Bible reflects the Essential Gospel.

In one way or another we have to define the contents of the Essential Gospel. How do we do that?

That's the problem. How DO we do that? Our human ability to achieve a clear, certain knowledge of its contents is a serious stumbling block to the concept of an Essential Gospel. Human knowing is limited, fallible, contingent, conditioned, and otherwise unable to apprehend anything perfectly. Indeed, one of the most profound insights of the Judeo-Christian tradition is that human knowing habitually leads to the construction and assignment of ultimate meaning to false systems of belief. Humans are idolatrous. How, then, can we be sure that OUR Essential Gospel is THE Essential Gospel? The answer that God in Christ has communicated with humanity in a perfect way fails to resolve this problem. The Judeo-Christian tradition also holds that humans have retained freedom in their relationship to God. And we remain imperfect, even as Christians. The problem isn't with God's message. It's with humanity's reception of the message. Even if there were such a thing as an Essential Gospel, we couldn't know it perfectly. The consequence is that we can't ever be sure that what we THINK is the Essential Gospel is in fact actually it. If we take any one element of Christian faith and posit it as "essential" we immediately run into the problem of how we know if we're correct in making THAT particular element essential. And we will probably be soon able to find committed Christians who disagree that it's essential. Even if there is an Essential Gospel we can never know with any certainty what it is essential.

HeRD #633 - Fighting For the Essential Gospel

HeRD #632 argued that even if there is an Essential Gospel, we can't know it essentially. There's always doubt whether what we think is the Essential Gospel really is or not. Suppose, however, that we drop that line of argument and allow the possibility that humans CAN know the Essential Gospel. What then?

"What then?" is even more complicated and messy than denying the possibility of knowing the Essential Gospel. There are literally thousands of contending versions of the Essential Gospel. Which one is the right one? Who decides? What standards have to be met to define it? Should the Essential Gospel be something that Christians generally can agree to? That impossibility boggles the mind. Indeed, forget everybody but the Protestants! Just arriving at a generally acceptable Protestant Essential Gospel would leave us with hardly anything. The missionary experience in Thailand is instructive on this point, even if we dispense with the so-called liberal and moderate missions. The histories of the evangelical missions in Thailand are littered with bitter controversies over this very issue of the core or essence of the Gospel. Missionaries quit their missions or they stop talking to one another because of those controversies. One mission condemns another (or all others) for having corrupted the essence of the Gospel. Several theologically conservative missions and church groups have habitually raided the pastures of other theologically conservative churches under the premise that they have the Truth those others don't have.

What we're left with, finally, is that individual Christians have to decide for themselves what comprises the Essential Gospel, a conclusion that makes a mockery of the concept itself. In fact, it makes no sense to assume that humans can know the Essential Gospel in its fullness, which is the same as saying that we can't really know the Essential Gospel at all. We can't be sure. There's always room for doubt. The argument in HeRD #632 stands, namely that we humans can't know the Essential Gospel. Christian wrangling about it is as good a proof as any that this is so.

HeRD #634 - A Timeless Essential Gospel

The history of the Christian church throws further doubt onto the concept of an Essential Gospel. If it's essential then it must be timeless. So, then, what do we do with James, the brother of Jesus and for many years the chief leader of the Jerusalem Church? He was a Jew, religiously as well as ethnically, who happened to believe that his brother was the Messiah. He went to the Temple. He participated in Jewish cultic life as a Jew. There's no way he could or would have believed that Jesus was God. More generally, the whole idea of the Second Person of the Trinity, equal to and of the same substance as the Father, took centuries to work out; and major segments of the early church rejected that formulation. It's doubtful that Paul would have agreed to the premise that Jesus IS God. So, either the divinity of Jesus as we understand today isn't essential to the Gospel OR James (and Peter, for that fact) and probably Paul didn't believe in the Essential Gospel. Historically, it's a mighty shaky and questionable Essential Gospel if major segments of the early church didn't hold to it. And Jewish Christians who believed that Jesus was a special person, the Messiah, but not God, were a major segment of the early church.

We could, of course, argue that it took the church time to discover the Essential Gospel; but if that's the case, then who's to say we've discovered it even now? At what point do we claim that the church has achieved knowledge of the Essential Gospel? Beyond that, if it took time to discover the Essential Gospel, then believing in the Essential Gospel isn't necessary for salvation. Either that or all of those people who believed in Christ before the church finally discovered the Essential Gospel are damned. If Christians were saved apart from knowledge of the Essential Gospel, then what's the significance of the Essential Gospel? It certainly isn't important for salvation. And if it isn't necessary to salvation, then why worry about protecting the Essential Gospel in the Thai context?

HeRD #635 - The Wrong Question

Belief in an Essential Gospel is itself culturally conditioned. The idea of Essences, if I have this right, comes out of Greek philosophy. The concept is essentially a Western one. There's no generally used word in Thai that means "essence". The English-Thai dictionary definition uses words that actually mean the "core of" or "the meat of" something, neither of which really means "essence" at all. More to the point, the Thai church gives virtually no time to arguing over what's the essence of the Gospel in its situation. It argues, rather, over the limits of Christian behavior in relationship to other religions. Can we pay respects to Buddha images? Can we make donations to Buddhist causes? Thus, when young Americans argue that the Thai church has to behave in circumscribed ways to preserve the Essential Gospel, they are actually bringing a Western, culturally conditioned conception of reality and imposing it on the Thai church. The Thai church doesn't ask about what's essential. It wants to know what's right. And that's a very different question indeed.

The Thai Christian concern, as I understand it, is with propriety, giving due and proper respect or honor to God. It's a First Commandment concern. And if I understand the Essential Gospel correctly, it focuses on systems of right thinking rather than correct behaving. Now, if the Western and the Eastern questions are both culturally conditioned, what makes the one preferable to the other? Furthermore, if we observe that the concept of an Essential Gospel is itself culturally conditioned, we're led to wonder if there can even be such a thing. One could argue that the Proper Gospel and the Essential Gospel are but two sides of the same coin; but even such an admission opens a Pandora's Box. If that's the case, then there's more than one version of the Essential Gospel. Each version is culturally bound. They're not really quite the same thing. Which means that the Essential Gospel is essentially Western and not universal. Which means it really isn't essential.

HeRD #636 - No Biblical Mandate

There's no Essential Gospel in the Bible. The Scriptures contain a myriad of teachings, commands, insights, and hints as to what is central to the life of faith. It addresses situations and issues centuries distant from each other. Nowhere does it outline how Christians (or Jews) are supposed to arrange all of this for themselves. The Bible, in fact, is just about as unsystematic as a book can be. It is also generally practical and contextual in its approach. The prophets don't define an Essential Gospel. They challenge people and princes to return to faith in God. Paul's advice to his churches is so directed towards particular situations that scholars argue endlessly over Paul's "essential" theology. Our old friend, the author of Mark, almost goes out of his way to keep things from being too clear. Indeed, the fact of four gospels, each with its own distinct view, should alert us to the fact that its impossible to systematize the Bible into one Essential Gospel. The very concept of an Essential Gospel is alien to it. It's alien to the way God has acted in history, as documented in the Scriptures.

As we mentioned in HeRD #632, one can't get around this problem by saying that the Whole Bible is the Essential Gospel. We all know that with a somewhat judicious selection of passages we can prove just about anything we want. Start working on almost any doctrine, and you'll find important passages that contradict each other. Throw out everything but Paul, as we observed above, and you haven't solved the problem at all. There's no solving the problem, because believing in an Essential Gospel just isn't biblical.

HeRD #637 - Jesus And the Essential Gospel

If there's an Essential Gospel, the purity of which we must at all costs protect, that Essential Gospel has to have originated with Jesus. It can't be an "elaboration" of his teachings. It has to come from him. Going a step further, it would seem clear enough that the heart of Christ's message and ministry can be summarized in the idea of the Kingdom of God. He saw it as his task to preach the Kingdom. (Mark 1:14-15) So, if we can clearly define the Kingdom, we've got a good grip on the Essential Gospel.

So, what did Jesus mean by the Kingdom? The answer to that question leads us back into the realm of disputation and uncertainty. If Jesus ever clearly defined the Kingdom, the Gospels failed to record the description. In the Gospels Jesus uses a host of parables and aphorisms to point at the Kingdom. They don't really define it. And if we take one of the best known and most graphic parables, that of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25ff), we find ourselves in even deeper water. The "good guy" is a Samaritan, a man representative of all that was faithless and false to Jesus' people. We ought to think about that one long and hard before we condemn peoples of other faiths to eternal damnation on the cross of the Essential Gospel. The point of the parable seems to be that the Kingdom is summarized by those who act compassionately. The other way that Jesus pointed to the Kingdom was through his actions: healing the sick, exorcising demons, choosing and training disciples, casting out the money changers from the Temple, and, ultimately, suffering on the Cross. Jesus didn't present a system of thought, such as is necessary to an Essential Gospel. He acted with Compassion. He worked for the Reconciliation of his nation to God.

If anything Jesus worked against the very concept of an Essential Gospel and its concern to protect doctrinal and cultic purity. Jesus attacked doctrinal purity as the means for keeping people from knowing the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus violated cultic purity and condoned such violations by his disciples. In sum, we can point to Jesus' teachings and concerns with some clarity, but they don't lend themselves to systematization. They can lead to a variety of conclusions and differing emphases. They're not the stuff out of which one can easily construct an Essential Gospel.

HeRD #638 - Facing The Issue

In some respects this mini-series on the existence of an Essential Gospel has yet to come to grips with the central issue involved, esp. in Thai contexts. That issue is the meaning of John 3:16-21, which states clearly that those who believe in Jesus, the Son won't perish, will have eternal life, will be saved, and won't be judged (NJB, NRSV). Those, on the other hand, who don't believe are already judged for their lack of faith. Several generations of missionaries have generally agreed that this passage and the whole sense of the Bible proves that non-Christians are damned. Full Stop. Whether we think God is unfair or that this is terrible or anything else about it doesn't matter in the least. Scripture is clear. People who truly believe in the Gospel are saved and those who don't believe in Jesus, the Son of God, aren't. If there's an Essential Gospel, that's it.

At this point we need to pay close attention to what John 3:16-21 says. First, faith in Jesus leads to eternal life (3:16). Second, Jesus didn't come to condemn or judge anybody (3:17). This is a highly important statement, because it means that Jesus didn't bring a new judgment on people who don't believe in him. Third, John goes on to note, that the non-believers are condemned already and that the condemnation they experience is inherent in their unbelief (3:18). The very fact of unbelief carries within itself condemnation and judgment. John 3:19 specifies the punishment for unbelief: living in darkness.

We should note here that these verses at no time state that unbelievers are denied eternal life. It doesn't say that they will perish. It doesn't say that they won't be saved. All it says is that they are condemned to live in darkness, a condition shared by ALL who do evil (3:20, NRSV). In other words, this passage discusses the eternal destiny of the believer and the temporal condition of the unbeliever. And extrapolation of the unbeliever's eternal fate has to be read into the passage. More in HeRD #639.

HeRD #639 - Facing the Issue Again

HeRD #638 argued that John 3:16-21 doesn't overtly condemn to eternal punishment those who don't believe in Jesus as the Son of God. Some will respond, however, that the implications of this passage are clear. Are we, however, to center an Essential Gospel on implications? One would expect the Essential Gospel to be clearly stated and unequivocal. Why doesn't John just come out and say, "Eternal life for believers, eternal damnation for unbelievers"?

Another "implication" seems to me to be much more likely, namely that God condemns no one to eternal damnation. We're all evil-doers. We're all living in darkness. We're ALL condemned by our unbelief, even those of us who take the name of Jesus. We're all in need of grace and even our faith is a gift of grace. And the same gracious, loving God who calls Christians to unwarranted faith in Christ makes provision for the eternal salvation of all of God's children. John 3:16-21, when examined closely, is ambiguous. It doesn't decide the eternal fate of non-believers. By implication, it seems incredible to think that the biblical God of Love who yearns for Reconciliation and who moans in divine pain over the broken condition of Creation will condemn billions to eternal damnation.

HeRD #640 - Facing the Issue One Last Time

We've been looking at John 3:16-21 as a key example of an essential element in the Gospel. Surprisingly enough, these verses say nothing about the eternal state of non-Christians. They might even be taken as implying that eternal salvation is God's gracious gift to all of

humanity, not just Christians. On the basis of this passage, it's simply not possible to state unambiguously that the eternal damnation of non-Christians is part of an Essential Gospel.

There's one other point that does have to be made, however. This passage, if we leave aside the condemnation of people who believe differently from we Christians, carries a strong positive message about the meaning of the Incarnation and about meaningful life in this life. It points to how God flows through human life and history. It points beyond the darkness of our modern (or, post-modern) world. And it provides all of the rationale we'll ever need for sharing in a positive, non-condemning way the Good News of Jesus. The point sometimes made that if Buddhists aren't goin' to hell there's no reason to preach the Gospel in Thailand is as witless as it is arrogant. If we see a good movie, we tell others about it. If we find a really good hair spray, we'll recommend it to others. These inconsequential pieces of good news pale before the hope of the Gospel.

Maybe we ought to leave the eternal fate of ourselves and others to God. Accept the good things we see in the other faiths around us. Participate with good people involved in doing good things, irrespective of the religious labels involved. And share in appropriate ways and at appropriate times the Good News, leaving to God the demand for a response.

HeRD #641 - Picking a Better Passage

If John 3:16-21 doesn't offer a clear cut basis for the Essential Gospel proposition that all non-Christians are damned, it would seem that Acts 4:11-12 does. In Acts 4, Peter and John were hauled off by the authorities to stand before a Sanhedrin of the Jewish leaders. Peter, in the power of the Spirit, declared the Gospel of Jesus, and in 4:12 he summarized, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." (NRSV) That seems clear enough. Salvation is only through Jesus. There are, however, a couple of problems if we try to use the statement for building an Essential Gospel.

FIRST, Peter is clearly speaking as a Jew to other Jews: Jesus is the only one by which WE Jews can be saved. His speech, as rendered by the author of Acts, doesn't clearly and unequivocally include other peoples. If it had, he would have said that there is no other name by which "the world" is saved. Acts doesn't say that.

SECOND, the United Bible Societies' handbook for the translation of Acts (Newman & Nida, THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, 1972) points out that the word for "salvation" also means "healing" and in 4:12, "represents a play on words that is difficult to reproduce in English: (Christian) salvation and/or the healing (of the lame man) are possible only through the name of Jesus." (p. 97) What if the author was focusing on the immediate event of the healing of the lame man and meant that healing (not salvation) is possible only through Jesus? I think this interpretation less likely, but that's the point: we have to interpret the passage.

THIRD, and perhaps most important, this passage says nothing about damnation. Salvation and/or healing come only through the name of Jesus. Only by interpretation and extension can we assert that this means that non-believers are damned. And, there is another interpretation that would seem just as valid, namely that the Name of Jesus is efficacious unto the salvation of All People, regardless of their religious labels.

The point I'd like to stress here is that if the eternal damnation of non-Christians is a key element of the Essential Gospel, it should be clearly stated in the Bible. It should be linked directly to Jesus. It should, indeed, be a central theme of the New Testament. The eternal

damnation of "non-believers" is not central to the Gospel message, not when we look carefully at what the various passages in question actually state.

HeRD #642 - An Almost Essential Gospel

We started this series on the Essential Gospel with the arguments of two groups of young Americans that Christian indigenization had to be very careful not to lose the essence of the gospel. There is a set of doctrines so central to the Christian faith that losing them is tantamount to losing faith and salvation in their entirety. I've been arguing as cogently as possible against the idea that there is an essence of Christianity that we have to protect. It does seem, however, that several passages in Matthew offer us a core to Jesus' teachings that could well function as something like an essence to the Gospel.

Matthew 7:21-23 has Jesus summarizing the Sermon on the Mount by saying that not everyone who confesses Jesus Lord is going to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This in spite of the fact that they drove out demons and performed miracles in Jesus' name. Matthew 7:24-27 continues the summary by stating only the wise person who obeys Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount will enter the Kingdom. The passage makes it clear that the wise will stand while the foolish will fall. Reading through the whole of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), it's clear that Jesus' central emphasis is on right living, not right believing. Matthew 25:31-46, the separation of the sheep & goats at the final judgment, puts the matter even more clearly. The Lord will recognize only those who fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, tended the sick, and visited the prisoner. The Lord himself was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, ill, and in prison. The passages doesn't say that only Christians who do these things are saved. It says, explicitly and without exception, that those who do these things are saved. It seems to me that we should read Matthew 28:19-20, the so-called Great Command in light of these passages. We're to teach people to obey Jesus' commands, and those commands are clearly directed towards a compassionate, peace-making practice. We are not saved by the name we confess but by the way we treat others, esp. those in need.

Jesus rejected a religion of purity, one that protected essential dogmas and practices. He taught and lived a faith of compassion. And he was Good News.

HeRD #643 - No Essential Gospel

There's no such thing as an Essential Gospel. There are only Gospels, many, many of them. One Christian's faith is another Christian's superstition. One Christian adores Mary, another disdains that adoration. Christians can't even agree on common dates for their high festivals. One Christian speaks in tongues, and another one shudders at the thought. One Christian loves the soaring lift of the organ on a Sunday morning, and another one says it's a sin to use an organ in worship. Some Christians even say its a sin (or, at least, wrong) to worship on Sunday. One Christian believes the Son is subordinate to the Father, another says that's heresy. There are Christian mystics. There are Christian rationalists. There are all manner of Gospels, with the adherents of each convinced that their Gospel is faithful to Jesus Christ. Some have icons and incense,. Others demand a sanctuary devoid of decoration or symbols. Some Christians shout and shake in worship, while others sit for long periods of silence. So, where's the "purity of the Gospel" that we're supposed to protect in Thailand? It's a false concept, one that ignores the incredibly vast, pluralistic nature of Christian experience(s) historically. It isn't biblical.

The Gospel image I prefer is that God is forever out ahead of us, calling us onward and outward, pulling us towards lives of Peace, Justice, and Loving Compassion. Christians, of all

stripes, have profound, life-changing experiences with this God as they are enticed by the Spirit to follow the Master. Those experiences are invaluable and worthy of sharing with others. Sometimes that sharing leads those others to their own experiences. All of this is only by the grace of God. There is absolutely no way we human beings can wrap up into a neat package the diverse workings of the Spirit, the incredibly diverse, wonderful ways Christians have been brought into healing relationships with God.

The question is, how can we best share the healing journey with the peoples of the diverse cultures of Thailand? Personal experience and historical study warn with painful clarity that clinging to an Essential Gospel and damning those of other faiths is not the way. Truth is, there are many Christians in Thailand who hold the "right" set of doctrines but who aren't themselves healed persons. They and their "Gospel" are bad news for the peoples of Thailand. It's time to worry less about right doctrines, less about protecting essences, and more about healing.

HeRD #644 - Making the Kingdom Real

"...Jesus' values must not be forgotten; for when they are put in practice, however seldom, at that moment and in that place God's kingdom has been made a reality."

Brown, INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT, p. 192

HeRD #645 - Jesus, the Betrayer

New Testament scholars have for many years been engaging in a rehabilitation of Judas Iscariot. The INTERPRETER'S DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE, published in 1962, notes that Judas is the "most enigmatic person in the gospel story" and suggests any one of a number of explanations for his betrayal of Jesus, some of which imply that even in betrayal he tried to remain faithful to Jesus' ideals. (II, 1006-07). Thirty years later, the ANCHOR BIBLE DICTIONARY (1995) article on Judas takes things a step further and almost turns Jesus into the sneaky bad guy of the story of the betrayal.

The article states, "The dilemma which the NT texts pose is that Judas is clearly a disciple of Jesus from early on. He enjoyed the trust of Jesus and the respect and confidence of the group. The paltry sum for which he allegedly 'betrays' Jesus is hardly an adequate motive to account for the action. It is impossible to ascertain what is being betrayed. Certainly if Jesus did not want to allow himself to be captured on that night he had plenty of opportunity to flee. Is it possible that Judas did not so much betray Jesus as was betrayed by him, i.e., that the hopes and wishes of Judas, along with those of the other disciples, were dashed when Jesus had his opportunity to confront the powers? Was Judas in fact selected by Jesus personally to be the agent who would make contact with the authorities to avoid tumult or a riot, and that the remorse of Judas came only as it became clear to him that Jesus, too, would die and not establish his kingdom?" (III, p. 1096)

The IDB and ABD articles' comments are pure speculation, a fact that indicates that we know very little about the dynamics of the historical situation. Why did things work out the way they did on that night? We really don't know. In a larger sense, there is a great deal that we don't know about the person of Jesus and the events of his life.

HeRD #646 - Mark: History of a Discovery

Paul's correspondence in the New Testament shows no interest in Jesus as a person. It is deeply concerned about the Good News of Jesus Christ. It seems to me we have a similar

situation in Mark. The gospel gives us very little biographical information about Jesus, and what we do learn about him is coincidental. A biography of Jesus, for example, would surely tell us clearly whether or not his father died before he began his public ministry. Mark doesn't. In an earlier HeRD or two, I asserted that Mark is the first century equivalent of a biography of Jesus. That's clearly not correct.

Mark 1:1 states clearly that the gospel is about the Good News about Jesus Christ. It's not about Jesus, per se. Even more to the point, Mark is about the Jesus' followers' discovery of that Good News. In chapters 1-4, they witness Jesus' healings and exorcisms. They listen to his debates with the overclass. They are taught by him. The stories Mark tells all contain hints and insights into the Good News of Jesus Christ. A key moment in Mark's unfolding history of that Good News comes in 4:35-41 when Jesus walked on water. The symbolism is highly important. The swirling, stormy waters are a classic Hebrew representation of chaos. In this passage Jesus both walked on the waves and stilled them. The disciples couldn't have missed the implications, namely that Jesus had divine powers to bring creation out of chaos. Now, whether or not Jesus actually walked on the water is not something we can ascertain. Mark's sources and the author himself believed he did. It's entirely possible that a natural, explicable event was the germ of this story and that the story itself grew with the telling. Or, again, we're dealing with a very different world view from our own in Mark. So, an event might well have been interpreted in a way we "moderns" wouldn't interpret it. Or, just maybe Jesus walked on water.

Whatever the particular event, at some point Jesus' disciples (not just the Twelve) realized that he had divine-like powers. This insight didn't answer their questions about who he was (see 4:41), but it was added data. The first culmination of their struggle to understand Jesus as the carrier of Good News comes in Mark 8 where Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah. The next 8 chapters of Mark add further information, focused on the crucifixion and resurrection, that the Christian church continues to mull over and re-interpret even today. The Gospel of Mark, in sum, documents the disciples' progressive discovery of the Good News revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

HeRD #647 - Discovery as History

HeRD #646 argued that the Gospel of Mark is a history of Jesus' disciples' discovery of the Good News revealed through him. It's not a biography of Jesus. The gospel, rather, documents an epiphany, an appearance of God, that became progressively clearer to the disciples as they experienced the Good News of Jesus Christ. Mark isn't about Jesus. It's about God in Christ.

If this is true, it has important implications for the historian's use of Mark to "get at" the actual Jesus. On the one hand, the historian will probably feel reassured about the accuracy of the data contained in Mark. It would have been an ultimate concern of the author to get his facts straight and to report his account with as great an accuracy and faithfulness as possible. Mark is as factual an account of the Good News of Jesus Christ as we could hope to have, and as such retains a great deal of useful historical data. On the other hand, that data is about the Good News, not Jesus. It's about the disciples' discovery of that Good News, not Jesus. The gospel, in other words, tells us more about the witnesses and their discovery of the Good News than it does about the vehicle of that Good News. Mark documents the origins of the Christian faith, not the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

The man, Jesus, isn't lost in the gospel, but he is obscured by the fact of Good News. And this insight should lead us to wonder why the early church was far more taken with the Good News than it was with the actual person of Jesus. In a way that isn't very clear, Jesus seems to

have called attention more to God than himself. The Resurrection has a lot to do with it. The early church re-interpreted their view of Jesus in light of their faith in the Resurrection. In any event, working through all of this back to the actual person of Jesus of Nazareth is incredibly complex. We're, inevitably, are left with more questions than answers.

HeRD #648 - Dead Pigs (Mark 5:1-20)

This passage contains the story of Jesus' exorcising a "mob" (TEV) of demons inhabiting a man who'd gone insane. Is it historical? With Mark, we have to ask the question of historicity in a couple of different ways. First, did this particular event happen in the way Mark reports it? Second, does the story reveal historical facts about the life and ministry of Jesus?

There's no way to give a satisfactory answer to the first question. Jesus carries on a rather extensive discussion with the demons possessing the man, a discussion to which the disciples were witnesses. What did they hear? We have to admit, however, that this type of thing happens in animistic societies. It isn't incredible. But, how about the pigs? Did 2,000 pigs lose their lives that day? In the every day world we live in, this sounds like an improbable embellishment. The person who told Mark this story, if there was one source, surely believed some pigs (2,000 sounds like way too many) died an animistic death; but the historian has to doubt that such a thing really happened. History documents only the mundane, and while demon possession can be classified as a mundane, mental phenomenon, this alleged physical manifestation of demon possession goes beyond the bounds of what historians can verify. IF the event took place, all we could say about it historically is that this herd of pigs ran off a cliff and people who saw the event BELIEVED their death was caused by the spirits.

Yet, the story could represent an actual event. There's some details that suggest the story wasn't a composite one or just made up. The portrayal of the man's possession in 5:3-5 is powerful and doesn't sound like something invented from thin air. He was certainly to be pitied. The reaction of the locals (5:15, 17) lends credibility to the story. In a fictional account, we would have expected the crowd to praise Jesus, but instead they were afraid and asked him to leave. Jesus' treatment of a would-be disciple in 5:18-19 also has a ring of authenticity. Jesus rejected his application, not something we might expect. Note, furthermore, that in this one case Jesus orders the healed man to go tell other people what happened (5:19). This is highly unusual for Mark, which usually has Jesus telling people to keep quiet about him. The author must have had some evidence that caused him to violate his own literary convention. This event, in sum, could have happened in a way something like what Mark reports. We just have to leave aside the pigs as being beyond the bounds of historical verification.

HeRD #649 - Decapolis Origins (Mark 5:1-20)

Is this passage historical? On the level of the event itself, we can't say for sure. Could be. More generally, however, it suggests developments in Jesus' ministry that sound historically credible. First, it suggests that Jesus himself carried his message to border districts outside of Galilee. There's no reason to doubt that possibility. Second, the negative, fearful reaction of the crowd is important. Geresá (TEV) was Gentile territory. We can assume that there must have been a Jewish population, however, since Jesus himself had no inclination to preach to the Gentiles. In any event, the crowd that gathered after Jesus exorcised the demons was surely a Gentile one. They reacted to Jesus with a superstitious fear that rings true. They wanted nothing to do with this Jewish magician!

There's a third point, however, that is both more speculative and interesting. Could it not be that this story is telling us about the origins of the very earliest Gentile missions? The man

who was healed begged Jesus to take him as a disciple. Jesus refused to do so, probably because the man was a Gentile. It just wouldn't have worked out to have a Gentile disciple attached to his entirely Jewish entourage and mission. Jesus, however, encouraged the man to tell about his experience, and the man did so. He traveled throughout the Decapolis amazing people with his story (5:20) and, thus, became the first itinerating Gentile evangelist for which we have a report. He surely believed himself to be a disciple of the Jewish rabbi-magician. His personal ministry anticipates the itinerate preacher model Jesus used with the disciples (Mark 6:7ff). We might even go so far as to wonder if this man's enthusiastic missionary endeavors put the idea into Jesus' head to send out disciples independently to spread his message.

Further speculation leads us to consider the possibility that Mark is recounting the origins of Jesus-believing house congregations in the Decapolis. Perhaps we're hearing the echo of those congregations' claims that they originated directly from the ministry of Jesus and pre-dated his death. Now, that is an interesting thought! And if Jesus was as well-known as the gospels claim, it's surely not outside the realm of possibility that some Gentiles in the Decapolis came to consider themselves his followers. It's entirely likely that some of them had heard him personally, either in Galilee or in the territories of the Decapolis. And it's not unlikely that some Gentiles at one time or another applied to join his band of disciples. This passage, in other words, points to the existence of Gentile adherents who conducted their own Jesus missions during Jesus' life-time. It suggests the possibility that groups of such Gentile adherents grew up in the Decapolis, which would mean that Gentile participation in the Jesus Movement began at a very early date. Why not?

HeRD #650 - Power Over Chaos (Mark 5:1-20)

The Gospel of Mark wasn't written with chapters and verses; and while the chapters and verses are an important tool for biblical study, they can also obscure relationships within the original text. It seems to me, for example, it isn't fortuitous that the story of the healing of the man of Gerasa of his terrible demon-possession follows immediately on the story of Jesus' calming the storms of Lake Galilee (4:35-41). That story is laced with the Hebrew mythic world view in which water and storm represented chaos. Jesus performed a divine-like creative act when he brought stillness and order to that chaos. The story ends with the disciples asking, "Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (4:41, TEV) That question is the question of the whole gospel. Who is this man? Mark 5:1-20 both sharpens that question and provides evidence hinting at its answer. The demons Jesus encountered in Gerasa were particularly potent ones. They drove the man they inhabited to a powerful insanity that even chains couldn't bind (5:4). The stormy chaos of that man's inner being parallels the stormy chaos of Lake Galilee, and Jesus repeated the miracle of bringing order out of chaos by relieving the man of his demons. At the end of his exorcism, Mark reports that the man was found, "...sitting there, clothed and in his right mind." (5:15, TEV)

If we accept the premise that Mark is a history of the disciples' discovery of the Good News of Jesus Christ (HeRD #646), the events on Lake Galilee and in the territory of Gerasa are important moments of revelation. They point out how the disciples were forced to re-evaluate their understanding of Jesus in light of the things they saw him do. Now, historians can't prove (or disprove) the historicity of these two events, but it seems entirely likely that the implied process of re-evaluation is historical. However we view him, Jesus was no ordinary man, and that very fact must have forced the disciples to almost constantly wonder just what sort of a man he was. That is, the question of Mark 4:41 isn't just a rhetorical device or theological question preachers throw out at their congregations on Sunday mornings. It was a real question, posed by the actions, teachings, and personality of the actual Jesus. The search for an answer to that question has been a powerful, if frequently divisive force in church history.

HeRD #651 - A Marcan Footnote (Mark 9:9-10)

We've been arguing, off and on, for some months now that the Gospel of Mark was written at least partly from eyewitness accounts deliberately collected by the author. Mark 9:9-10 provides an internal clue concerning Mark's sources. The context of these two verses is the Transfiguration, a visionary experience shared in by Jesus and three of the disciples, Peter, James, and John (Mark 9:2-10). As they come down from the mountain, Jesus orders his companions to keep this experience to themselves "until the Son of Man has risen from death" (9:9); and Mark reports that they obeyed his order, although they did discuss the event among themselves (9:10). The account of the Transfiguration, therefore, could have come from only one of three people. All three are excellent primary sources for information about Jesus. The author also tells us that this account wasn't told until after the Resurrection took place. Prior to that Peter, James, and John obeyed Jesus' order to keep quiet about it.

In these two verses, the author clearly cites the sources for his account of the Transfiguration. He also tells us when the story of the Transfiguration became current, namely after the Resurrection. In other words, the story of the Transfiguration was part of the earliest church's post-Easter reflection on the person of Jesus which its three witnesses began telling in those exciting days after the Resurrection. This citation, thus, helps other historians evaluate the historical reliability of the account of the Transfiguration. On the one hand, it came from an excellent source; but on the other hand, it was first told in the heady days after the Resurrection and reflects a post-Resurrection commentary on the person of Jesus. It almost surely was told in a way different from the way Peter, James, or John would have told it prior to the Resurrection revelation of the full measure of Jesus' identity.

More in the next HeRD.

HeRD #652 - Reflections on the Marcan Footnote (Mark 9:2-10)

Why did the author of Mark make a point of informing his readers that the account of the Transfiguration came from an authoritative source but was told only after the Resurrection? Several reasons are possible. First, the author's sources for the account are very good. They are, in fact, taken from the first generation of key church leaders. Those sources would have suggested to Mark's readers that this account is authoritative. Second, the author may also have been informing his readers about a qualitative difference in the data on this event. Most of the other events recounted in the gospel were current among the disciples during Jesus' lifetime. They were part of their common store of pre-Easter experience with and reflection on the person of Jesus. The Transfiguration, however, is post-Easter reflection and interpretation. The critical historian may take this to mean that the gospel account of this event may well not be historical; but the faithful first century reader would have taken it to mean that the account of the Transfiguration reveals crucial, authoritative information about Jesus.

Did the Transfiguration actually take place in the way Mark reports it? The honest, critical historian has to say, "I don't know." It was a visionary experience. The account was only told later, after the participants had experienced the Risen Lord, so that it was interpreted through the lens of the Resurrection event. It was, in that sense, a re-created event that might have "grown in the telling." We also don't know how the account reached the author of Mark, whether it came from one of the three eyewitnesses or from others who re-told the story. As the church reflected on the person of Jesus through the lens of the Resurrection, the story was likely to have changed in the telling. This is not to say that the author in any sense intended to give his readers misinformation. The author surely believed the event happened as he wrote it. A modern historian who doesn't believe events like this can happen will necessarily conclude that the story

is a fabrication. One who does believe in such things will be inclined to say that the story has a substantial historical core. In any event, the account of the Transfiguration provides significant insights into how the post-Easter church understood the person of Jesus.

HeRD #653 - Jairus & His Daughter (Mark 5:21-23, 35-42)

This event has a historical foundation. I'd almost bet on it. It's laced with little details, unimportant in and of themselves, that suggest an actual event. We seldom know the names of people involved in Jesus' healing, but here we have both a name and a title. We have a list of the eyewitnesses to the event (Jairus, his wife, Peter, James, and John). We know exactly what Jesus said in Aramaic to the girl, and we know how old she was. Mark's stories seldom include so many details. It's one of the events one can point to when arguing that the author of Mark used eyewitness accounts, because it's just these sorts of details that adhere to oral history data. We have to acknowledge, yet again, that we have no way of proving with certainty that this event happened more or less in the way Mark reports it. In this case, however, it would be more surprising if it didn't than if it did.

HeRD #654 - Don't Tell the Jews (Mark 5:19 and 5:43)

In the first half of Mark 5, Jesus performed an exorcism on a Gentile. After doing so, he specifically ordered the man to go and tell others (his family) what had happened. In the second half of the chapter Jesus healed a dying Jewish girl. Afterwards, he specifically ordered those present to keep quiet about the matter. An important difference between the two stories is context. On the far side of Lake Galilee, Jesus was in a Gentile context. When he returned to the near side, he was back in a Jewish context. It seems that Jesus was quite happy to have the Gentiles hear about God's working through him. But he wanted to keep the matter hidden from the Jews. Does that make sense?

In terms of Jesus himself, I don't think so. As we've argued before, the Marcan theme of silence doesn't make much sense in historical context. The story of Jairus' daughter is a good example. The daughter was dead. The wailing had begun. Jesus went into her room, closed the door, and brought her back to life. And then he tells the handful of eyewitnesses to keep quiet about it! That's ridiculous. The girl is going to leave that room and people are going to be "amazed" (a favorite word of Mark's). Rumors will spread. There is no way the thing will be kept quiet. So, then, why the theme?

The juxtaposition of these two verses, 5:19 and 5:43, suggests a contrast between the two contexts. If Mark was written ca. 70 CE, it may be that the author was trying to explain that the decline of Jewish Christianity wasn't a failing of the church or of Jesus' power. It was Jesus' own will. Chapter 5 follows hard on the heels of Chapter 4, where Jesus had pointed out that only some of his auditors would become the "good seed" of the Kingdom. Many would reject the Kingdom. This clearly bothered the Jesus portrayed in Mark. It surely bothered the actual Jesus. And it must have been an issue in the early church: if Jesus was so all-powerful as to quiet storms and exorcise savage demons, why did his own people largely reject him? Why didn't they understand who he was? Mark's answer is that Jesus didn't want them to know. It doesn't sound like a very good answer, but it may have been the best available ca. 70 CE.

HeRD #655 - What Did Mark Think? (Mark 5:19 and 5:43)

The last HeRD argued that the author of Mark had Jesus order people to be silent about his miracles because he, the author, wanted to explain why most Jews didn't accept Jesus as the Messiah. That HeRD ended with the statement that, "It doesn't sound like a very good answer,

but it may have been the best available ca. 70 CE." We should think about that. Does the theme of silence actually address the question of Jewish intransigence concerning Jesus? If it does, how would the author himself have analyzed the issue? We have to be constantly conscious that Mark was written in a very different cultural, religious, and intellectual environment from our own. Animism was taken for granted. Society was hierarchical, centered on patron-client relations. It was also openly patriarchal. Mystical thinking, visionary experiences, and what we call miracles were a part of every day life. As a Christian, the author believed that God acted in human events.

So, he might have reasoned, with first century logic, that if Jesus came from God and was divinely powerful, then Jewish resistance could only be effective if Jesus allowed it. This wasn't the best of what HeRD #654 called a bad lot of answers. It was the logical one. It might not have been able to explain why God didn't want the Jews to understand and accept Jesus, but the conclusion that this must be so was inescapable and convincingly logical.

HeRD #656 - Mark as a Reliable Source (Luke 8:40-42, 49-56)

Critical historical research is based on trust. Historians critically evaluate the available sources to determine which ones are most reliable and then rely on those sources to shape their recounting of the past. The author of Luke did the same thing. As he states in Luke 1:1-2 himself, he relied upon written accounts that were themselves taken from eyewitnesses. Those accounts were reliable and authoritative because they came from Jesus' disciples, those closest to the Master.

Something like 80% of New Testament scholars agree that the Gospel of Mark was Luke's most important single source of information. Luke, indeed, carries large sections of Mark over into his own account. The story of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21-23, 35-42) is an example. The account in Luke follows Mark closely and faithfully, making only minor changes. Luke drops the Aramaic of Mark, giving only the translation. He doesn't call the daughter, "little" as does Mark. Luke probably thought it a contradiction to call a girl of 12, "little". There are other minor differences, but Luke on the whole is remarkably faithful to Mark. He even retains the somewhat awkward structure of Mark in which another story is sandwiched in between the story of Jairus' daughter. Why? The answer seems obvious enough, namely that Luke took Mark's to be a reliable and authoritative account.

The point is not that modern-day historians should suspend their critical, historical approach to Mark. The point is that a somewhat later Christian source, on the basis of its own analysis, affirmed important segments of Mark as being trustworthy. Luke was written anywhere from 10 to 40 years after Mark, and took Mark's work to incorporate reliable sources of information. In that sense, the weight of ancient ecclesiastical tradition supports the Marcan account as trustworthy. It still remains for the historian to evaluate that weight in light of modern-day historical standards. It seems, in that regard, that New Testament and early church historians are now less inclined to reject ancient traditions out of hand. Luke's reliance on Mark, in other words, counts for something.

HeRD #657 - A Good Historian Trusted Mark

Raymond E. Brown's discussion of Luke as a historian (INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT, pp. 319-322) presents a relatively positive evaluation of Luke's historiographical credentials. Brown's estimation is based on the contents of Acts, but we'll remember that Luke-Acts are a two-part work written by the same author. Brown argues that the events in Acts are historically plausible. Acts, furthermore, contains verifiably correct details. The author, writing 30-50 years after the fact, couldn't possibly have known all of those details himself. Brown

concludes, "...the author of Acts does not get bad grades for historical accuracy in the various sections of his book. Though he wrote more in a biblical style than in a classical history style, it is not ridiculous to think that the author might have been a fitting candidate for membership in the brotherhood of Hellenistic historians, even if he would never be made president of the society." (p. 322)

The author of Acts is the author of Luke. If, in Acts he does a fairly good job at preserving historical accuracy, it follows that he would have done the same in the gospel. In this light, then, we should note that Luke took over 75% of the contents of Mark into his own gospel. It's not quite correct to leap to the conclusion that because Acts is fairly accurate, therefore Mark is also fairly accurate. It is correct, however, to argue that the author of Luke-Acts was clearly concerned to preserve accurate data about the past; and to that end, he relied heavily on the Gospel of Mark for his portrayal of the Good News according to Jesus Christ. The author of Luke thought Mark was reliable. The author of Luke, furthermore, had a good sense about historical accuracy and what was reliable.

What this means is that we can't simply write Mark off as a theological mystification of the actual Jesus. If we are to question the factual reliability of his accounts, we need to have good reason. I would argue, further, that even where we can question the factuality of a given event, we can frequently rely on the underlying development of events and chronology betrayed in the event. Luke the historian trusted Mark. That trust counts for something.

HeRD #658 - A Marcan Sandwich (Mark 5:24-34)

This is the story of the woman who touched Jesus' cloak and was healed. A couple of introductory remarks are in order: First, this story is sandwiched between the story about Jarius' daughter and is a prime example of what is playfully known among New Testament scholars as a "Marcan sandwich." It's not entirely clear why the author used this technique of embedding one story within another one. The author does seem to be indicating the passing of time. These sandwiches, in other words, are another piece of evidence suggesting that Mark's author was aware of chronology and the inter-relationship of events. There's nothing fortuitous, furthermore, about the way in which he relates one story or event with another one. The author is not just telling a bunch of stories. He's telling one story, artfully composed of numerous events. Second, we should recall again the importance of the crowd as an agent in Mark. This event begins with Jesus having to push and shove his way through the crowd (Mark 5:24) that greeted him on his return to Galilee from the other side of the lake. This story reminds us of Jesus' popularity. It also underscores the intense popular pressure on him.

Taken together these two points highlight the intensity of the Incarnation as being located in the human realm. Jesus, God-man, was caught up in a complex flow of events where demands made on him overlapped each other. Going in one direction, he suddenly had to stop to deal with someone else's problem. That's about as typically human an experience as one can imagine. The crowd, furthermore, wasn't just a backdrop. It was a hot, sweaty, demanding, push-and-shove physical experience. It was also a social reality, embodying the eagerness and expectations people felt concerning Jesus. It's hard to believe that Jesus was at all happy to be caught up in the middle of all of that physical and social reality. And, while the historian can't ever be sure that this specific event took place, Mark's portrayal of Jesus' situation is persuasive. This is a point we've returned to several times in HeRD. Whatever the specifics of individual events, Mark is portraying Jesus and his situation in historically credible hues.

HeRD #659 - CCT Numbers I

The General Secretary's Office of the Church of Christ in Thailand has recently published the results of the CCT's 1997 census of its membership. The census was taken because it was generally recognized that the figures reported by most of the CCT's 19 districts were inaccurate. No one really knew how large the CCT is or what the actual distribution of its membership might be like. The General Secretary's Office undertook an intensive census project that reached all but a small handful of CCT churches. It was a good process, and it's unlikely that an accounting any more accurate than this could be taken. The figures presented below and in following HeRDs are as of November 1997.

Table 2 of the CCT's Statistical Report shows that the CCT has a total constituency of 107,218 people. This includes baptized members and adherents not yet baptized, esp. children. Its formal membership rolls include 66,073 members in 844 organized worshipping communities (including 508 churches). Of this formal membership figure, 35,719 (54%) are women and 30,354 (46%) men. The CCT's larger constituency includes 27,713 families. The largest district is District 19, a Karen tribal district of Baptist denominational heritage. It has 14,676 communicate members in 80 churches and another 166 organized groups. District 19 accounts for 22% of the CCT's total membership. The smallest district is District 8, Phet Buri. It has only 477 communicant members in 7 churches and 1 other organized group. That's a little more than .7% of the CCT's total membership.

In a sense, there's nothing surprising in these numbers. It's been widely held for some time that the CCT has something over 60,000 members, although the final figure might be a little larger than expected. The ratio of women to men is also no surprise. And, it's widely known that the Karen 19th District is by far and away the largest CCT district. What is helpful, however, is to know that these figures are generally reliable. That's something one can seldom say about church statistics of any kind related to the Thai church.

HeRD #660 - CCT Numbers II

The 1997 CCT census does contain a number of figures that should cause a moment or two for reflection. Significant among these are the latest figures for the membership of districts of Baptist or Disciples of Christ heritage. Previous CCT statistical reports showed that in 1982, just 18 years ago, there were only 3 districts in this category. Their membership accounted for just 3.2% of CCT membership. In 1993, 5 districts accounted for 26.7% of the CCT's total figures. Most recently, in 1997, the figures are 6 districts totaling 47.5% of the CCT's membership.

In contrast, the districts of Presbyterian heritage have shown a significant decline in their dominance of CCT statistics. In 1982, 10 such districts accounted for 85.5% of the CCT's membership. By 1993, that figure dropped to 67.6%. And in 1997, it was 48.3%. Historically, the CCT has identified itself closely with the Presbyterians and has understood itself as being a denomination of the "Reformed" family of churches. As of today, the CCT's Presbyterian old core identity no longer represents of the majority of CCT members, and it is less than 1% larger than the Baptist-Disciples presence. It is almost certain that more CCT members now receive baptism as adults and by immersion than as infants and by sprinkling.

In the short term, this changed has caused alarm among the established CCT leadership. Effective steps have been taken to insure the continued political domination by the old Presbyterian core for the foreseeable future. Looking beyond the immediate future, however, it seems that the CCT is forging a new identity for itself. It no longer has a predominant Western denominational heritage. It's no longer predominantly northern Thai in ethnicity. It has become identified with minority needs and issues. And it has become an agent for the Thai-ization of a significant number of minority people, many of whom speak Thai poorly or not at all. It's not

clear where these demographic changes are taking the CCT, but it's impossible to believe that there won't be a major impact on both its identity and its future.

HeRD #661 - CCT Numbers III

The 1997 CCT census figures document the continuing failure of the CCT to empower its women. Women constitute 54% of the CCT's membership. You'd never guess it by the following statistics. CCT churches have a total of 2,534 elders. Of that number, 510 are women (20%). It has 1,837 deacons, of whom 841 are women (46%). Most striking of all, of the CCT's 336 pastors, only 32 are women (9.5%). There are two issues, at least, involved here. First, the early church took a different attitude about the relationship of the genders, insisting on a level of equality far in advance of its surrounding cultures. To an extent, the fact that the CCT even has women in positions of authority reflects that attitude. Yet, we are far from what simple justice requires. Second, it would seem that if the CCT is serious in its concern to "be Christ" for Thai society as best it can that it would cease to rely on less than half of its membership for its leadership. The CCT is not so blessed in leadership resources that it can afford to squander more than half of those resources.

HeRD #662 - CCT Numbers IV

The CCT's Statistical Report for 1997 reveals that the CCT is an aging population. Comparisons with government census figures for 1990, however, indicate that its over all pattern of aging is not that different from society generally. In the table below, Thai census figures and CCT figures follow slightly different age ranges. The government ranges are in parentheses.

A Comparison of CCT (1997) & Government Census Data (1990)
Given as Percentages

	1-15(0-14)	16-30 (15-29)	31-45 (30-44)	46-60 (45-59)	61+ (60+)
CCT '97	28.6%	28.3%	23.4%	11.2%	8.5%
Thl '90	33.6%	31.1%	19.4%	10.6%	5.3%

Taken as given above, the CCT appears to have an older population in comparison to Thai society generally, and that is likely the case. However, Thai society itself is aging, and the government data is 7 years older than that the CCT figures. The discrepancy is surely not as great, but it's still all but certain that the CCT's membership is somewhat older on the average than is Thai society generally.

HeRD #663 - CCT Numbers V

HeRD #660 pointed to the continuing "tribalization" of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT). Statistics taken from the CCT's Statistical Report for 1997 indicate that this process will continue into the foreseeable future. The church in the first decades of the new century is going to be more and more a church dominated numerically by its tribal churches.

There are three large tribal districts. The 10th and 19th Districts are Karen. The 18th District is Lahu. According to the CCT's 1997 census, they account for 57.5% of the CCT's total constituency in the 1-15 age bracket. They account for only 28.0% of those in the 61+ bracket. Given a continuation of current trends into the future, thirty to fifty years from now the strong core of the CCT is going to be among its tribal people. These statistics, indeed, don't tell the

whole story. First, among CCT churches tribal evangelism is considerably more successful than lowland evangelism. Thus, we can expect that the numerical domination of the tribal districts will increase even faster than these figures suggest. Second, the figures above don't include District 16, a small but largely tribal district on Thailand's western border. They don't include significant pockets of Hmong churches in District 7 (Chinese, of Presbyterian heritage), Yunanese churches attached to District 2 (Chiang Rai), or the churches of various tribal origins that are under District 12 (Chinese, Baptist heritage).

The policy implications of these figures seem clear enough. The future health of the CCT depends, in part, on its ability to nurture tribal young people and their churches--and on its ability to integrate the tribal churches into its life. The issues involved, however, are difficult. Some segments of the CCT's leadership continue to show attitudes towards the tribal churches that border on racism. There is also a growing sentiment in some tribal quarters that they need to protect and recover their tribal identities. Thus, there could be a real tension between the CCT's need to integrate tribal churches into its larger life (a need it still only dimly perceives) and the need of those churches to preserve their own identity. One sees the possibility of a split in the tribal churches themselves between cultural accommodationists and conservationists. On the non-tribal side, there will possibly be struggles between inclusivists and those who would limit the role of the tribal churches (the right word might be "racists"). How all of this works out may well have a decisive impact on the very nature of the CCT in the coming half-century.

HeRD #664 - Chapter & Verse

The Bible is divided into chapters and verses, and few people doubt the utility of its being so divided. Indeed, the need for some scheme was felt even in the early church, and from that point on various methods were tried (and discarded) over the centuries until the 13th century. As you might expect, the division into chapters came first and verses followed later. It was the English theologian, Stephan Langton, while lecturing at the University of Paris sometime between 1203 and 1207, who divided the Vulgate in chapters. A somewhat later version called the "Parisian Bible" became the standard format and carried over into English translations of the Bible.

The division of the Bible into verses started with a Jewish scholar, Rabbi Isaac Nathan ben Kalonymus. In about 1447, he divided the Old Testament into verses, but his verses weren't numbered. The numbering of verses as well as the development of verses for the New Testament is credited to Robert Estienne, a French printer-editor. In 1551 he published a Greek-Latin New Testament which he divided into verses. Four years later, he published the Vulgate, using Rabbi Nathan's verses for the Old Testament and his own for the New Testament. The first English Bible to have verses was the Geneva Bible (1560), which followed Estienne's versification. The same system was carried over into the King James Version (1607).

As necessary as this division into chapters and verses may be, it also poses obstacles to understanding the content of the Bible. There is a very real tendency among average readers and scholars to read verses and chapters as isolated units, esp. in relation to material just before and after the verse or chapter in question. This division has also opened the door for proof-texting, which allows anyone to think anything they want and still find "justification" for their improbabilities in Scripture. We tend to forget, in sum, that the division of the Bible into chapters and verses is an entirely artificial construct.

HeRD #665 - Musical Indigenization

On August 29, 1998, the Office of History sponsored a one day hymn sing-seminar featuring the "old-time" northern Thai hymns that were sung by the churches of the North into the 1930s. (They're entirely Western hymns but with northern Thai lyrics.) Some 60 people from ten churches participated, most of them being individuals aged 60 and above. I'd like to share with you a few things I observed and learned.

Many Westerners, myself included, have been critical of the failure of the 19th and early 20th centuries missionaries to use indigenous northern Thai music in worship. The most important thing I learned from this event was that, apparently, the churches themselves engaged in a covert indigenization of missionary hymnody. As I listened to these older church members sing hymns they learned as children, it was striking how "un-Western" some of them sounded. The voice quality and tendency to slide somewhat between notes was definitely northern Thai. Participants claimed that different churches sang the same hymn in different ways, sometimes even adding notes and syllables to the hymn. Most people couldn't read music. The original northern Thai hymnals and one later reprint all lacked notes anyway. The missionaries didn't get around to many rural churches often enough to enforce the "proper" way of singing. This last point is an important one. Traditional northern Thai music had no notation, and the same tune was played in strikingly different ways by different musicians in different temples and localities. It seems that the northern Thai churches were doing something similar with their hymns. They were, that is, fitting Western hymns back into a traditional context because they brought a largely traditional attitude and set of musical habits to their singing.

These observations, if correct, suggest that the indigenization of Christianity into northern Thailand was taking place, largely covertly and unintentionally. In this case it is certain that the missionaries, trained in Western musical attitudes and theory, would have tried to preserve the "proper" singing of the "pure" hymn as it was written. They would have met with success in the city churches, where they could enforce their standards. But out in the country, the people were quietly fitting elements of their new religion back into their own heritage and culture. How this process worked out and how wide-spread it might have been, we don't know. The massive forces of modernization and centralization overwhelmed it to the extent that by 1950, probably earlier, central Thai completely replaced northern Thai as the singing language of the churches. The old northern Thai hymnals were long out of print and fewer and fewer people could read them. More and more church leaders were trained in Western hymnology and accepted the Western idea that a hymn has to be sung the way its written. The traditional world that was quietly indigenizing Christianity into northern Thai ways was itself crumbling. It's important to remember, in any event, that the local genius of the northern Thai church may well have been indigenizing Christianity in ways we have now largely forgotten. The whole matter needs much more study.

HeRD #666 - Singing the Right Note

After World War II, there was evidently a movement among trained missionary and Thai musicians to reconstruct the Thai church's hymnody. They observed that in many cases the musical tune and the linguistic tones clashed. The tune, for example, would move upwards, but the lyrics had low or mid-tones. The meaning behind the words, thus, was lost in this clash of tone and tune. Hymns, as a consequence, were re-translated or, at least, corrected so that tune and tone went up or down largely together. Quite a few new hymns, properly translated, were added to revised hymnals.

As I listened to the elder generation of northern Thai church members sing the old-fashioned northern Thai hymns, I listened as best as I could for this clash. My observation was that by-and-large the northern Thai hymns don't suffer from a clash of tone and tune. During the day, the hymn sing worked on some ten old hymns, and there was only one or two instances at

most in each hymn where there was a clash. They certainly didn't take away from the meaning of the hymns when they occurred. And the song leader adjusted the tune slightly in a couple of cases to correct the worst clashes.

This isn't a minor point. One participant actually alluded to the process by which modern hymn translators match tune and tone when he complained that today's hymns use all sorts of fancy, obscure words to match the tune. His complaint was that people don't know what all those words mean. In other words, it could be that the very process of correcting the clash of tune and tone itself has created a loss of meaning. The cure, perhaps, has been as bad as the illness. It's worth wondering, furthermore, if there was an illness. In discussing this matter with another participant, she noted that northern Thai tones are flexible enough so that they can wobble and slide around the Western tune. Meaning isn't really lost at all.

HeRD #667 - Hymns That Reach the Heart

Ach. Prasert Indaphun is in his middle-late 80s. He worked for many years as a teacher and administrator at McGilvary (later Thailand) Theological Seminary, now the McGilvary Faculty of Theology of Payap University. He spoke briefly at the seminar on northern Thai hymns concerning his personal feelings about those hymns. He told his audience that the northern Thai hymns "reach the heart." The "new" hymns in central Thai are hard to sing. People don't understand the language used. They're also hard to remember, unlike the old northern Thai hymns which are easy to recall. He felt that the churches could still use the northern Thai hymns as special music. He thought they'd be better than using English lyrics, because most people in the churches don't understand English "un-um-em-mum." No one knows what's going on. If we sing the northern hymns, people understand the words. They know what's going on. He ended with the statement, "This is our mother tongue," the clear message being that central Thai isn't the mother tongue of northern Thais.

Ach. Prasert is a voice from the old northern Thai church and representative of a past that is but a rumor of a memory to most northern Thai Christians. Young northern Thais don't seem to feel his attachment to northern Thai. They routinely speak a version of it laced with and largely dominated by central Thai. It's sad to see the old northern Thai church and its mother culture dying away. It's wisdom and its struggles ought to be important resources for the contemporary church, but it doesn't seem that they are. As one listened to Ach. Prasert, one couldn't help but share in his feelings of future shock and sadness at the loss of the world of his youth.

HeRD #668 - Adam's Rib in Thai Context

A sermon I heard preached some months ago points to some of the elements involved in the building of Thai theologies. The sermon had to do with family life and alluded to the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:21-22). The preacher observed that God created both the man and the woman in the image of God. God used one of Adam's ribs to make Eve. God didn't take a piece of hair from the top of Adam's head; and God didn't take a toenail from Adam's foot either. Eve was created out of a rib, which is in the center part of the body. This shows that both Adam and Eve were created as equals, neither one above or below the other.

These comments point to three important elements in the construction of a Thai theology. First, the preacher was reflecting on a biblical passage. Second, he called upon a traditional world view to make sense of the passage. Thai thinking, even today, is hierarchical. It constantly puts things into higher-lower relationships. The human body provides an excellent example of that thinking. The head is high and most highly valued. Feet are low and dirty. In the context of the Thai understanding of the relative values of the parts of the body, thus, the Genesis passage

takes on a special meaning. Eve wasn't created from a higher or lower part of Adam's body. She was created from a part of the mid-section, showing that she was Adam's equal, neither superior or inferior. Third, this sermon illustration was also fitted into contemporary democratic thinking. It's definitely not traditional to assert the equality of the sexes. Such an assertion reflects the fact that Thailand is busily reconstructing itself as a Western-style parliamentary democratic society.

Packed, then, into this one sermon illustration were biblical reflections from a traditional world view reflecting current democratic ideals. And the result seems to be a rather faithful rendering of the biblical claim that God created both women and men in God's divine image.

HeRD 669 - Thinking Theologically

In the course on early church history I'm teaching at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, I offered the students the speculation that Jesus may have been a disciple of John the Baptist. Most of the students found the proposition unlikely and unacceptable. Their analysis began with the comment that Jesus was too high of a person to have ever been someone else's disciple, someone lower than himself. But, then, one student reminded the others that the King of Thailand has teachers, and no one considers them to be higher than the King. Another student objected (incorrectly) that for Jesus to be a disciple of someone else would make him lower than the Buddha, who was never in such a situation. Yet another student struggled with Thai concepts of social seniority and respect. Would these have allowed Jesus to be inferior to anyone else? Specifically, could Jesus have been a disciple of John's since John was only a few months older than Jesus? Towards the end of the discussion, still another student observed that the Bible taught that Jesus humbled himself to come into the world. In such a position, he could surely have been someone else's disciple.

It was intriguing to listen to these students call upon cultural resources in their theological analysis. At no point did they treat Jesus as a first century Jew. It was difficult, in fact, to treat him as an actual, every day person at all. Instead, they drew on parallels from Thai royalty, on comparisons with the Buddha, and on key Thai cultural-social concepts to shape their understanding of the person of Jesus. The Jesus they were constructing was very much a Thai Jesus, to the extent that the only biblical insight they brought to bear contradicted most of what they'd concluded from their cultural resources. Their culturally-based reflections had led them to a high and lifted-up Jesus that almost entirely obscured the fact that he was born into a nondescript social ranking that reflected none of the kingly majesty they were assigning him. Thai religious, social, and cultural categories dominated their construction of the person of Jesus. As I listened to these student reflect on the Jesus, I felt awed and troubled. It was impressive to witness the central role of culture in religious thinking, to see that role so clearly reflected. It was troubling, however, to realize how little a role scriptural images and concepts played in these students' thinking. They hadn't yet learned how to bring culture and Bible into a fruitful dialogue.

In sum, it's incorrect to say that the Thai church isn't indigenous. In spite of awkward outward appearances, it is a fully Thai church. It seems to me, however, that the indigenization of the Thai church has taken place without a conscious, concerted effort to wrestle with the biblical resources available to the Christian faith. Churches should always be conscious of how cultural baggage informs and distorts their religious perceptions. It's not a failing peculiar to the Thai church that it lacks that consciousness.

HeRD #670 - Happy Holidays

HeRD has come to the end of another year. December is a regular month off. Looking ahead, 1999 is going to take us in several directions. The long run of HeRDs about the early church is coming to an end, although there may be a few more from time to time. I'll be taking up my research on northern Thai church history again, and you can expect the bulk of HeRDs in 1999 to focus on 19th and early 20th century Presbyterian work in the North. There'll also be more HeRDs on the Karen church, esp. concerning the impact of a Karen millennial movement on the growth of the Karen church in northern Thailand. And I'm sure that other things will come over the course of the year.

I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all a joyful & meaningful Christmas and New Year's season. Thank you, as always, for your support and encouragement, Peace, Herb

Index for HeRD 1998

-A-

Acts, Book of	514, 622, 657
Adam	668
Akha	506
Alexandria	625
American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions	627
American Missionary Association	627
Ancestor Worship	565, 570
Andrew, Disciple of Jesus	524, 526
Animism	493, 503, 506, 509, 522, 525, 550, 559, 560, 564, 581, 584, 585, 648, 650, 655
Anthropology	506
Antioch	554, 625
Asceticism	494, 496

-B-

Ban Dan	620
Ban Dok Daeng	631
Ban Kiew Pong	575
Ban Nok Church	567, 568
Ban Nong Ched Nuey	575
Baptism	515, 517, 519
Baptist Missions, Thailand	627
Baptists, Karen	568, 585
Baptists, Northern Thai	567, 568
Beelzebul	560

Bible	494, 507, 511, 531, 533, 566, 569, 580, 582, 591, 623, 629, 630-632, 636, 664, 669
Bible, English	664
Bible, Geneva	664
Bible, King James Version	664
Bible, Northern Thai	567
Bible, Parisian	664
Bible, Vulgate	664
Biblical Literalism	533
Bonney Danpongpi	567, 568
Borg, Marcus	593
Brown, Raymond E.	608, 621, 629, 630, 644, 657
Brunner, Emil	497
Buddha	669
Buddhism	492, 502, 503, 509, 584, 585, 613, 617, 618, 635, 640
Buddhism, Mahayana	591
Buddhism, Thai	492, 561, 563, 611, 612, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619
Burma	566
Bye	579

-C-

Capernaum	534
Carman, John	611, 616, 617, 618, 619
Catholic Church	497, 498
Catholicism, Thai	619, 627
Chadtrees Danpongpi	566
Cham Noi Church	566
Chiang Mai	561, 573, 576, 579
Chiang Mai University	611
Chiang Rai Province	567
Christian Life	534, 535
Christianity	492, 506, 510, 513, 525, 578, 614, 615, 617, 618, 624, 631-643
Christianity, Akha	506
Christianity, Early	505, 554, 598, 614, 625
Christianity, Gentile	497
Christianity, Indian	616
Christianity, Jewish	634, 654
Christianity, Karen	570, 574, 575, 580, 581, 582, 585
Christianity, Thai	492, 503, 507, 563, 612, 617

Christianity, Thai-Chinese	627
Christianity, Western	612
Christians, Thai	510
Christmas	545
Christology	525, 530
Church History, Thai	530, 531, 627
Church of Christ in Thailand	584, 592, 627, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663
Church Renewal	500
Church, Decapolis	649
Church, Early	492-499, 501-03, 509-511, 527, 532, 533, 535, 549, 551, 553, 558, 598, 600, 606, 622-624, 626, 628, 634, 647, 649, 651, 654, 656
Church, Gentile	554
Church, Hmong	663
Church, Jewish	554, 558
Church, Karen	564-573, 576-578, 580, 659, 663
Church, Lahu	663
Church, Marcan	527
Church, Matthean	626
Church, Medieval	590
Church, Northern Thai	567, 665, 666, 667
Church, Protestant	507
Church, Rural	665
Church, Thai	496, 500, 507, 530, 532-534, 553, 561, 570, 600, 613, 626, 635
Church, Thailand	502, 503, 535
Church, The	496, 497, 501, 502, 541, 543, 551
Church, Yunanese	663
Churches, Baptist	660
Churches, Disciples of Christ	660
Churches, Presbyterian	660
Churches, Tribal	627
Clark, David	591
Comparative Religion	616
Contextualization	See Indigenization
Conversion	493, 506, 564, 565, 578, 580, 584, 585, 590
Cross, The	596
Crossan, John Dominic	544, 545, 546, 538, 593
Crucifixion, The	621, 628

-D-

David, King	560
-------------	-----

Decapolis	649
Demons	550
Dharma, Buddhist	615
Dialogue, Inter-religious	611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 617, 618, 619
Disciples of Christ Missions, Thailand	627
Disciples, Jesus'	510, 511, 516, 518, 521, 523, 525, 535, 539, 551, 553, 557, 597, 599-602, 605, 606, 627, 628, 646, 647, 650-652
Discipleship	518
District 2, Church of Christ in Thailand	592, 663
District 7, Church of Christ in Thailand	663
District 8 , Church of Christ in Thailand	592, 659
District 9 , Church of Christ in Thailand	592
District 10, Church of Christ in Thailand	663
District 12 , Church of Christ in Thailand	592, 663
District 16, Church of Christ in Thailand	663
District 18, Church of Christ in Thailand	663
District 19, Church of Christ in Thailand	592, 659, 663, 564
District 19, Church of Christ in Thailand	See also Karen Baptist Convention
Dualism	492, 493, 506, 611, 612, 613

-E-

Eakin, John A.	534
Education	575, 576
Education, Northern Thailand	575
Education, Thai Government	575
Epistemology	632
Esther Danpongpi	567
Estienne, Robert	664
Ethics	580
Eusebius	608
Evangelism	494, 502, 503, 534, 535, 615, 617, 640, 643, 649, 663
Eve	668
Exclusivism	492
Exorcism	550, 557, 559, 648

-F-

Fest, Joachim	508
Finn, Thomas M.	622
First Jewish War	625
Forgiveness	515

-G-

Galilee	503, 515, 517, 519, 526, 533, 535, 549, 595, 600, 628, 649, 658
Galilee, Lake	519, 650, 654
Genesis, Book of	614
Gentiles	509, 549, 553, 554, 622, 626, 649, 654
Gerasa	650
Geresa	649
Globalization	573, 576
Gnosticism	614
God	492, 494, 503, 510, 513, 515, 522, 523, 528, 537, 551, 563-565, 569, 574, 580, 581, 583, 585, 597, 605, 614, 615, 622, 632-636, 639, 640, 643, 647, 654, 655, 668
God-Fearers	622
Gospel	512, 516, 519, 521, 522, 526, 532, 533, 548, 555,
Gospel, Essential	631-643
Gospels, The	494, 511, 514, 531, 536, 545, 556
Government, Thailand	620

-H-

Harvard University	616
Heathenism	506
Herod, King	538
Herodotus	555
Hill Tribes, Thailand	617
Hinduism, Indian	616, 619
Historiography	496, 501, 507, 508, 511, 512, 516, 519-522, 524, 526, 529, 531, 532, 537, 545, 546, 548, 550, 552, 554, -556, 562, 593, 607, 609, 630, 647, 649, 656
Historiography, Greek	555
Historiography, Hellenistic	657
Hitler, Adolph	508
Holy Spirit	496, 497, 500, 515, 516, 541, 560, 574, 632, 641, 643
Hope of Bangkok Church	500
Hovemyr, Anders	565, 568, 570
Huey Ya School	575
Hymns, Northern Thai	665, 666, 667

-I-

Idolatry	632
Incarnation	583, 599, 602, 629, 640, 647
Indigenization	509, 535, 561, 563, 565, 570, 577, 578, 580, 582, 626, 631-643, 665, 668, 669
Infanticide	546
Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture, Payap U.	611, 618
Institutionalization	496, 497, 498, 499, 501, 500, 502, 553
Isaiah, Book of	513
Islam	615, 617
Islam, Indian	616
Israel	494, 503, 509, 513, 514, 551, 598, 606
Israel, Lost Tribes	581

-J-

Jairus	653, 654, 656, 658
Jairus' Daughter	653, 654, 656
James, Apostle	651
James, Brother of Jesus	634
Jerusalem	503, 519
Jerusalem Church	634
Jesus	494, 496-498, 501-504, 507, 509-528, 530-551, 553-560, 562, 563, 574, 578-580, 593-603, 605, 608-610, 612, 614, 621, 624, 626, 628, 632, 634, 637-655, 658, 669
Jesus Circle	518, 520, 541
Jesus Movement	494, 496, 497, 498, 501, 502, 551, 622, 649
Jesus Scholars	593
Jesus, Teaching Methods	595, 596
Jewish People	554, 654, 655
John the Baptist	513, 514, 515, 517, 669
John, Apostle	641, 651
John, Gospel of	623
Jordan River	514
Joseph of Arimathea	621
Joseph, Father of Jesus	646
Judaism	492, 493, 496-498, 502, 503, 509, 513, 514, 518, 523, 531, 537, 538, 541, 549, 553, 563, 614, 622, 626, 641
Judas Iscariot	645
Judea	517, 538

Juvenal 622

-K-

Kalonymus, Rabbi Isaac Nathan ben 664
Kammerer, Cornelia Ann 506
Karen 571, 576, 577, 578, 582, 617
Karen Baptist Convention 564, 567, 569, 572
Karen Baptist Convention See also District 19, CCT
Karen Culture 572, 573, 574
Karen Language 571
Karen Theological Seminary, Rangoon 568
Karen, Pwo 570
Karen, Sgaw 570
Karen, Traditional Religion 580, 581
Karma 531
Kieckhefer, Richard 590
Kingdom of God (of Heaven) 598, 599, 600, 601, 603, 604, 637, 654
Knowledge 588, 589
Kyzyl Baptist Church 591

-L-

Lampang 564
Lampang Province 567
Langton, Stephan 664
Language, Thai 571
Language, Central Thai 667
Language, Northern Thai 667
Last Names, Thai 620
Law, Jewish 621
Law, Karen 565
Levi 539, 541, 554
Luke, Gospel of 525, 535, 545, 557, 558, 560, 595, 604, 610,
621, 623, 656, 657

-M-

Machlis, Joseph 529
Mae Hong Son 579
Mae Kwa Church 568
Mae Sariang 568
Mark, Gospel of 511-552, 554-560, 562, 579, 594, 596-610, 621,
623, 624, 628, 636, 646-658

Mary, Mother of Jesus	562
Materialism	614
Matthew, Gospel of	525, 535, 545, 557, 558, 595, 604, 608, 609, 610, 623, 624, 625, 626, 642
McGilvary Faculty of Theology, Payap University	511, 561, 585, 667, 669
McGilvary, Daniel	534
Medicine	564, 574, 584
Medicine, Karen	574
Medicine, Western	574
Meechai Santichaichan	575, 576
Meeks, Wayne	492, 493, 494, 495, 498
Menyakee	579
Messiah	550
Millennialism, Karen	579
Ministry, Christian	535
Miracles	596, 599, 646, 650
Mission, Evangelical	633
Missions	617
Missions, Gentile	624, 649
Missions, Pentecostal	500
Missions, Presbyterian	493, 501, 534
Missions, Protestant	493, 502, 506, 530
Missions, Thailand	500, 530, 633
Mo Che To	579
Modernization	506, 575
Monotheism	492
Moore, Sebastian	504, 505
Movement	497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502
Munro, Winsome	628
Music, Church	665, 666, 667
Music, Northern Thai	665
Music, Western	529
Musikee	574
Musikee Association, Karen Baptist Convention	564, 567, 571, 572, 577

-N-

Nakon Pathom	627
Nationalism	553
Nazareth	557, 562
New Testament	511, 519, 532, 535, 551, 553, 555, 614, 625, 629, 646, 664

New Testament, Greek	629
New Testament, Nestle-Aland Edition	629
Nong Daeng Congregation	569
Northern Thai Culture	573
Northern Thai Language	571
Northern Thailand	573
Nua Klao Church	585

-O-

O'Keefe, William F.	508
Office of History, Church of Christ in Thailand	567, 586, 620, 665
Old Testament	503, 513, 583, 614, 664

-P-

Palestine	493, 549, 625
Pannenberg, Wolfhart	555
Panya, Noi	567, 568
Papias	608, 609
Parables, of Jesus	595, 596, 597, 603
Paris, University of	664
Pastoral Care	501, 566, 577
Pastoral Care, Thai	561
Patriarchalism	518
Paul, Apostle	510, 555, 622, 634, 636, 646
Pentecost	496, 558
Pentecostalism, Thai	500, 585, 627
Pentecostalism, Tuvin	591
Peter, Apostle	523,-526, 552, 562, 608-610, 624, 634, 641, 651
Peters, James R.	574
Pharisees	531, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 562
Phet Buri	534
Philosophy, Greek	635
Philosophy, Indian	616
Pontius Pilate	538
Prasert Indaphun	667
Presbyterian Missions	567
Presbyterian Missions, Thailand	627
Presbyterians, Northern Thailand	501, 568
Prophets, Old Testament	13, 514, 614, 636
Protestantism, American	618

Protestantism, Thai	492, 493, 496, 500, 501, 581, 584, 585, 590, 612, 617
Protestantism, Thailand	503, 509, 563

-Q, R-

Racism	663
Reagan, Ronald	612
Religion, Karen	565, 580, 581
Research	586, 588, 589
Resurrection, of Jesus	510, 555, 596, 628, 647, 651, 652
Revivalism	496, 500
Ritual & Worship	492, 566, 569, 570
Ritual & Worship, Karen	580
Roman Empire	492, 493, 498, 540, 546, 603
Rome	520
Russia	591

-S-

Sabbath	541, 542, 543, 564
Saeng Chandngarm	611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 618
Sahamit School	575
Salvation	585, 631-643
Samaritans	637
Sanhedrin	621
Satan	493, 516, 559, 560
Schweitzer, Albert	507
Schweizer, Eduard	503, 509, 553
Scribes, Biblical	531
Sermon on the Mount	559, 642
Sermon on the Plain	559
Siam Mission	627
Siberia	591,
Sinclair Thompson Lecture Series, Payap University	611,-619
Smith, Morton	593
Stanton, Graham N.	623, 625
Statistics, Church of Christ in Thailand	592, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663
Stengel, Casey	508
Stephen	503
Sukonrak Pannya	620
Sun Muang School	575
Synagogue	622

Syria 496

-T-

Temekala Church 564, 566
Ten Commandments 635
Thailand 493, 531, 616, 668
Thailand, Northern 506, 534, 564, 568, 584, 667
Theism 615
Theissen, Gerd 554
Theology, Karen 582, 583
Theology, Thai 668, 669
Transfiguration, of Jesus 651, 652
Trinity 522, 535, 550, 599, 634
Tuva Republic, Russia 591
Two Source Hypothesis 623

-U, V, W-

United Bible Societies 591, 629, 641
United States of America 616
University of Wisconsin 574
Uttaradit Province 620
Valery, Paul 508
Vietnam War 616
Wedding Ceremony 566
Westernization 668
Williamson, Lamar Jr. 552
Women's Issues 565, 569, 570, 628, 661

-X, Y, Z-

Youth, Karen 571
Youth, Karen Christian 576
Zehner, Edwin 493

BIBLICAL REFERENCES

Old Testament

Genesis 2: 21-22 668

Mark

Mark 1 525, 539

Mark 1:1	512, 646
Mark 1:2	513
Mark 1:2-3	513, 514
Mark 1:8	560
Mark 1:9	515
Mark 1:9-13	515, 516
Mark 1:12	515
Mark 1:14	519, 599
Mark 1:14-15	517, 637
Mark 1:14-20	521, 535
Mark 1:15	527
Mark 1:16	519
Mark 1:16-20	518, 519
Mark 1:20	518
Mark 1:21-28	522, 550
Mark 1:21-38	526
Mark 1:29-30	524
Mark 1:29-31	523
Mark 1:34	522
Mark 1:35-39	525
Mark 1:39	526
Mark 1:39-40	526
Mark 1:4-8	514
Mark 1:40	526
Mark 1:40-45	527, 528, 531
Mark 1-4	646
Mark 2	539, 543, 547, 548
Mark 2:1	534
Mark 2:1-12	536, 537, 538, 539, 552
Mark 2:5	538
Mark 2:7	543
Mark 2:13-17	539, 540, 554
Mark 2:13-28	541, 542
Mark 2:14-15	541
Mark 2:16	539, 540, 541, 543
Mark 2:18-22	541
Mark 2:18ff	541
Mark 2:21-22	541
Mark 2:23-28	541, 542, 547
Mark 2:23ff	541
Mark 2:24	543
Mark 2:27-28	542

Mark 2-3	548
Mark 3	594
Mark 3:1-12	551
Mark 3:1-6	547
Mark 3:5	547
Mark 3:6	548
Mark 3:7-12	549, 598
Mark 3:7-8	549
Mark 3:9	549, 594
Mark 3:10	549
Mark 3:11-12	550
Mark 3:13-19	551, 598, 605
Mark 3:20	534, 562
Mark 3:20-21	557
Mark 3:20-30	598, 605
Mark 3:22-30	559
Mark 3:28-30	560
Mark 3:31-35	562, 563, 598, 605
Mark 3-4	598, 600
Mark 4	595, 603, 605, 606, 654
Mark 4:1-2	594
Mark 4:1-8	606
Mark 4:1-9	601, 598, 605
Mark 4:1-34	605, 606
Mark 4:2	595
Mark 4:10	601
Mark 4:10-12	597, 598, 599, 601, 605
Mark 4:11	597
Mark 4:13-20	601, 605
Mark 4:20	598
Mark 4:21-22	601, 602, 605
Mark 4:23-25	602
Mark 4:24-25	605
Mark 4:26-29	603, 604, 605
Mark 4:3-9	597
Mark 4:30-32	604, 605
Mark 4:33	597
Mark 4:33-34	598, 605
Mark 4:34	605
Mark 4:35-41	646, 650
Mark 4:41	646, 650
Mark 5	654

Mark 5:1-20	649, 650
Mark 5:1-20)	648
Mark 5:1-6:6	605
Mark 5:3-5	648
Mark 5:15	650
Mark 5:15	648
Mark 5:17	648
Mark 5:18-19	648
Mark 5:19	648 654, 655
Mark 5:20	649
Mark 5:21-23	653
Mark 5:24	658
Mark 5:24-34	658
Mark 5:35-42	653
Mark 5:43	654, 655
Mark 6:6-11	494
Mark 6:6-13	605
Mark 8	550, 646
Mark 8:27-30	550
Mark 9:2-10	651, 652
Mark 9:9	651
Mark 9:9-10	651
Mark 9:10	651
Mark 9-16	646
Mark 10	544
Mark 10:13-16	544, 545, 546
Mark 10:15	544
Mark 12	595
Mark 15:40-41	628
Mark 15:42-47	621
Mark 16:8	628

Other New Testament

Matthew 11	595
Matthew 25:31-46	642
Matthew 27:57	621
Matthew 27:59-60	621
Matthew 28:19-20	642
Matthew 5-7	642
Matthew 7:21-23	642
Matthew 7:24-27	642
Luke 1:1-2	512, 610, 656

Luke 1:36	514
Luke 10	595
Luke 10:25ff	637
Luke 11:14-23	560
Luke 12:10	560
Luke 3:23	538
Luke 4	525
Luke 4:42-44	525
John 3:1	638
John 3:16-21	638, 639, 640, 641
John 3:17	638
John 3:18	638
John 3:19	638
John 3:20	638
Acts 4: 11-12	641
Acts 4:12	641
I Corinthians 15	555
I Corinthians 15:6	555
I Corinthians 15:35ff	510