

HeRD 1999

Herb's Research Diary

HeRD #671 - Getting Title I

One of the things I'm asked most frequently is how the Laos Mission acquired its first piece of property, where Chiang Mai First Church is now situated. The story is a bit complicated and will take several HeRDs to explain.

The Daniel and Sophia McGilvary family arrived in Chiang Mai in April 1867. The Jonathan and Kate Wilson family followed some months later, reaching the city in February 1868. From the first the two families wanted to acquire a prime piece of property, both to live on and to demonstrate that the permanence of their mission. Even before they moved North, Chao Kawilorot, the "Prince" (Chao Muang) of Chiang Mai, had promised them land. He renewed that pledge when they arrived, and even showed them a good site between the city's eastern gate and the Mae Ping River. In May 1868, however, he withdrew the site from their consideration. A few months later, McGilvary raised the issue again with him, and this time Chao Kawilorot responded immediately and presented the mission with an excellent site, placed right on the river about a half mile from the city proper.

The Wilsons built a temporary dwelling and moved on to the property at some point before June 1869, and in a letter to the Board of Foreign Missions dated 7 July 1869, Wilson wrote almost poetically about the natural beauty of the site with its view of the river, the city walls, and Doi Suthep looming in the background. The property was rich in trees and other greenery. Wilson also praised the property because it was strategically placed where many walked past every day. He wrote, "Many of them enter our house voluntarily, and others we lure into our presence, and before they leave, we can tell them about the blessed Saviour."

It should be noted, however, that Chao Kawilorot didn't deed this piece of property over to the mission. Although a gift for their use, he retained legal ownership for himself. We should also note that in the process he took the property away from its previous owner, without compensation, as was his right. Needless to say, that person was none too pleased with all of this and eventually found ways to express his displeasure.

HeRD #672 - Getting Title II

Chao Kawilorot, as we saw in HeRD #671, didn't exactly keep his word about giving the Presbyterian missionaries in Chiang Mai a piece of property. He did, indeed, hand over for their use a beautiful, prime river site. What he did not give them was legal title to the property, and he also left them with an angry, bothersome neighbor who was the previous and uncompensated owner of part of the property. One suspects that Kawilorot was playing something of a double game in all of this. By the time he gave this property to the missionaries some time around September 1868, he was already disenchanted with them; and it's entirely likely that he didn't want to encourage their permanent presence. It's also likely that he didn't want them to feel too secure in their situation on the river. Whether this was the case or not, it was certainly the result. First, he seems to have made it clear to the two missionary families that they didn't have legal title, a matter that bothered them a great deal. Second, he probably intentionally reinforced their sense of insecurity by leaving them with an angry, bothersome neighbor.

Chao Kawilorot himself died on 29 June 1870, and the Chao Uparat (the so-called "Second King") of Chiang Mai and heir apparent was Chao Intanon, son-in-law of Kawilorot. The

missionaries may have had some small hope that the change in political leadership would lead to a change in the legal status of the land they occupied, and not long after Kawilorot's death Chao Intanon did come to look over the property. He refused, however, either to acknowledge their ownership of the property or to allow the missionaries to enlarge it. He also refused their request to be allowed to purchase the property. There matters rested for some months.

HeRD #673 - Getting Title III

In a letter to the Board dated 1 October 1870, Wilson reported on a court case he had brought in early August against one of their neighbors. Wilson described him as a disagreeable, contentious man who'd been the chief of Chao Kawilorot's boatmen and a man well liked in government circles. He also had a grudge against the missionaries because part of the land they occupied had belonged to him, and he'd received no payment for it. Wilson branded him a "confirmed drunkard." At some point, this obnoxious neighbor began to openly harass the missionaries, hurling "foul curses" at them and making loud noise at night. Wilson finally complained to the authorities, and they promised to investigate. We should remember that at this point the Wilson family was living on the site, while the McGilvarys had just started building a house there and were living elsewhere. The neighbor responded to Wilson's complaint by physically attacking the Wilsons' servants and threatening Wilson's life. The whole matter went to court, where the neighbor lost the case and was punished in a manner Wilson doesn't explain.

Wilson's October 1st letter went on to observe that in spite of the fact that he won the court case, he failed to obtain his main objective in bringing the whole case to court. The Chiang Mai government again refused to let the missionaries buy the land they occupied, and the court ruled that the former owner had given the land to Kawilorot for the use of the missionaries. He wrote, "They refused to let us pay for the ground & they made it a serious crime for any one to sell [to] us." And, that, "The lot was made over to us for our use, but the deed was careful to state that the ground was royal property." While Wilson, thus, clearly felt that he'd failed to achieve his goal of obtaining clear title to the river property, it's interesting to note that he did get a deed. It evidently stated that the mission was given use of the property. This seems to have been something of a concession to his wishes and a step towards full ownership.

And there matters rested again.

HeRD #674 - Getting Title IV

HeRD #673 told the story of how Wilson took his neighbor to court for abusive behavior. It's clear from his letter to the Board of 1 October 1870 that Wilson acted as an individual and not on behalf of the Laos Mission. That's strange. The issues at hand involved mission property, and Wilson evidently hoped that the case would lead to an opportunity for the mission to buy the property. Why did he act as an individual, and why is it he makes no mention at all of McGilvary? McGilvary, in fact, never comments on the case in his official correspondence with the Board.

It's possible, perhaps likely that McGilvary didn't support Wilson's action, for reasons we can only guess at. Over the years, McGilvary proved himself less abrasive and "hot-hearted" than Wilson in his relationship with northern Thai society. Wilson was more confrontational and more judgmental. McGilvary may have thus advocated a more patient approach. If there was a difference of opinion, McGilvary would surely have preferred to keep that difference private. He most especially wouldn't have discussed the matter in correspondence with the Board. One reason for my suspicions is that in later years, Wilson and McGilvary had some rather sharp differences of opinion on mission policy, differences that Wilson complained about in

correspondence with the Board. McGilvary never did. The long-held tradition that the two were old and dear friends needs to be tempered, and it's possible that there were undercurrents of feeling between them that aren't clearly reflected in the historical record. We could even speculate that some of those feelings began in mid-1870 when Wilson was trying to deal with a contentious, perhaps dangerous neighbor in ways McGilvary refused to support. Wilson could well have been disappointed in McGilvary. And McGilvary may have felt that Wilson was as much the cause of the tension with his neighbor as was the neighbor.

It must also be said, however, that the only hard fact we have is that Wilson acted on his own behalf and there's no mention of McGilvary being involved in the case. The rest of my thoughts here are only "informed speculation." Fun, perhaps informative, but to be taken with a grain of salt.

HeRD #675 - Getting Title V

As of early October, the Laos Mission continued to be frustrated by the fact that it couldn't obtain a clear title to the property it was occupying. McGilvary wrote about the issue to the Board in a letter dated 7 October 1870, in which he provided both a theological and a political analysis of the situation. McGilvary wrote this letter just five days before his family moved onto the property.

Theologically, he noted that he was sure that the Laos Mission would become a permanent presence in the North. He wrote, "We believe that it is the Master's Holy will that it shall be so established. We may have to wait long and lay the foundation slowly as in most mission fields. But God is not slow concerning his promises as some men count slackness. One day with him is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." One reason why McGilvary might not have supported Wilson's court case--if in fact he didn't (HeRD #674)--could have been because he felt patient trust in God would get the mission further than open confrontation. One of the things that made McGilvary such a formidable opponent to those who wanted to rid the North of his presence was that he truly believed his cause must one day win, and he was willing to act in ways commensurate with that faith. His faith translated into a stubborn, non-confrontational patience that was determined to find ways beyond every obstacle.

McGilvary's report of October 7th went on to analyze the political situation the mission faced. He wrote, "We think that the attitude of the new government towards Christianity will be one of indifference so far at least as outward persecution. The real animus I think will be the same. Their decided preference would be that we should leave and we need not expect any FAVORS...They will probably not dare to interfere with us, or openly thwart us. But it will be a far more popular government with the people than the late one." [emphasis in original] He went on to observe that it would be some time before the new government's policies would become settled on many issues. The mission's land, thus, was a political football and as such demanded patience of the mission. For McGilvary at least, his faith in the ultimate triumph of his cause gave him reason to be patient.

HeRD #676 - Getting Title VI

The resolution of the mission's property problem, when it came, was a clever one. Chao Intanon, we'll remember, appeared to follow the policies of Chao Kawilorot concerning the mission's request to purchase and own property. He refused that request, surely for political reasons. Chao Intanon was designated to become the next Prince of Chiang Mai, but he inherited a situation in which Kawilorot's adopted son, Chao Buntawong, exercised considerable political influence. Chao Buntawong was an avowed enemy of the missionaries and worked persistently to

have them removed. Open support of the missionaries would have brought Intanon into conflict with Buntawong at a time when Intanon was still consolidating his own position. The truth is, he was quite happy to resolve the land issue in the mission's favor. He just had to find a way to do so, and his solution was an elegant one.

In a letter dated 31 December 1870 to the Board, McGilvary explained what happened. He wrote, "When the present acting prince and future king returned from Bangkok it appeared for a time as if he intended to pursue the same policy towards us, so far as buying lots is concerned. But he has virtually yielded the point by leaving it optional with our neighbors to let them GIVE us as much of their lots as was necessary for filling out our place with the privilege of making them such return as would satisfy them. It is in fact a virtual purchase though the words buy and sell have not been insisted on. The same thing is true too with regard to the original lot given by the King. the original owners were driven off and we were forbidden to give and they to receive any remuneration. Its effect on the mind of themselves and others was bad. We have since the accession of the new prince remunerated them for their places so that we have now a place that we can feel is by right as well as in fact our own." McGilvary put the total amount the mission expended on its land at between about \$250 to \$270.

The solution was elegant, simple, and delightfully northern Thai. Officially, the owners of the various plots pieced together by the mission into one site each gave their land to the mission. The mission, in return, gave them a sum of money. No buying or selling. Nothing Chao Buntawong could object to. Everybody was happy, except those who wanted to be rid of the missionaries. And so the whole matter was settled by this civilized and clever stratagem. Or was it?

HeRD #677 - Getting Title: A Postscript

The story about how the Laos Mission acquired its land is a delightful one. It suggests the compromises that both the missionaries and the political authorities had to make to accommodate themselves one with the other. There's left just one question, however. By this "virtual purchase," as McGilvary termed it, did the Laos Mission acquire legal title to its property or not? It doesn't seem so. Indeed, I have to confess I'm not sure just what constituted a "legal title" to property in Chiang Mai in the early 1870s. The missionaries believed that it was possible to own property legally and that legal ownership was withheld from them for political reasons. That being the case, did they acquire such title through Chao Intanon's stratagem? Again, it doesn't seem likely they did since there was no formal purchase of the property. In other words, their virtual purchase left them virtual owners and nearly everybody was satisfied with the virtual reality created by Chao Intanon. The question is, when, if ever, was this virtual reality transformed into a legal one? When did the mission become legal owners of the property First Church, Chiang Mai, now stands on?

One further note. So far as we can tell, the fact that the mission actually paid for its property doesn't seem to have made any difference legally. Yet, McGilvary clearly FELT much more secure in the mission's ownership of its property because money had changed hands. Does that feeling reflect actual practice in Chiang Mai in the 1870s? In other words, was that how people acquired virtual ownership of land, through informal buying and selling of it? Or do McGilvary's feelings reflect a more Western attitude about owning property? If you pay for it, it belongs to you. There aren't any clear answers to these questions.

HeRD #678 - Getting Title: Some Partial Answers

Not feeling satisfied with where we left things in HeRD #677, I called Dr. Ratanaphorn Sethakul, one of the leading historians of northern Thailand, about land laws in Chiang Mai in the 1870s. She kindly permitted me to share with you her comments.

The problem we face is that no one has studied the issue of 19th century land ownership in Chiang Mai in depth, so we don't know that much about it. Dr. Ratanaphorn said that most historians think that all of the land in the Chiang Mai State legally belonged to the Prince. He could parcel it out as he chose. No one else "owned" land, except the temples. There couldn't be buying and selling, although there may have been some ways around this restriction as land did change hands without going through the Prince. Concerning the case of the missionaries, she stated that even after they had paid over money for the land they "purchased" they couldn't have owned it in a legal sense. And a close reading of McGilvary's letters to the Board indicates that he never claimed that the mission had obtained a clear title to the land. On the other hand, it seems clear from missionary correspondence that, whatever the theory involved, people other than the Prince did own land, in fact if not in law. Certainly Wilson's troublesome neighbor thought he had a right to compensation for the land Chao Kawilorot took from him to give to the missionaries. Perhaps, then, McGilvary's concept of "virtual ownership," whatever the legal formalities, is a useful one. We saw in HeRD #673 that the mission actually did get a deed for its property, although the owner was specified to be the Prince. Was that a common practice? Did such a deed give the holder any prerogatives or rights concerning the property so deeded? We don't know.

It appears, in sum, that Chao Intanon's stratagem at the end of 1870, whereby the Laos Mission obtained "virtual ownership" of its property did put the land in its hands. The mission was satisfied that it had a full right to the land. Yet, the property apparently didn't actually change hands in a legal sense and remained the property of the Prince.

HeRD #679 - Rebels Against Me

In September 1868 Chao Kawilorot, the Prince of Chiang Mai, initiated a brutal suppression of the Christian religion that resulted in the death of two Christians. His action successfully halted the spread of Christianity for a decade. In a conference with the missionaries some months later, Kawilorot stated clearly his reasons for suppressing the new religion. Jonathan Wilson, in a letter dated 24 January 1870, quoted Kawilorot as stating, "Siam is ONE government. Chiang Mai is another. The King at Bangkok may permit his subjects to become Christians. I will kill every one of mine who forsakes Buddhism for the religion of Jesus. Those who embrace Christianity are rebels against me & will be treated as such. If the missionaries teach their religion & continue to make Christians I will banish them from the country."

[emphasis in the original] At least two issues were at stake. First, the Chao Muang's political power was associated with his religious role in conducting certain animistic rites. He was also the chief patron and defender of Buddhism in his territories. Hence, conversion to Christian meant denying him one of the pillars of his own power and Chiang Mai's political stability. Second, his power and the political stability of his state depended on the maintenance of Chiang Mai's corvee labor system whereby a patron could call on the labor of his or her clients at any time. The fact that Christians were forbidden from working on the Sabbath undermined the rationale behind that system. Without defending his bloody act, we should understand that Kawilorot shed Christian blood for what he considered to be fundamental issues of state.

HeRD #680 -- Commitment

When told in early 1870 that the two missionary families would be permitted to stay in Chiang Mai only if they refrained from teaching religion, Daniel McGilvary replied,

"We were willing to do all we could for the bodies of the people and to advance their temporal interest. But still all the king's money would not have induced us to come here for any other purpose than to teach Christianity."

From the Records of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, McGilvary to Irving, 24 March 1870, v. 3.

HeRD #681 - Northern Thai Crypto-Christians I

HeRD #296, sent out in November 1996, generated more discussion than any other single HeRD. It raised the issue of "crypto-Christians" in the early church, that is the role and place of secret believers, people who believed in Jesus but refrained from broadcasting their faith in public. The issue of secret believers is relevant to the Christian experience in northern Thailand as well. In fact, the missionaries may have made no one decision more significant to the future of the northern Thai church than their decision to reject secret discipleship.

Nan Inta, the first baptized northern Thai Christian, at first asked to be allowed to believe in secret. He felt that the political situation in early 1869, at the time of his baptism, was dangerous. McGilvary and Wilson rejected his request out of hand, saying that he had to leave the consequences of his faith in God's hands. At least one other convert in 1869 also asked to be allowed to convert secretly, and he met with the same answer. He too decided to take the risk of public profession. In September of that same year, the infant northern Thai church experience brutal oppression. Chao Kawilorot rejected the idea of public discipleship, as we saw in HeRD #678.

The question of secret discipleship came up again in 1871. In a letter to the Board, dated 24 October 1871, Wilson reported on the case one potential Christian who claimed to have ceased participation in Buddhist ritual and said that he trusted in Christ alone. He told the missionaries, however, that "an open profession of Christianity would cost him his head." He wanted to be a secret disciple. Wilson said that they'd had several cases of this type, and while it saddened the missionaries to have to refuse them they felt compelled to do so. They seem, in fact, to have given little actual reflection on the matter, believing apparently that only a public profession of faith could lead to salvation.

I'd like to pursue the question of secret discipleship, or crypto-Christianity, for a few of the following HeRDs.

HeRD #682 - Northern Thai Crypto-Christians II

In HeRD #680 we saw that in the political environment of the early 1870s a number of potential Christian converts wanted to become secret believers. It was too risky to become a Christian otherwise. McGilvary and Wilson rejected this option and demanded public profession as the only way to conversion. I'd like to suggest that one facet of this difference had to do with differing conceptions of "boundaries".

Tongchai Winichakul's excellent book, *SIAM MAPPED*, makes the point that prior to the 20th century Thailand conceived of its political boundaries in a way radically different from that of Europeans. For Europeans a boundary was a fixed, clear line between two pieces of territory. One knew precisely when one crossed a boundary. For Thais, however, a boundary was a vague

region of inter-mingling loyalties. The petty rulers of frontier states often owed fealty to two different major states, and their loyalties shifted and varied with the winds of political change. Crossing a border took time as one traveled out of one region of fealty through a region of mixed fealty into that of a different fealty. The only people bothered by this supposed vagueness were Europeans.

McGilvary and Wilson, rigid dualists in the Western sense, certainly conceptualized conversion as the crossing of a clear boundary. It seems likely, however, that some northern Thais tried to redefine this Western conception of conversion. They wanted to live in a "region" where personal faith in Christ was possible without having to declare open adherence to the Christian religion. They too may have understood themselves to be crossing a boundary between Christianity and traditional faith, but they conceived of that crossing over in a different, less dualistic and less clearly defined way. Such a difference in conception is worth pondering,

HeRD #683 - Northern Thai Crypto-Christians III

HeRD #681 theorized that the Presbyterian missionaries in Chiang Mai and potential northern Thai converts conceived of conversion in different ways. The missionaries saw it as a crossing over a clearly marked boundary. The northern Thais thought of it as traveling through a region where mixed loyalties were acceptable. IF I'm correct in this , it has some important implications for our understanding of northern Thai church history.

This theory, among other things, reinforces the impression that the missionary conception of conversion was culturally bounded. It was a Western, dualistic conception that one could argue didn't fit either the northern Thai religious consciousness or the particular political situation in the early 1870s. Based on its rigidly dualistic conception of conversion, the Laos Mission required potential converts to cross a clear, sharply drawn boundary for reasons that the missionaries found compelling. Most northern Thai potential converts, however, surely found those reasons less than compelling and probably perceived them as unreasonable and naive. Thai religious conscious doesn't deal in such sharply drawn boundaries at any rate.

This difference in perception of what it meant to convert, to the extent it existed, was of crucial importance to the future of the northern Thai church. It determined who could join the church and who couldn't. Only those who were willing to make a sharp break with their religious heritage were allowed to cross over into Christianity. There's no way of knowing, but one has the impression from missionary correspondence that only a minority of potential converts were willing to make that kind of change. The missionary conception of conversion, thus, created a church that was radically separated from its social and cultural context. It probably also unintentionally reinforced the church's dependence on missionary patronage. The secret believers, if allowed to join the church surreptitiously, would have continued to live in the midst of society according to their own means. They wouldn't have been socially and economically dependent on the mission.

HeRD #684 - Northern Thai Crypto-Christians IV

Over the last three HeRDs, I've been arguing that the Laos Mission's understanding of conversion as crossing over a sharp boundary had a major impact on the life of the northern Thai church. I'd like to add a further thought here about indigenization.

In spite of its alien appearance, the modern northern Thai church is no less northern Thai than the rest of its society. Little is presently understood about the process by which it adapted Western, missionary Christianity to its own thought-ways and folkways. but it did adapt itself. It

seems likely, in any event, that the fact that the missionaries forbade secret conversions and the formation of a hidden church must have had a determinative impact on that process of indigenization. Indigenization had to take place more covertly, because the missionaries also rejected the possibility of building a northern Thai church from within northern Thai society. Indigenization, that is, had to take place in the context of overt Western structures, methods, and theologies put in place by the mission. Indigenization, furthermore, couldn't consciously avail itself of indigenous religious structures and consciousness, again because missionary ideology rejected the value of these things out of hand.

Let me stress that I'm playing with ideas here. But, if I'm anywhere near correct, what happened was that the northern Thai church had to construct itself without recourse to the full religious and socio-cultural resources of its society. And it had to do this where the missionaries couldn't really see what was going on. In a sense, it even had to deny to itself that any indigenization was taking place, because the Christian ideal the churches held (and still hold) was their image of the Western, specifically the American church. The impact of all of this on indigenization was, in the aggregate, negative. It denied the church conscious access to many of the strengths of its own society. It left the church feeling ambivalent about its identity, insecure in its northern Thainess.

HeRD #685 - Northern Thai Crypto-Christians V

When McGilvary and Wilson rejected the possibility of a northern Thai crypto-Christianity, they determined the future course of northern Thai Christianity. We have no way of knowing, of course, what shape a hidden northern Thai church might have taken. But we can speculate. It obviously would have been a more overtly Thai church. Being quietly lodged in the midst of its neighbors it would have had to be. It would have brought a greater appreciation for its own cultural resources to bear on the process of indigenization. It may even have functioned like the earliest church, participating in the religious life of its community AND worshipping Jesus in the privacy of its homes. It would probably have been a larger church; and it may even have taken on the aspects of an almost underground religious movement, again in a way similar to what happened in the earliest church. We tend to forget that as the early church moved into Greco-Roman cities such as Antioch, the surrounding society only gradually became aware of its existence. It was quietly hidden away for many decades in a growing abundance of house churches.

There's one other consideration that we have to take into account here. We will recall Chao Intanon's solution to the missionary desire to own their own property (HeRD #676). He created a virtual reality, by which the missionaries could feel confident in their right to their property without "really" owning it. Now, everyone understood the ploy involved, but because nothing was done officially it was as if nothing was done. I assume that a hidden northern Thai church would have existed in much the same way. It would have had considerable freedom and latitude, just so long as didn't claim to be "real". In our modern cyber-speak, it would have been a virtual church quietly hidden away, again not unlike the earliest church. All of this sounds terribly ambivalent, but then northern Thai society has an impressive tolerance for just such situations and a happy way of avoiding much confrontation.

There never was a virtual church, however. Perhaps there couldn't have been. The very fact that the missionaries were so visible and so visibly attacking traditional religion may have made it impossible. Chao Kawilorot might have been suspicious in any event and taken steps to suppress the underground church. Nineteenth-century northern Thailand wasn't 1st century Palestine, and suggesting that the northern Thai church could have grown in a way similar to the earliest church could be entirely wrong. I would argue, however, that rejecting the idea of a

virtual northern Thai church requires as much speculation as does proposing it, and the idea has the merit of suggesting that the way the church WAS founded was only one of a number of options. Given what followed, my own personal sense is that there were better options.

HeRD #686 - Two Realities

Daniel McGilvary lived his missionary life between two realities. The first was the political and social reality of northern Thailand. The prospects of the work at any given moment had a strong impact on him, as his letter to the Board dated 4 December 1872 shows. It wasn't a good time in the history of the Laos Mission. As a consequence, McGilvary admitted that he hadn't written as much as in past years. He felt like writing only when there were good results to report. He stated, "I have always been careful not to hold out false encouragement's of success and not to give a righter coloring to the field than the strictest adherence to the truth would justify." When things weren't going well, he found it "not pleasant" to write about discouragements, esp. as such reports might adversely affect other peoples' attitudes about the mission. The past months had been just a time, a time when the missionaries worked hard and met with little results. He wrote "Our harps have been hung on the willows." (Psalm 137:2).

That's one reality. The other reality was faith in God's intentions for the North. Having admitted to a number of discouragements, McGilvary went on to avow, "Yet our faith has seldom wavered as to the early triumph of the gospel among this interesting people." Later in the letter, he stated, "God's Holy Spirit has been present with us but not to that extent that we have longed and prayed to witness. It is yet a day of SMALL THINGS with us - VERY small - yet we are taught not to despise it. We praise his Holy name for what he has done for us while we look for far greater things. The little one shall become a thousand and the small one a mighty nation & the Lord will hasten it in his time." [emphasis in original] He concluded, "Our martyrs are dead but the spirit of the martyrs still lives in Nan Inta and some of the old and the new converts. God is not leaving us in doubt as to his purposes of mercy to this people."

A superficial appreciation of these two realities will lead the unwary to fulsome praise of McGilvary's strong faith in the face of adversity. And he does deserve such praise. There is a downside, however. This confident trust that God will one day triumph allowed missionaries to continue about their business uncritically. They could feel that any failures were only momentary and that perseverance would lead to triumph. One didn't need to question one's methods or attitudes. Just wait. Just keep on. God will triumph. McGilvary may have been less guilty of this heedless reliance on God than others; but there was a tendency among missionaries to perpetuate ineffective methods and hold to destructive ideologies decade after decade, avowing the whole while in their faith that God would one day fix things.

HeRD #687 - Two Realities Twice Over

In HeRD #686 we saw that McGilvary's letter to the Board of 4 December 1872 reveals the fact that he lived with two distinct realities, one mundane and the other transcendent. We also saw that he didn't like to write to the Board unless things were going well.

This second point underscores one of the difficulties we face in studying the history of the northern Thai church. It wasn't just McGilvary that kept bad news to himself. The missionaries, with a few notable exceptions, seldom discussed their more serious problems with the Board. They especially kept their personal differences and tensions out of public view. This makes it very difficult to get at the actual texture of events, because we don't know the full story behind even major mission decisions. We have trouble discerning negative influences on the mission and problems the missionaries faced in their work. We see only the public face, the squeaky

clean, bright-eyed image the Laos Mission projected for reasons of propriety and policy. Now, sometimes things got so entirely bad that the folks on the field had to tell the tale to the Board. And there were a few missionaries who almost relished the gossip they forwarded overseas. We also have the private family correspondence of a few missionaries, which sometimes told things to the relatives that weren't told to the Board. These sources reveal that sometimes life in some of the stations was almost a living hell of suspicion and mistrust. They reveal, on occasion, the highly politicized nature of decision-making in the mission.

Historians are generally aware of the fact that the human past is filled with brutality, oppression, suffering, and warfare. Even the best of stories have their tragedies. And, indeed, the true value of historical knowledge is precisely in its exposure of the unhappy reality of the past. The past never really was what our later loss of memory would like it to have been. The problem the historian of the northern Thai church faces is cutting through the bright facade to uncover the more dingy and depressing reality.

HeRD #688 - What About Us Little Guys?

Believing as he did that God intended "great things" for the northern Thai, McGilvary was more than a little sensitive about those who disagreed, especially if they were other missionaries. He particularly took exception to the view expressed by his colleague, Dr. Charles Vrooman, that the Board should send reinforcements to China and Japan rather than to the Laos Mission. Vrooman felt that the need for missionaries was much greater in those nations.

In his letter to the Board of 4 December 1872, McGilvary protested. He vowed his support for the Board's work in the great nations of Asia, but he asked bluntly if the Board was going to deliver the Gospel only to those nations. He asked if the Board thought that the smaller kingdoms and tribes needed it less. "Has any other remedy been found for them!" He pointed out the great success of the missions to the Sandwich Islands and the Karen. He asked if there was any "more interesting" people than the northern Thai (the "Laos," as he calls them) and marshaled an array of arguments to urge their cause. He asked the Board to consider the fact that if it didn't reinforce the Laos Mission, the mission and its work would surely die. He concluded yet again with his confident assertion that God intended great things for the northern Thai. He also had too much confidence in the good judgment of the Presbyterian Church to believe that the work in the North would be allowed to lapse.

Eventually, the Laos Mission was to become one of the larger Presbyterian missions, though not among the very largest (see HeRD #210). Yet, throughout its existence one of the more important limitations on its resources was the Board of Foreign Mission's commitments to more prestigious Asian missions, including those in China, Japan, India, Korea, and somewhat later, the Philippines.

HeRD #689 - The First Marriage

Just in case you ever wondered, the first Christian marriage ever performed in northern Thailand took place on 7 March 1871. For the record, McGilvary wrote in an 11 March 1871 letter to the Board that, "I performed the ceremony of the first Christian marriage ever celebrated in Chiangmai on the 7th Inst. The parties are not as yet baptized members of the church though they are not idolaters and profess their faith in the true God and desire at no distant day to be recognized as true followers of Christ."

HeRD #690 - The First Hospital, Maybe

Another question I'm asked now and again is when the first missionary hospital in northern Thailand, was founded. It sounds like a straightforward question, and there should be a precise answer. The trouble is the actual past has a way of not being so straightforward and precise. It all depends on what one means by "hospital". The first record of a hospital in Chiang Mai that I'm aware of is found in Daniel McGilvary's letter to the Board dated 10 April 1872. After Dr. Charles Vrooman, the first trained Western physician to work in the North, arrived in early 1872, the Laos Mission quickly moved to start what McGilvary called a "temporary hospital." It was located on the mission compound where First Church, Chiang Mai is now located and consisted of eight huts where patients and their families could live. Whatever the medical consequences of this first hospital, McGilvary was delighted with the evangelistic opportunities it offered the mission. He noted that because of the hospital more people than ever were visiting the mission compound, and most of them accepted the invitation to attend daily morning worship and/or Sunday worship. Two patients had already shown a "deep interest" in Christianity.

We don't have a firm date on this one. The hospital was started sometime between February and early April 1872, probably in March. We should still wonder whether Vrooman's little collection of huts in the back yard constituted a hospital in any meaningful sense of the word. It had none of the facilities, departments, staff, orderliness, or equipment that we would normally expect of a hospital. Is a "temporary hospital" a hospital? Hospital or not, in any event, it does constitute an answer of sorts to the original question of when the first hospital was founded. I should add that this rude and primitive first attempt at a hospital had no institutional connection with the later McCormick Hospital. Its existence was brief, and when the next doctor came a few years later, he had to start over.

HeRD #691 - The First Chapel

While we're on this little run of firsts, here's one more: the first mission building dedicated solely to the worship of God. In his letter to the Board, dated 12 August 1876, McGilvary reported that, "About two months ago I built a small bamboo worship center or chapel on one corner of our lot on the public road. It has been a very successful experiment so far." He noted that the chapel was filled with worshippers on several occasions to the point that some were left standing. This is the only mention of this first chapel that I've come across, and we could wish for some more details. How big was it? Which corner was it on? How long was it used? Were there seats or did they sit on mats on the floor? If the experience of other churches is any guide, it was almost certainly a modest, bamboo hut and didn't last very long. At least we can pin the date down to the month. The Laos Mission started using its first chapel in June 1876.

HeRD #692 - A Bigger, Better Building

As we saw in HeRD #691, the Laos Mission started using its first chapel, a temporary bamboo structure, sometime in June 1876. It saw this little chapel as but the first step towards a larger, more impressive church building, and put in a bold request to the Board for funding to that end. Board officials in New York were quick to complain that it sounded like the mission wanted a building well beyond the means of the native church. They also noted that the permanence of the mission was still in question, which fact made investment in large buildings unwise. McGilvary responded in a 6 December 1877 letter that the mission expected that ultimately the church would have to build its own buildings, find its own pastors, and establish its own schools. He went on, "But in the meantime we do not think it wise to here have no better church built than our little handful of Christians could aid in building. We need one good church in every place of sufficient importance to establish a mission." McGilvary concluded that

building such a chapel as the mission envisioned would in and of itself promote its permanence esp. in the eyes of the populace.

In the 1870s every important mission decision had to weigh a number of factors, public relations and political considerations being prominent among them. Building a chapel was no exception. Temporary, little bamboo ones sent the wrong messages, that is that the mission and the church faced an uncertain future. A bold, big building would prove otherwise. The mission gave due importance to self-support issues, but put them off to a future date when the church was larger and more secure. In hindsight we can question this ordering of priorities, esp. since it persisted throughout the history of the mission, but in doing so we must take into account the murky, uncertain situation facing the mission and its converts in the 1870s. The search for a more secure future weighed heavily on the missionaries' minds.

HeRD #693 - Prolegomena

Daniel McGilvary's letter to the Board of 4 December 1872 will one day feature prominently in the first chapter of a history of the role of women in the Laos Mission. Surveying the situation of the mission at that time, he urged in the strongest terms the need of the mission for more women workers. McGilvary took particular note of the role several powerful northern Thai women played politically, notable among them Chao Tipkesorn, daughter of the late Chao Kawilorot and wife of Chao Intanon, the new Prince of Chiang Mai. He went on to observe that northern Thai women lived under "no great restraints" and that socially they were nearly the equal of men. "So that while there may not be that peculiar call for female labor that there is where females are kept in seclusion and are not seen by males, there is still that advantage that enlightened woman ever exerts over her own sex." He has hesitated in requesting single women, however, only because of the isolation of the North. It would depend on the individual woman's ability to be content with very little society and, thus, with just her work.

A few observations: First, not all male missionaries took McGilvary's relatively enlightened attitude towards women on the mission field. Second, however, it's also clear that McGilvary expected that women missionaries would work and influence would be limited to other women. Third, his words also seem to imply that being a young, single woman was in and of itself a potential handicap to joining the Laos Mission. It's unlikely he would have written similarly of young, single male missionaries. Fourth, it's also worth noting that even after living in Thailand for 14 years without a furlough, McGilvary still thought of Chiang Mai as being "socially isolated." It's as if, socially, the tens of thousands of northern Thai who lived in close proximity to the mission didn't even exist. McGilvary, in sum, took what we would now call a fairly open attitude for his day towards the role of women missionaries, but he was still very much a man of his own times. For the record, however, we should note that he was instrumental in getting the Laos Mission's first single women, Edna Cole and Mary Campbell, to the field. They arrived in 1879.

HeRD #694 - Lithographic Press I

The northern Thai church's past encompasses dozens and hundreds of events and themes just waiting for someone to come along and turn them into histories. One could write a respectable, scholarly tome on the history of missionary printing alone. The story began well before the mission was founded as McGilvary planned and schemed to get a press into the North. In the early 1870s, it looked for a time like he might be successful.

Jonathan Wilson, apparently, brought the very first press, a small lithographic press, with him in 1868, but in spite of much tinkering he couldn't make it work. No mention is made of it in

the missionary correspondence after October 1868. In late 1870, however, references to another and much larger lithographic press do begin to appear. In December 1870, McGilvary expressed regret that the boxes containing the press were so large and heavy no one was willing to bring them up river. Then in April 1871, he reported that the mission sent a special boat down just to get that press. And, finally, after almost another year of silence, McGilvary informed the Board in February 1872 that Wilson was unpacking the press and setting it up. It wasn't until September, however, that Wilson reported his frustrations with the press. He had endless problems with the ink. It either wouldn't dissolve sufficiently or it dissolved to the point of being useless. Then, there was the manual. It was in German, and Wilson couldn't make heads nor tails of it. Eventually he even tried to make his own ink, but again to no avail.

The Board heard nothing further about the press until a full year later, September 1873, when Wilson mentioned in passing that since the hot season he'd been either too sick or too busy to give the press any attention. His strength was esp. drained by the burdens of mission work because his family was on the field alone. His health, in sum, was just too broken to work on the lithographic press. After this brief reference, that press too passed into the great graveyard of historical silence. From 1874 onwards, the mission began to lay plans for obtaining a regular press.

HeRD #695 - Lithographic Press II

As we saw in HeRD # the Laos Mission's first concerted effort to import a press into Chiang Mai ended in failure. We can't help but wonder what happened to the press itself. Did it collect rust in some shed or under a grass roof on a back corner of the mission compound? Was it cannibalized for parts? We don't even know where Wilson set it up in the first place.

There are some obvious points to be made from this failure concerning the difficulties in importing major Western technologies into Chiang Mai in the 1870s. A press, even a lithographic one, couldn't stand alone. Aside from supplies and spare parts as well as a shipping system able to handle heavy equipment, it required a certain level of technical expertise that was beyond Wilson and McGilvary. Dr. Marion Cheek made just that point in a 21 August 1875 letter to the Board, noting that what it came down to in the end was a matter of finances. Establishing a working press in Chiang Mai would be very costly, and he implied that the only thing it would be good for was printing Bibles. He felt that it would be a long time before the Bible would be translated. Cheek argued that the money could be better spent in something over more value to the people of Chiang Mai, such as a school taught in central Thai. Events proved Cheek correct about the press and about the translation of the Bible into northern Thai, which was never completed.

On the other hand, we can't just simply say that the lithographic press was doomed to failure. IF the ink had worked, or IF one of the missionaries could have read German, or IF one of them had more technical expertise in printing things might have worked out differently. The prospects weren't good, again, as events proved. But that doesn't mean a different outcome was impossible, just unlikely.

HeRD #696 - Assistants

In September 1869 Chao Kawilorot took effective, if violent, steps to bring the Christianization of northern Thailand to a halt. Although he failed to throw the missionaries out of Chiang Mai, he was otherwise successful. It took the Laos Mission a decade or more to recover, if it really ever did. Prior to Bloody September, McGilvary was already discussing ordination for at least one member of the fledgling church founded just a year earlier. In a 1

November 1875 letter to the Board he returned to his concern to establish a "native" leadership as quickly as possible. He wrote, "No burden weighs so heavily on my own mind now as the prayer that God will raise up laborers among the Laos themselves. From our distant and isolated position we cannot hope to have a large reinforcement of foreign laborers."

McGilvary, given the era, was relatively enlightened concerning the question of opening up leadership opportunities to converts. It's not clear, however, that he was so enlightened about empowering that leadership with full authority. He went on to state, "The substantial character of the Laos as a race will I have no doubt enable more to be accomplished through native assistants than in many other heathen lands." This sentence requires a close exegesis. First, it deals with future, expected native leadership as a matter of race, rather than individuals. This suggests that there exists an objective set of leadership skills, necessary everywhere and everywhen, and the northern Thai most likely had a better than average grasp of those skills. For heathens. The concept of "heathenism" is an important qualifier here because it suggests limitations on those skills not shared by enlightened peoples. Hence, McGilvary used the words "native assistants" quite naturally and innocently. His words assume that the mission itself would continue to exercise leadership, but do it through the agency of native assistants. They would form a middle level between the mission and the church.

The image of "native assistants" is a powerful one in the Laos Mission's correspondence, one that lingered for several decades. It was, in effect, mission policy to limit the power of its native leaders and retain for itself final authority in the oversight of all church and institutional work. That policy sprang from ethnocentric prejudices about heathenism that helps to explain some of the weaknesses northern Thai churches have experienced right down to the present.

HeRD #697 - A Conversion Failed & A Point Missed

Missionary records, naturally, highlight evangelistic successes and tend to pass over failures. In a letter published in the FOREIGN MISSIONARY, February 1870, however, Daniel McGilvary reports on the case of one inquirer who backed off from his interest in Christianity. This unnamed individual first made contact with the missionaries while he was in Chiang Mai working on one of several public works projects ordered by Chao Kawilorot, the Prince of Chiang Mai, and carried out in 1868-1869. He seemed very close to conversion at that time, but then he returned to his home village and nothing more was heard from him. The missionaries sent Nan Inta, their first convert, out to investigate, and he reported back that the man declared that he had decided he would never worship Jesus. He would be saved or lost with his own people.

This is one of only a few instances in the missionary record where we hear through them the voice of those who rejected Christianity. It seems, in this case, that McGilvary failed to understand the reason for that rejection. He observed that, "Some, of course, have real doubts as to the entire falsity of Buddhism; some hold back to see if the authorities will make any opposition, while others cannot storm the opposition of their own families." The failed converts' point was different: Christianity was not the religion of his own people. His decision had nothing to do with doubts, political pressure, or family opposition. As he understood it, he couldn't any longer be a part of his own people if he became a Christian. We can only speculate how many others might have felt the same way.

What's interesting is that McGilvary could hardly admit that rejection of Christianity might be a positive act of conscience. For him it amounted, mostly, to cowardice or weakness, or at the very most a failure to see the "entire falsity" of Buddhism. He and his colleagues in the Laos Mission lived in a very different cognitive world from the people they were trying to

convert, and I'd suggest that that fact in and of itself was a major obstacle to their desire to convert the North to Christianity.

HeRD #698 - The Family Alien

Pa (Aunt) Kammool deserves special attention in the history of the northern Thai church, not only because she was one of the first two baptized women converts so much as for the price she paid for conversion. Baptized in January 1876, she soon thereafter fell into problems with her family. McGilvary related the story to the Board in a letter of 12 August 1876. In July 1876, Pa Kammool's brother, who was the kamlang (patrician) of her family asked her to make a contribution to the "demonolatry of the family." She refused, and the brother then called her and her husband, Nan Inta, to a family conference. During that meeting, he spoke harshly to the couple and threatened specifically to take her case to the Chao Muang (Prince) of Chiang Mai. McGilvary went on to write, "She told him that as to that he might do as he pleased but that she was never going to worship the spirits. She was willing to redeem herself for life by paying to the FAMILY a small sum, but that she could not again join the family directly or indirectly in their worship. The brother somewhat calmed down and said he would consider that proposition, though insisting still that his sister should be an alien to the family." (emphasis in original)

This episode deserves a book's worth of commentary, but just a one thought will suffice here. We glimpse again the northern Thai genius for creating realities to fit necessities. In effect, Pa Kammool proposed to pay off her animistic obligations in one lump sum. It's just that she didn't CALL it that. She stated that she was compensating the family, implying that the family could do what it wanted with the money. The distinction between contributing to animistic rites and compensating the family instead is a fine one at best. McGilvary, however, approved of this gambit, suggesting that perhaps nearly a decade in Chiang Mai had somewhat softened his attitude about compromises with "heathenism". Compromises could be accepted so long as they just weren't labeled "compromise".

More on Pa Kammool in our next HeRD.

HeRD #699 - The Risk of Alienation

HeRD #698 reported on Pa Kammool, one of the first baptized women converts in northern Thailand. Some months after her conversion, she went through a trying time with her family, a time when she risked being virtually exiled for her refusal to participate in its animistic practices. Her courage in the face of family pressure deserves a further comment.

In the context of her times and culture, taking such a risk was surely unusual and impressively brave. She was willing to cut herself from significant parts of her former life for the sake of her new religion. Why? There were probably several factors involved including, among others, personal faith. It's also possible that her big brother's attitude galled her, and she felt she didn't have to take this sort of nonsense from him. Conversion meant accepting missionary patronage, so her desire to affirm her new loyalties over her old may also have been at work. Her husband was the first baptized Christian in the North and had himself paid a considerable price in anxiety and persecution for his conversion. Pa Kammool might have also desired to affirm her willingness to share in her husband's burdens. All of this is speculative, of course, but not unreasonable for that. Although pious myth-makers might want to transform Pa Kammool into a Heroine of the Faith, it's much more likely that she had to consider a number of factors in her resistance to her older brother's rage. These included religious, social, and patronage issues as well as her relationships to her spouse and children. It may well be, for example, that she also wanted to liberate her own nuclear family from an oppressive situation

and set her children on a course that she deemed better for them. There were surely other factors at work that we have no knowledge of.

It's important to remember, however, that some northern Thai's found in Christianity a faith worth taking substantial social risks for and worth suffering for. Families such as that of Pa Kammool and Nan Inta had to reconstruct family life in a new mode, a Christian mode. We don't understand very well at all how they went about doing it.

HeRD #700 - Returning to a Different Home

In November and December 1876, the Laos Mission baptized five converts, including one woman and four men. In a 4 December 1876 letter to the Board, Daniel McGilvary reported that all of them had spent more or less time in the mission's makeshift hospital. That experience had an important impact on their lives.

Of one of them, the 70 year-old Nan Panya, McGilvary wrote, "Nan Panya after being in the hospital a month, was dismissed and returned to his home ? but it was not the same home to him again. Previous to this, he had spent his sacred days in the temple making merit being even more religious than Nan Inta had been. That had lost all its interest to him. The scales had fallen from his eyes. To use his own words - he found on his return that his HEART was no longer here. He had caught a glimpse of the beauty of him who is altogether lovely. The villagers wondered what spell had come over him to keep him from the temple and his idols. There was a general mourning over his defection. That HE should give up all his store of merit, the accumulation of a devotee of three score years and ten and become crazy over the notion of the foreign teachers was surely a sad comment on human stability [?] from their stand point. He was THE one man of the village of whom all of this would not have been expected." (Emphasis in the original).

As always in such accounts, we have to make allowance for McGilvary's pious interpretation of events. We don't know how Nan Panya himself would have explained his conversion. All we can be sure of is that he placed himself under the medical care of the mission for a month and then converted. Yet, McGilvary isn't too far wrong in suggesting that Nan Panya experience a significant shift in his religious world view. To those who didn't share in that shift, he surely appeared to be some combination of crazy, perverse, or stupid. It's also likely that his old way of life did become suddenly alien to him. Like Pa Kammool (see HeRDs #698 and 699), he too had become an alien in his own home.

HeRD #701 - More Thoughts on Alienation

The experiences of Pa Kammool and Nan Panya (HeRDs #698-700) point to central issues in the life of the northern Thai church, particularly the issue of the relationship of the church to northern Thai culture and society. There are two issues involved here, and they aren't always as carefully distinguished as they should be. The first is the change in one's way of thinking and acting that not infrequently follows conversion. If these two cases are any gauge, it seems inevitable that conversion would lead to a certain amount of social alienation, sometimes a significant amount. In the cognitive world of the North in the 1870s, traditional religion wasn't just "traditional". It was all there was. It was taken to be as true as any physical reality, perhaps even more true. Rejection of it could be taken as a sign of mental illness. A scandal. A moral evil. A stupid, wasteful act that introduced unwanted tension among family members and between neighbors. It's possible that the missionary demand that the converts make clean breaks with traditional religion accentuated social alienation. On a deeper level, however, changing one's religion, however gradually or circumspectly, was going to change one's social

relationships. Some degree of social alienation seems inevitable. This seems to have been the case, frequently, in the church in New Testament times. Converts felt constrained to change their social relationships, which act involved them in social tension and alienation.

There is a second issue, however, one that has to do with the more difficult issue of cultural alienation. Pa Kammool and Nan Panya joined what was becoming a distinct counter-culture whose ways are overtly, obviously different from the larger culture. The early church generally didn't experience alienation from its cultural surroundings. Social structures, cultural life-ways, and moral values remained the same within the churches as they were in the larger society, something not true of the northern Thai Christian counter-culture. As described in earlier HeRDs, early Christians were frequently "single aliens" from their social surroundings. Northern Thai converts, on the other hand, experienced a "double alienation." (see HeRDs #357 and #369, May 1997). I'd only add here that Christian faith frequently involves a degree of alienation from one's surrounding society. Cultural alienation, however, isn't inevitable. Or even desirable.

HeRD #702 - Familiarisation

Last March, I learned how to pound rice. The technology is simple, but the skills involved aren't, at least not for someone who comes to it later in life. One has to dispense with academic "learning strategies" and fancy theory and enter into a very basic learning process. Shigeharu Tanabe calls this type of learning "familiarisation," the transfer of knowledge related to farming. He writes, "Farming technology...is taught and transmitted rather non-discursively, mainly through a pattern of bodily postures and movements. Its associated knowledge is also conveyed through verbal and bodily forms such as sayings, songs, dances, and in some cases involves more complicated ritual practices. In the most simple case, mastering such a skill means learning how to handle a tool so that through rhythmic movements that flow naturally from human physiology it bestows an extension to human powers." Tanabe continues, "The mastery of any sequence of farming is attained almost exclusively through watching, imitating and incorporating the bodily prescriptions given in a discursive form." (ECOLOGY AND PRACTICAL TECHNOLOGY, p. 11). All of us, of course, are past masters at familiarisation else we couldn't have learned to function in society. Elements in our formal education are also taught through familiarisation, such as writing. Musicians are particularly adept at this style of learning.

If we think back to the 1870s, the Laos Mission found itself in a society in which familiarisation was the dominant learning strategy. Even formal education depended on rote learning, which we can take to be a form of familiarisation. The mission, on the other hand, was an Old School Presbyterian mission that believed that faith began in the mind, in rational reflection. True piety had to be rational before it could be warm. It depended on the mastery of a body of knowledge associated with a book. It's not that these missionaries didn't understand familiarisation. Not a few of them were creative practical technologists themselves, but their faith was not one to be acquired by familiarisation. One of the central challenges they faced, then, was finding ways to teach their religion that melded into the ways the vast majority of northern Thais were used to learning. The way they chose to do this was by introducing Western education along with Christianity. They, in other words, decided to fit northern Thais to their teaching strategies rather than their teaching strategies to northern Thai ways of learning. Whether or not this was the "right" thing to do, it was an extremely difficult thing to do. It meant importing and popularizing an array of Western educational techniques.

HeRD #703 - Reversion

Laos Mission correspondence is filled with instances where the ill turned to missionary medicine to find cures that traditional medical practices failed to provide. We should note, however, that this particular road wasn't just one way. Wilson's letter to the Board of 15 March 1875 provides a rare glimpse of the reverse process. An inquirer, who had lived with the Wilsons for a time and had shown a serious interest in Christianity, became ill. Wilson told him that his case was probably terminal, and the man at first seemed resigned to accept "what God had in store for him." But, then, he left the mission compound and returned to his home where he had the "spirit-doctors" visit him. They performed their rituals and tied strings on him. He got better, and Wilson reported with clear disappointment that the man later lied to him that this was all done while he was too ill to know what was going on. His friends did it to him. Wilson didn't believe a word of it. There's no indication, in any event, that he ever became a Christian.

Western medical knowledge and practice in northern Thailand in the mid-1870s was still rudimentary at best. It could effect what seemed to be miraculous cures in some cases, but not in others. The first two missionary doctors in the North, Charles Vrooman and Marion Cheek, both complained of a lack of patients. Traditional practices more than held their own for several decades in the medical war the mission had declared on them from its inception in 1867.

HeRD #704 - The Bliss of Ignorance

Recent HeRDs indicated that the Laos Mission faced considerable obstacles in importing Western printing into Chiang Mai in the 1870s. It was partly a matter of infrastructure, or rather the lack of infrastructure that was the problem. But, in some cases, the political situation of the 1870s also worked against importation. In a letter to the Board dated 15 March 1875, Wilson complained about Chao Intanon, the Prince of Chiang Mai, and his brother, Chao Buntawong, the Chao Uparat or so-called "Second King". Chao Intanon told Wilson that the people of Chiang Mai weren't interested in Western-style education. He didn't seem to want Western schools for them. Wilson grumbled that, "The King & this brother are both ignorant of reading & writing. Unable to read themselves why should they wish the common people to know the advantages of a school?"

In Bunthawong's case, it wasn't just a matter of ignorance. He was strongly anti-missionary and anti-Christian, and he surely didn't want to see missionary-sponsored education established in Chiang Mai. Chao Intanon, as we've seen in earlier HeRD's, was a friend of the Laos Mission. We've also seen that in the 1870s he faced a difficult political situation because Chao Buntawong was very influential. Chao Intanon more probably simply couldn't be seen as too soft on the missionaries, hence his apparent lack of enthusiasm for Western education. It's also possible that he really didn't see the value of missionary education.

HeRD #705 - I Need A Hospital

Dr. Marion Cheek is the most infamous Presbyterian missionary to have served in northern Thailand. After a few years with the mission, he turned to business and is reputed to have kept a stable of minor wives. His wife left him. His former colleagues in the mission all but disowned him. And the truth is he never really accomplished very much as a physician. The following may be a reason, or an excuse, for why that was so.

Writing in August 1875, some months after his arrival in March, Cheek explained to the Board the difficulties of his situation in Chiang Mai. He wrote, "...I have done no work. I have been studying the language a part of the time; but I have not had an opportunity of doing any medical work since I came here. And, indeed the prospect in the future, I must say, is not cheering. Unless I have a hospital here, my medical work will be a failure. I may give out

medicine to any who come for it and visit as many as I can; but this will do little good except to relieve suffering to a slight extent. I would be able to reach only a very few in this way. I could visit only a small number, and my practice would be very unsatisfactory both to the patient and my self. The people are scattered and few in number." The people of Chiang Mai, he urged, were small in number and scattered. He emphasized that, "A hospital is NECESSARY if a medical man is expected to do enough work to justify keeping him here."

McGilvary must have been sorely disappointed in Cheek, even before Cheek left the mission. Indeed, McGilvary had himself shown that "merely" dispensing medicines had relieved more than a little suffering and had gained him an active lay medical practice. McGilvary, furthermore, never saw medical missions as an end in itself. It was a key weapon, rather, in the fight against northern Thai "superstition". Cheek's words and his actions suggest that he wasn't much interested in the evangelistic aspects of his profession. They also show that he wanted to practice medicine in Chiang Mai just as he would have in his home state of North Carolina. So, perhaps we should conclude that, in addition to other obstacles to Westernization we've mentioned in recent HeRDs, the persons of the Westernizers themselves could be an obstacle to that process.

HeRD #706 - I Need Medicines

In HeRD 705# we saw that Dr. Marion Cheek took a somewhat narrow view of how he should proceed in establishing a missionary medical practice in Chiang Mai. Although a trained physician, he seemed less able to doctor the people of Chiang Mai than did McGilvary, the experienced lay practitioner. In all fairness, we should also note that Cheek faced a very basic problem, esp. in his first year. He wrote in September 1875 that he hadn't been able to dispense any medicines since May because his general supply had run dry. This brings us right back to that problem of a lack of infrastructure to support missionary attempts at modernization.

HeRD #707 - Why?

Why did northern Thais convert to Christianity? A McGilvary letter dated 22 October 1877 offers some insights into the complexity of this question. He reported on four recently baptized converts. The first, Pa (Aunt) Kwang, had a son-in-law who converted in 1876. McGilvary writes, "She was interested at that time but could not make up her mind to resist the opposition of her friends. She again went to the temple but her eyes had been opened and she could not enter with her [illegible]. She is happy now in having made a final decision on the Lord's side." The other three all first came to the missionaries looking for medicine. McGilvary continues, "One of them belongs to a family in which there is leprosy and there is some fear that he may ultimately become a victim. He has been under a course of treatment and it is to be hoped that the symptoms may be at least mitigated."

Pa Kwang's conversion seems to have been for largely religious reasons. Contacts with Christianity, if McGilvary is correct, led her to feel dissatisfied with her former faith. In spite of social pressure, she ultimately converted. The potential leper patient, on the other, may have been more interested in non-religious benefits from conversion. We can't be sure, but he may have calculated that it was wiser to ingratiate himself with the missionaries, even if he didn't have to convert to get medical care. We know nothing about the remaining two, except that they'd received missionary medical care.

The results of these cases and many others reported in the missionary literature don't add up to a single conclusion, although medical care is frequently mentioned as a catalyst for conversion. It's important, however, to highlight this lack of conclusive data as a caution to

those who would rush to judgment concerning the reasons people converted. The data we have, for example, doesn't prove that most converts were rice Christians. On the other hand, it's clear that relatively few converted for "purely" religious reasons. It needs to be stated yet again that conversion was a complex process involving any number of factors depending on the persons involved.

HeRD #708 - The Fall of Mt. Meru

Daniel McGilvary was an Old School Presbyterian and a "scholastic Calvinist." He put great store in rational expressions of the faith and in learning as the avenue to obtaining faith. It was quite natural for him, thus, to emphasize scientific and cosmological themes in his evangelism because he firmly believed that the solid, scientific world revealed its Creator. Creation, scientifically understood, was as sure a witness to God as was the Bible. Supposed contradictions between science and the Scriptures were due to incomplete data or faulty interpretations of the data. Thus, in the mid-1870s McGilvary entered into a scientific dialogue with Chao Rat Lamkan, a man of high rank who McGilvary considered to be by far the most intelligent man in the North. McGilvary taught him the rudiments of geography and astronomy, and together they studied the stars with a small sea glass belonging to McGilvary. At first Chao Rat Lamkan refused to question northern Thai cosmology, which put the great Mt. Meru at the center of the universe. Eventually, however, he admitted to McGilvary that either the Buddha or his disciples had been mistaken about cosmology, and he even worked out for himself further "proofs of the Copernican system." (McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1876, Board of Foreign Missions Records).

The historical study of northern Thailand has paid little if any attention to the significance of encounters such as these. The Laos Mission seems to have been a significant importer of new ideas, and it was the only agent of Westernization that systematically engaged northern Thais in debates on cosmological and religious questions. McGilvary, in particular, evidently invested many hours to such discussions as these with many different individuals. He was the first science teacher in the North, the purveyor of a powerful new way of interpreting reality that has long since driven traditional thinking of the field and out of the schools of northern Thailand. That process began with him.

HeRD #709 - Mt. Meru's Fall Again

In HeRD #708 we saw how McGilvary entered into an extensive dialogue with a number of northern Thais about cosmological and scientific questions. He seemed quite adept at convincing learned northern Thais that their former beliefs about reality were incorrect. He hoped that he could show them that both their cosmology and their religion were false. The Bible and science were true, and therefore they should accept the findings of both science and Christianity. In later years, however, sometime after the 1870s, this theme disappears from his correspondence entirely. He seems to have given up on the dialogue about science. The reason almost surely was that, except for an exceptional case or two, people didn't convert because of his arguments. Indeed, it seemed to make no difference to northern Thais that traditional Buddhist cosmology turned out to be wrong. They could accept that Buddhism was wrong in some ways, but still not wrong in the ways that mattered. The same pattern was played out in Bangkok, where even King Mongkut had fully accepted the Western, scientific world view. He remained, at the same time, a committed follower of the Buddha.

The Presbyterian missionaries of the 19th century, didn't understand that it was possible to give oneself to a religious path that didn't claim to know the whole truth. They put ultimate store in their faith in a perfect Scriptures revealing a Perfect God and God's Perfect Son. For them,

ultimately, Truth must be perfect, without blemish. Which is to say that they didn't understand the religious genius of the Thai people, a religious genius that equates perfection with a calm, peaceful praxis. It's a genius that seeks truth primarily in practice rather than cosmology and theology.

HeRD #710 - Davy Crockett

For those who may not know of him, Davy Crockett was an American frontiersman of the earlier 19th century. Although a historical figure, numerous legends and tall tales grew up around him. Among the most cherished of those tales is the story of how he died in 1836 in battle along with a small force of hardy fighters defending the Alamo during the Texas War of Independence. A whole generation of Americans grew up on Walt Disney TV episodes that culminated with Davy swinging his rifle against the horde of Mexican troops swarming over the parapet. Now, it appears that this final episode in Davy Crockett's life never happened. Jos[◆] Enrique de la Pe-a, an officer in the Mexican army, kept a diary in which the storming of the Alamo is detailed. According to the diary, Crockett was captured alive, along with six other men. He didn't die fighting. He surrendered, only to have the Mexican general, Santa Anna, order him tortured and executed.

De la Pe-a's diary has caused something of an uproar in Texas. There's a feeling that Crockett's heroism is diminished and called into question by the diary. There are numerous charges, as a result, that it's a fake, especially because it surfaced suddenly in the 1950s with no indications of where it had been for the previous century. Those academics who defend it have come in for abuse, and the whole matter has caused enough stir to find its way into the popular press and on-line. One scholar, in an effort to calm the waters of controversy, has subjected the diary to rigorous scientific testing. Those tests show that the paper and ink are authentic and that the diary could not have been written in more recent times. Still the controversy rages. Some people, evidently, don't want their Disney Davy tampered with. If there's a point here, it's simply to highlight once again how important to us our images of the past are--whether or not they do have much to do with the actual past.

HeRD #711 - Research Consultation I

In December of last year, some twenty individuals attended a three-day consultation on church-related research in Thailand (Dec. 15-17) sponsored by the Office of History, Church of Christ in Thailand. Dr. Philip Hughes was our chief speaker and consultant. It was held primarily in English, and most of the participants were expatriates working in Thailand, many of whom have research experience. Some are currently involved in research. Several Thai participants, however, kept us firmly rooted in the Thai church. The consultation was loosely structured and not aimed at any so-called practical ends, except to allow the participants an opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. The consultation focused not on the results of research but on the research process itself, and for several HeRDs to come, I'd like to share themes and insights from that consultation with you.

To begin at the end, one of the central tensions the consultation revealed was between past and future foci on research. For the most part, our vision for research was firmly fixed on past and present issues, especially the ever fascinating and perplexing issue of indigenization or contextualization. Philip Hughes brought to us, however, a different perspective, one based on his years of research in Australia and his knowledge of social and religious trends in other countries. He is convinced that young people in their 20's and under are moving in new religious directions that will render the question of indigenization meaningless. This is a global trend. Young people look on religions more as providing a set of resources for life and less as being

communities for living life. They pick and chose from each religion things that are useful to them, such as Buddhist meditation or Christian concepts of service. In Australia, thus, "religiosity" is on the rise. More people than ever feel themselves to be religious. Church attendance and participation, however, are on the decline. Even the rate of growth among the Pentecostals has declined significantly.

Philip's comments suggest an obvious shift in the focus of research, from past issues to future ones. The issue is no longer how the Christian community contextualizes itself into the Thai scene, but what types of resources it will provide Thai people and how it will structure itself to provide those resources. To a degree, answers to that question depend on the church better fitting itself to Thai contexts, but the shift in focus is crucial. And I have to confess that we didn't seem to know quite what to do with it.

HeRD #712 - Research Consultation II

The consultation on church-related research sponsored by the Office of History in December '98 featured two panels of three persons each. The first panel spoke to the experiences that have been gained from past research. The second looked towards future directions. Nearly all of the panelists set the stage for their presentations with biographical remarks that one of them summed up best when he stated that, "My research process is part of my personal journey." It was clear that biography played an important part in both the subjects people choose for research and the methodologies they pursue in their research. There was a tendency, however, to see all of this in a negative light, as if personal perspective and commitment necessarily introduced a distorting bias into the research process. It corrupts the data. My own feeling, shared with the consultation, is that we make too much of the inability of humans to know the Truth. We spend too much time lamenting our inability to attain Truly True Truth and escape the poison of our biases. Perspectives can help us see things that others might not see. Commitment drives us towards the truth as frequently as it does away, for right commitment seeks to ground itself in clear seeing.

The consultation, in any event, seemed to be very conscious of the person of the researcher as integral to the research process. It raised questions about the relative merits of outside researchers, as opposed to researchers who come from within the context of research. Some participants were esp. sensitive to power issues, particularly the power research gives to the researcher. There was genuine concern that research not be intrusive and that it be built on a certain level of mutual trust between the researcher and those being researched. At least one participant felt that foreign researchers weren't likely to achieve an adequate level of trust or of objectivity needed to collect quality data.

HeRD #713 - Research Consultation III

The consultation on church-related research sponsored by the Office of History felt that one of the greatest obstacles to church-related research is its lack of organization. There's little sense of who's doing what. It's difficult to locate materials or to know what's been done on any given subject. Several participants agreed that church-related researchers need a regular forum for coming together and regular means for sharing information. It was generally agreed that there's a need for a web site. Beyond that, the participants seemed to disagree on how organized church-related research in Thailand should become. Some called for a formal association or for a "Christian Research Center" that would serve as a channel of communication for church-related research. Still others suggested that Thailand should have a Christian Research Association, such as is found in Britain, New Zealand, and Australia. Further discussion, however, revealed a sense that Thailand isn't ready for such formal structures. In the end, there was a general agreement

that there is a need, at least, for a regular meeting, perhaps every other year if not every year, at which church-related researchers can meet. The consultation itself seemed to be a possible format. Various participants pointed to the need for indexes and bibliographies and the need to sensitize the larger church to the need for research.

The final session of the consultation articulated a five-point plan for the building of a church-related research infrastructure in Thailand. First. Establish an independent research agency, possibly along the lines of the New Zealand Christian Research Association, which has a governing board but no regular employees. Other models were also proposed. Second. Hold annual or biennial consultations. Third. Initiate useful projects while at the same time publicizing the idea that research is important. Fourth. Set up a web site as the core mechanism for promoting networking among researchers. Fifth. Begin to train church people, esp. church leaders, to be capable information users. In all of these discussions, the consultation staggered between visionary possibilities on the one hand and perceived limitations on the other. The most difficult obstacle facing us in these discussions was that we have little sense of who is doing what and where at the moment.

HeRD #714 - Research Consultation IV

The December research consultation had two invited guests, Philip Hughes (see HeRD #711) and Mr. Mark Henman. Mark is a doctoral student with the Melbourne College of Divinity doing research in Kanchanaburi Province on the religious relations between two closely related villages, one Catholic and one Buddhist. Both villages migrated from the Northeast some years ago. In the course of his research, Mark has come to emphasize the importance of non-verbal forms of communication in inter-religious relations. Mark reminded the consultation that humans communicate significant amounts of meaning non-verbally, but students of inter-religious dialogue have entirely ignored the non-verbal aspects of dialogue. A careful observation of those aspects has revealed to Mark the fact that people convey religious meaning through the way they conduct themselves in their daily, mundane lives. In the case of the two villages he's studying, Mark has found that while there is little or no verbal discussion of religious subjects, both have strong perceptions of the beliefs of the other, based on perceived actions as well as participation in each others' festivals.

Mark has hit on what seems to be a potentially very useful research tool for the study of church life in a number of ways, not just inter-faith dialogue. What would we discover, for example, if we subjected local church worship services to this type of study? What do our services communicate non-verbally? It would be fascinating to study congregational forms of non-verbal communication. Is it possible, for example, that low attendance at worship is related partly to non-verbal messages that leave people uneasy or downright unhappy? There seems to be a lot of fruitful potential here.

HeRD #715 - Research Consultation V

One of the participants in the December research consultation, from the Philippines, raised the question of foreigners doing research in Thailand or with Thai churches. He asked if Thais, esp. in the villages, aren't suspicious of the intentions of foreign researchers. He suggested that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the foreign researcher to obtain accurate data. Indeed, he argued that in general outsiders aren't going to get good data from villagers. Since most of the participants in the consultation are Westerners, these questions and observations struck home in an important way.

One of the Thai participants, however, disagreed that local Thai people would deny a foreign researcher good data out of an inherent suspicion of the researcher. He suggested that quite the opposite is the case. He stated, "We admire farang and the scientific approach, so having foreigners do research is quite acceptable." He thought that in some cases the foreign researcher would be perceived as a less of a threat and would be easier to talk to. People, that is, could share things with an outsider that they wouldn't open up about to other people in their own community.

Further discussion suggested that the issue involved in one of intrusiveness. How intrusive is the researcher? Does the researcher build trust? Do people sense that they might get some benefit from sharing the truth as they see it with the researcher? The general sense of the consultation was that in Thai research contexts the context itself doesn't impose inherent limitations. There are, however, questions about the language capabilities of the foreigner, the use of translators, and how sensitive the foreigner is to imposing foreign meanings on Thai data. The initial question concerning the relationship of the researcher to those being researched was important, however, as it promoted reflection on a whole range of issues that any researcher should be sensitive to. It also opened up the further question of power relationships, which we'll look at in the next HeRD.

HeRD #716 - Research Consultation VI

Power issues are among the most difficult ones facing a researcher. A number of participants in the consultation seemed particularly conscious of these issues in terms of church research in Thailand. One person raised the question of who conducts research and the purposes of their research. He urged that church-related research needs to be integrated into the life of the churches. Churches need to learn how to read and use research data.

That sounds right on, but one of the Thai participants immediately responded that the whole question of using data in the church is a murky one. Research and its data can be an avenue to power, and people in the church know this. They often feel ambivalent about or outright distrustful of researchers, and they fear the power that research knowledge gives to the researcher. Another participant noted that the decisions of who does the research and decides what subjects are researched are made outside of the churches themselves. Church-related research, thus, seems to point to the powerlessness of local Thai churches. It's not clear how relevant research is to them, nor is it clear whether or not the data and knowledge that result from research actually empower the churches or aid them in strengthening their life and witness. Still another participant, however, took a different perspective. She noted that power isn't just one thing. There are different types of power, including the power of the Cross. Power, indeed, can be a positive thing and in some situations can open doors to new possibilities. She argued that research can actually be prophetic, that is exercise power in a way that channels God's message into human situations.

Although there was no single conclusion concerning research and power, it seemed to me both important and hopeful that the consultation raised power issues early and remained sensitive to their importance. Whether we draw on the prophetic tradition or a theology of incarnation, it's clear that Christian researchers can't avoid wrestling with their role in relationship to the churches. Motivation. Intention. Methodology. Subjects. Confidentiality. Use of Data. The uses and abuses of power by researchers impact all of these subjects and any others involved in the research process. It's helpful, for me at least, to see these questions as presenting opportunities as well as posing problems.

HeRD #717 - Research Consultation VII

Dr. Pradit Takerugrangsarit spoke to the consultation on church-related research concerning the potential role of such research in the life of the church. He urged, first, that the church needs to use research to discover its role in society and to make the church itself more aware of the world around it. Where the consultation generally had been thinking of the church as the object of research, Dr. Pradit was proposing that it also must become an agency for research. He wondered, for example, how the church could possibly respond to contemporary issues, such as government corruption, apart from research. Second, he lamented the fact that the church and its educational institutions don't put enough emphasis on research and that churches rarely use research to assist in decision-making. This needs to change. Third, Dr. Pradit spoke more generally to the churches' needs for information and for systems of information-sharing. Based on these three points, he called for the establishment of an independent Christian research center, for the training of more Christian researchers, for an informal network of Christian researchers, and for more cooperation between church researchers and researchers in general. He urged on the consultation a concept of "theological research" that will relate church life to the larger world and that will give theological reflection an empirical grounding.

Dr. Pradit brought to the consultation yet a different dimension to the issue of church-related research. He was proposing that we use research as a tool for the indigenization of the church into the real world that it now lives in. This isn't a "classical" form of indigenization that wants to make the church "more Thai" so much as a call for the church to be more fully engaged in the turn-of-the-century Information Age. Dr. Pradit envisions research as an important tool for that indigenization.

HeRD #718 - Research Consultation VIII

Dr. Esther Wakeman spoke to the consultation on church-related research immediately after Dr. Pradit and brought a strikingly different vision for church-related research. She argued for a form of research that would address more personal issues of faith. How does it help us as individuals to be more loving and Christ-like? How can it help us engage in conflict resolution? Such research would be more focused on human relationships within the church. It could, for example, study patterns of conflict within congregations, seeking to understand the sources and the possible solutions to that conflict. She explained that at heart the question was that of grace and how we can understand grace within our social and cultural contexts. How, for example, can we understand and explain grace in a Thai context? Dr. Wakeman summarized her presentation by observing that church-related researchers should conduct their research in a spirit of love for the church. They should be Christ-like individuals.

This presentation sparked a lively discussion. The consultation reflected on the relationship between the internal search of the researcher and the external search carried out in the research. It raised questions concerning the relevance of transcendent goals to the research process. Dr. Wakeman's presentation reminded us that research in the context of the church should be conducted in accordance with the church's concerns and values. It should reflect theological perspectives. Research, thus, isn't just ABOUT the church. It participates in the church's life and journey.

HeRD #719 - Research Consultation IX

The consultation on church-related research in Thailand sponsored by the Office of History last December concluded with a discussion on future directions for research. This was a topic that deserved more time and reflection than the consultation ended having up to devote to it, but three specific suggestions were made for future research.

FIRST, the churches need to have a clearer picture of how labor migration affects the churches themselves and what they might do to respond to labor migration. Although the current economic crisis has witnessed significant reverse-migration, we have to expect that the future holds a return to in-migration of rural people, including Christians into the cities. The churches have largely failed to address this issue, important as it is to the future demographic shape of the nation and the church. SECOND, the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) needs to better understand the role of its tribal churches in its life and future. Tribal churches will soon comprise half of the CCT's membership, but there is a clear reluctance to allow these churches a voice or a role in the CCT's life. THIRD, we need more study of the relationship of local churches to their communities. How do they relate now, and in what ways can we improve those relations?

HeRD #720 - Chao Fa Kolan

Northern Thai church history is replete with the most improbable characters. Chao Fa Kolan is one of my favorite. In a 24 March 1870 letter to the Board, Daniel McGilvary reported on the activities of this "prince of the Northern Shans" who had caused trouble in the North for some three years. Chao Fa Kolan had ruled a Burmese tributary state, but he had lost favor in Burma and fled into Chiang Mai territory. Burma entered into negotiations with Chao Kawilorot, the Prince of Chiang Mai, to get him returned to Burma, and in the process presented him with some gifts. Rumor of these negotiations and gifts reached Bangkok, and Kawilorot was summoned to Bangkok to explain charges that he was about to shift his loyalty to Burma. Whatever the truth of the matter, Kawilorot talked his way out of any trouble. We should note that it was during this trip to Bangkok in 1866 that the McGilvays obtained permission to take up residence in Chiang Mai.

When Chao Kawilorot returned to Chiang Mai, he actually passed up an opportunity to capture Chao Fa Kolan who then turned bandit prince and began to raid northern Thai communities. He eventually became such a threat that Kawilorot raised an army of 10,000 men to chase him down. This army set out in November 1869. McGilvary observed, "There was a time when it was feared the Chaw Fa Kolan might have a force too strong for the Laos and that he might slip around and take the city." The fear proved unfounded. Kolan had only a few hundred men, who were easily routed by the Chiang Mai army. Kolan himself fled back into Burmese territory. A short time later Kawilorot started on his final journey to Bangkok. Kolan took this opportunity to establish himself on Chiang Mai's northwest border, where he again posed a threat to the city. McGilvary concludes by reporting that Chiang Mai's acting authorities acted quickly to form yet another army. Chao Fa Kolan was once again defeated and this time wounded as well. He again fled to Burma and passes out of northern Thai mission records.

Chao Fa Kolan's role in northern Thai church history is a secondary one, but possibly not unimportant. McGilvary's letter indicates that Kolan created a state of anxiety and sense of external threat in Chiang Mai. It may not be coincidental that it was during one of the periods when he appeared to threaten Chiang Mai that Chao Kawilorot initiated his bloody suppression of the embryonic Christian movement. Kolan's depredations and the threat of a new, possibly disloyal religious movement would have contributed to a sense of instability that Kawilorot couldn't ignore. In September 1869 he suppressed the Christians. In November his army defeated Kolan.

HeRD #721 - Another Headache

Although McGilvary had no intention of "contextualizing" the Laos Mission's work in our late 20th century concept of the term, he was keenly aware of the difficulties of communicating Christianity cross-culturally. In its early years the mission couldn't charge for its medical

services. People wouldn't have paid. Dispensing free medical care, however, turned out to be a problem, not only because of the costs involved to the mission but also because the recipients assumed that the missionaries were giving free care to make merit. In a letter to the Board dated 5 February 1872, McGilvary discussed mission plans to begin charging fees to those who could afford to pay them. Doing so would show that the missionaries weren't just trying to "lay in a store of merit." He stated, "It will teach them the difference between the benevolent and the meritorious nature of our work." McGilvary's concern highlights themes that played a key part in the formation of Presbyterian work in the North, particularly the contrast between benevolence and merit-making. "Benevolence" in 19th century American Protestant parlance meant any act that brought people closer to God. It combined notions of evangelism and humanitarianism. [See HeRDs #127-29 and #180] Merit-making conjured up a deeply held Protestant antipathy to humans trying to buy their own way to salvation.

All of this provides yet another example of the strategy the Laos Mission followed in bringing Christianity to northern Thailand. It looked upon indigenous religious ideas and beliefs as threats. No thought seems to have been given to packing merit, a deeply meaningful Thai religious concept, with new meaning. McGilvary, rather, wanted to communicate the concept of benevolence, a deeply meaningful American religious concept, to the people. Given the realities of the situation, there was little hope, none in fact, that the Laos Mission could carry off this feat of replacing a fundamental, northern Thai complex of religious meaning with an American one.

HeRD #722 - Nan Inta's Return

Chao Kawilorot's execution of two of the first seven northern Thai Christians in September 1869 quickly gave rise to a mythic interpretation of that event that has persisted down to the present. Drawing on early church parallels the Laos Mission claimed that the "blood of the martyrs" give rise to the northern Thai church. It didn't. That period of persecution killed the embryonic church that was coming to birth in 1869. It was reborn until several years later. The story of Nan Inta's return to the mission fold in 1872 helps us understand that process.

Nan Inta, you will remember, was the first baptized Christian in northern Thailand. When the bloody events of September 1869 exploded on the church and the mission, he fled for safety. Some 2 and 1/2 years later, in April 1872, Jonathan Wilson wrote the Board that Nan Inta still keep his distance from the missionaries. He stated, "Whether his heart has become indifferent to the gospel, or whether the fear of his master keeps him away from our worship, we know not. We have long hoped for his return, but disappointment & sorrow are all that his present course brings us." In late April, however, Nan Inta attended a little meeting with Wilson, another convert who had fled the September Persecution, and two other men who weren't Christians. It was a stormy night, dark and gloomy as only nights before electricity could be. This small huddle of men talked and shared tales by the flicker of a lantern or two. They also prayed. Wilson reported that Nan Inta prayed a touching prayer that was "full of love for souls and of Christ." This event marked his return to the mission and one step towards the rebirth of the northern Thai church.

HeRD #723 - Window on the Translation Process

Even before the founding of the Laos Mission in 1867, Daniel McGilvary gave thought to translating the Bible into northern Thai. The task proved a long, arduous one, and the mission never did succeed in translating the entire Old Testament. McGilvary wrote a letter to the Board, dated 22 February 1876, that provides some insights into two of the difficulties the Laos Mission faced in translation. He wrote, "I have been devoting all the time I could to finishing and revising my translation of Matth. It is still not all done but I will have it in time for [?] to polish

it." He also asked that the "advance sheets of the new Engl. Bible translation" be sent to him as soon as possible. He was referring to the American Standard Version, which he felt was based on the latest textual criticism. Further comments by McGilvary suggest that he was translating from the English Bible rather than from a Greek text.

The first translation difficulty facing the mission was time [see HeRD #181]. Matthew was the first book the mission translated into northern Thai, and McGilvary was writing nine years after the mission was founded. Later missionary letters refer time and again to the fact that all of their other duties left little time for translation. The second problem was a lack of resources. Even much later than this they had few commentaries on the field. They also lacked the tools and networks of translation consultants available to biblical translators today. It didn't help matters that McGilvary was apparently translating from the King James English Bible rather than Greek. It seems likely that he would have also relied on the central Thai translation as did later missionary translators in the North.

One has to wonder what impact all of this had on the northern Thai church. It was decades before it had even such books as Romans, Galatians, or Isaiah were available. The translation of Jeremiah, evidently, was never completed. Even Mark wasn't available until 1904, some 37 years after the mission was founded. What does it mean to a church to lack Romans or Jeremiah or Mark?

HeRD #724 - Man-eating Giants

Yoko Hayami's doctoral thesis on ritual and religious transformation among the Sgaw Karen (Brown, 1992, pp. 32-33) reports that Karen Christian evangelists began visiting the Karen community of Senyakhi, Chiang Mai Province, in the 1940s. Once a few families began to convert the evangelists told the converts to throw away all of their traditional religious paraphernalia. They also urged them to move away from their traditionalist neighbors because of tension with those neighbors, who threw stones at their services and called the Christians man-eating giants. Hayami observes that these first conversions at Senyakhi must have been difficult for the converts, both because of their own attitudes and because of their neighbors' reactions.

The Senyakhi experience is far from unique in the history of Thai Christianity, and it serves to highlight one of the central historical experiences of many Thai Christian communities. Converts and convert communities not infrequently have become socially isolated and marginalized. The term "outcast" may be too strong in most instances, but the tendency has been to move in that direction. Research a former colleague and I did in Nan Province some years ago discovered that over time Christians in that province have tended to separate themselves from the larger society. In a number of cases they live in their own quarter of the village, and in a few cases all or nearly all of a village is Christian. In the case of the Karen converts in Senyakhi, Hayami states that they soon moved away some distance and formed their own village.

The impetus for separation comes from both sides. The converts develop new attitudes and a new sense of identity. Frequently they come to associate their larger social environment with evil and impurity. Some individuals may begin to engage in more or less aggressive evangelism. Their neighbors, on the other hand, become fearful of the consequences of the failure of the Christians to participate in important religious-animist rites. And that's the point I'd like to emphasize here: in numerous cases Christians and their neighbors seem to be able to agree on only one thing, namely that they shouldn't live together. Both, in fact, fear the consequences of having to live with people who are religiously impure.

HeRD #725 - How Come Christians are Rich?

Yoko Hayami notes in her thesis (see HeRD#724) observes that Karen Christian converts in northern Thailand more frequently than not seem to benefit financially from their conversion. She notes, in particular, that they're able to maintain or increase their land holdings in the decades after conversion (pp. 38-39). She offers four reasons for this: 1. Christian families no longer have to spend some times large sums of money on livestock for ritual sacrifices. Christianity is cheaper. 2. Christian Karen have been more aware of the value of education and had greater access to it. 3. Baptist Karen has a "stringent prohibition" against alcohol and opium, opium being a "major cause of impoverishment." 4. many of the earlier converts are "enterprising and diligent men," and the Christian evangelists emphasized hard work. She concludes, "It is also true that without liquor accompanied by many of the time-consuming ritual and social activities, Christian villagers are left with few choices but to work." (p. 39)

HeRD #726 - Competing Missionary Strategies

Yoko Hayami's doctoral dissertation on "Ritual and Religious Transformation Among Sgaw Karen of Northern Thailand" documents two missionary approaches to traditional Karen religious practices: Christian (Baptist) and Buddhist (Thammacarik). The strategies of each are in some ways a mirror image of each other and reflect not only religious concerns but also cultural attitudes about religion.

Karen Baptist evangelists require that converts make a complete break with traditional Karen religious practices. Ritual paraphernalia is discarded. Chickens and pigs intended for traditional rituals are sold. As a consequence converts also separate themselves from their former communities, including relatives, in a number of ways. In traditional communities, ritual is central to the maintenance of communal and personal well-being. Christians, thus, necessarily break with the community and frequently remove themselves physically from traditional villages. Hayami goes on to note, however, that through their Karen Christian social networks, converts maintain a distinctive Karen identity. The Thammacarik missionaries, on the other hand, seek no clear break with the traditionalist past. In many ways, their Thai Buddhist rituals and ceremonies parallel and echo traditional practices and themes. They represent additional ways by which the traditionalist Karens can maintain communal and personal well-being. It appears, however, that the trend among traditionalists-Buddhists is towards Buddhism and away from traditional practices, esp. among young people. Buddhist missionaries are clearly concerned to promote the full integration of the Karen into the Thai nation-state, to Thai-ize them as much as possible. Christianity, in sum, promotes Karen-ness but denigrates traditional religious practices, thus re-defining what it means to "be Karen." Buddhism doesn't challenge traditional practices, but it does denigrate a separate Karen identity.

In both cases, missionary religion has become a carrier of important elements of the modern world. As Hayami describes them, Christian Karen live comfortably in a world that separates politics, economics, and religion into distinct compartments. The pastor is the pastor. The headman is the headman. Traditional Karen life acknowledge no compartmentalization whereas such divisions into separate spheres is characteristic of modernization. Buddhist Karen, by contrast, are being nationalized in a process whereby their Karen identity quietly dissolves in the acids of national consciousness. Nationalism, too, is a marked element of our modernized world. And we should note that both strategies lead, ultimately, to the demise of traditional Karen culture and religion.

I'd like to share a thought or two on all of this in the next HeRD.

HeRD #727 - More Hard Questions

HeRD #726 described the competing strategies of Christian and Buddhist missionaries working among the Karen. Christian evangelism destroys traditional religion while seeking to preserve a separate Karen identity. Buddhist evangelism tolerates traditional practices as it works to implant a Thai identity in the Karen. There are some difficult issues in all of this. On the one hand, many Karen found traditional practices burdensome and deadening. Now, more and more are seeing them as just plain irrelevant because they intended to promote well-being within a particular kind of communalism which is ceasing to exist. The modern world with its roads, mass communications, education, and socio-political structures has all but destroyed the Karen traditional world. Many Karen themselves are content to be done with the burdensome rituals and animistic fears of that world. Yet, that's not the whole story. The Karen world has a sound, a color, an intonation, an aesthetic appreciation, and a wisdom of its own. There is more to being Karen than traditional ritual, as important as it was in earlier times. Many Karen still feel a deep attachment to their culture and language and want, desperately, to see them survive the onslaught of modernity.

What role might the Karen church play in conserving Karen culture for the future? It's worth at least playing with the possibility of combining certain elements of the Christian and Buddhist missionary approaches. What would have happened if the church combined Buddhist gradualism with a Christian concern to preserve Karen identity? Some of the best Karen evangelists, I'm told, already preach Jesus as the fulfillment of Karen religion. What would have happened if we'd retained key elements of the old ritual in their old form? Could Christian missionaries have packaged a Christian message and ethic in a more traditional form? What would have been the consequences? Is it still possible to "save" elements of Karen identity and culture? These questions aren't easily answered, but if we agree that the loss of Karen-ness will leave our world poorer--surely the Karen church should be wrestling with them.

HeRD #728 - Just A Thought

A final thought from Hayami's doctoral thesis on ritual and religious change among the Karen: Christian missionaries demand a complete break from the traditional past. Buddhist missionaries are willing to allow people to weave Buddhist and traditional practices into a single cloth. If we Christians are so confident in the power of our message, why is it we have to remove ourselves religiously, even physically from the world around us? There are ready-made answers about overcoming sin and the need for radical change, but the truth of the matter is that in terms of actual behavior Christians aren't all that different from any body else. The feuds and power-struggles among us are fair proof of that. Don't our rigidly dualistic methods suggest a lack of faith in our own message? Buddhist missionaries among the Karen, on the face of it, seem more confident in the power of their message to eventually, if gradually work a change among the Karen. We don't seem to have confidence that the Christian message will over time work such a change. We seem more afraid than confident, more defensive and aggressive than hopeful and trusting.

Just a thought.

HeRD #729 - AIDS: Love 'Em At a Distance

Chaichean Somphornchokchai's "ministry thesis" at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology on the attitudes of Christians in Chiang Mai towards AIDS sufferers betrays an interesting, if somewhat subtle, pattern. Those responding to his questionnaire, distributed to members of three churches in the city, demonstrate generally positive and accepting attitudes towards those with

AIDS. When asked, for example, if AIDS sufferers are bad people, just at 90% disagreed with that statement. In another question, 88% disagreed that those who display physical symptoms related to AIDS are repulsive. That same percentage disagreed with the idea that Christian AIDS sufferers will go to Hell after death. When asked, however, about close physical contact, the figures change. Some 14% of the respondents felt that being around AIDS patients was not like being around other people, and another 15% said they weren't sure if it was the same. When asked if eating with AIDS sufferers was the same as eating with other people, the figures rose to 17% disagreed and another 17% uncertain. And just over 69% agreed that the eating utensils of AIDS sufferers should be kept separate from those of others.

These figures suggest that at one level, the respondents have little overt prejudice against people with AIDS. All three churches (one CCT, one Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand, and one Catholic) conduct some AIDS ministry work and have made a point of educating their members to greater acceptance of those suffering AIDS. They can be credited, evidently, with some success in those educational efforts. On the other hand, there's still some nervousness about the physical aspects of being around people with AIDS. I should append here the "standard disclaimer" that Ach. Chaichean's sample is only 165 respondents from the three congregations. The most that can be claimed for it is that it raises questions and suggests avenues for further research.

HeRD #730 - Indigenization Princeton Style

For those of you who've never heard of it, the "Princeton Theology" was a highly influential conservative Presbyterian nineteenth-century theology that lingered on into the twentieth century. Its home was Princeton Theological Seminary, but it powerfully influenced nearly every nook and cranny of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. It's the theology that the Presbyterian missionaries brought with them to Siam.

Mark A. Noll's article on "The Princeton Theology" (in David F. Wells, ed., *THE PRINCETON THEOLOGY*, 1989) provides important insights into the Princeton Theology in its own cultural setting. Noll argues that one can't understand the Princeton thinkers apart from their American heritage. He writes, "On the basis of their Calvinism, they questioned American myths about the power of the self, the American trust in consciousness, the American rejection of the past, and the American idolization of democracy. Yet they also took their stand as cultural insiders. They spoke Calvinism with an unmistakable American accent. With most other intellectuals of their day, they relied on a Common Sense approach to truth, they assumed the value-free character of scientific investigation, they were suspicious of high-flown ideas from the continent, and they took economic and political self-reliance for granted." (p. 15) Noll sums up the Princeton Theology in noting that it was "simply a singular expression of the ordinary affirmations of [its] day." (p. 27)

The point to keep in mind here is that the received theology of the main stream of Thai Protestantism until well after 1900 was, in fact, an indigenous theology. But it wasn't an indigenous Thai theology. It was American, and a close study will show that the Princeton theology's strengths in its own setting became liabilities in the Thai setting. Its ability to speak relevantly to its own cultural setting blinded it to the fact that it was profoundly alien to other contexts.

HeRD #731 - Thoughts on Discovering the Historical Jesus

Historians studying the life of Jesus face the constant problem of having to work through the New Testament texts back to Jesus himself. Those texts aren't neutral or value free. They

embody, rather, the earliest church's interpretation of who Jesus was, and it's difficult to work past them to discover who the actual Jesus was and what he did and said. John's Gospel contains some hints of how the earliest church interpreted its understanding of Jesus. These hints help us, in turn, to understand the principles of interpretation used by the Gospel writers as they recounted the story of the actual Jesus. John 12, for example, describes Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and 12:46 states, "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him." (NRSV) This verse points to the importance of the Resurrection. The early church looked back on Jesus' life through the lens of its belief in the Resurrection. It also points to the role of biblical prophecy contained in the Jewish Scriptures in interpreting that event and Jesus' life more generally. John 14:26 adds a third consideration. There Jesus states, "...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." The earliest church, that is, looked back on Jesus through the lens of its own experience with the Holy Spirit.

Resurrection. Old Testament prophecy. Holy Spirit. My personal sense is that the Gospels provide us with a great deal of information about the actual Jesus. We saw this in the long series of HeRDs on the Gospel of Mark. At the same time, I'm also convinced that the interpretive principles of the earliest church put a particular "spin" on the way the Gospels present Jesus. He was, for them, the Risen Lord spoken of in numerous prophecies and confirmed by their experience with the Holy Spirit. The Gospels are theological reconstructions of Jesus, based on both the actual person of Jesus and the religious experiences and beliefs of his followers. They're useful to the historian in recovering the actual Jesus, but they have to be used with discretion.

Which Jesus is the true one? The one recovered by the historian? Or the one constructed by the early church? It all depends on what we mean by "true". I'd like to suggest that each is true within its own realm of meanings and that the supposed conflict between the historical and theological portraits of Jesus reflects the fact that both small-minded historians and narrow-minded Christians can't accept spiritual experiences as a valid order of truth within itself.

HeRD #732 - The House Party Movement

Protestant revivalism in Thailand has expressed itself in numerous forms and has many sources, one of the earliest of which was the "house party" movement initiated in November 1925 by the visit of Mr. Frank N. D. Buchman to the Presbyterian Mission's Women's Bible School in Bangkok. Buchman already had a growing international reputation as a dynamic, if sometimes controversial advocate of a spirit-filled Christian life and witness. He was in the process of initiating an international movement, known as the Oxford Group, the intention of which was to transform the world through the practice of right Christian living. He had been traveling around the world with a team of young men whom he was training to become change agents, but by the time he arrived in Bangkok his team had dispersed and he was traveling alone. A massive, sometimes highly detailed biography of Buchman only mentions in passing his stay in Siam (Garth Lean, *ON THE TAIL OF A COMET*, 1988, p. 120), and the records we have from missionary sources barely mention his name. Yet his stay had a remarkable impact on the Thai church. The fact that he had the impact he had from an apparently brief visit tells us not a little about both the man and the situation of the Thai church in the mid-1920s. What may be most remarkable of all is that the house party movement he initiated in Bangkok afforded Thai church leaders their first opportunities to assert meaningful leadership in determining the future directions of the churches. I'd like to share more on the house party movement in Thailand in the next two HeRDs.

HeRD #733 - The House Party in Siam

According to an article written by Margaret C. McCord in the April 1926 issue of the SIAM OUTLOOK (pp. 140-141), Frank Buchman led a House Party at the Women's Bible School in Bangkok during the first week of November 1925. She wrote, "This is his method of personal work. He makes an effort to get a group of people together for two and a half days, for stories, the Quiet Hour, and a time of heartsearching and self surrender." (p. 140) The very first house party was aimed primarily at the students of the Bible School, but three young men were also allowed to attend. McCord reports that the pastor of Second Church and one of the first participants, Kru Chareon Sakulkan, at first resisted the whole idea and saw no need for it. Eventually he was to become a key leader in spreading the house party method to other cities and churches. McCord went on, "The need for confession of sin is emphasized, and altho some of the confessions were doubtless superficial at first, we could see that the cleaning out process was having effect. The attitude of the leader is that of a physician trying to get the patient cleaned out. So in those who have confessed, the feeling of loving fellowship prevails over any feeling of embarrassment. The effect of the House Party was cumulative as the days went on." (p. 140) Kru Chareon led a second house party in January 1926, and McCord goes on to record that these two house parties had a strong impact both on the Bible School and on Second Church.

Word of the house party approach spread rapidly, and Kru Chareon was soon in demand in other churches. An article in the July 1926 issue of SIAM OUTLOOK gives an enthusiastic account of three house parties he held for the Lampang people, including one at the Khun Tan cabins in the mountains. Kru Chareon followed Buchman's style and allowed a great deal of freedom and informality in the meetings. The article states, "The leader tells stories of personal evangelism, relates incidences of changed lives, and gives Bible readings and studies; he makes a plea to allow the Holy Spirit [to] direct the thoughts and words. This leads to many public confessions of wrong doings, to reconciliation with those against whom there has been an ill feeling; to righting wrongs committed, and to private conferences with the leader or with the pastor or with others who can help." (p. 23) The house party movement continued for a few years and then died away in the late 1920s.

HeRD #734 - House Party Impact

Frank Buchman's visit to Bangkok in November 1925 is arguably one of the most important events in 20th century Thai church history. Although he himself wasn't a revivalist in the classic mold, the house party movement he initiated in Thailand marked the emergence of revivalism as the primary strategy for church renewal in what was to become the CCT. The pre-World War II revivalism movement culminated in 1938-1939 with the revivals of Dr. John Song, and the house parties of the mid-1920s can be seen as preparing the ground for those revivals. After the War, CCT leaders returned to the Song revival model and continued to rely on it as the primary means for church renewal until the mid-1960s. Revivalism, thus, was a central motif in church life for 40 years and even today remains an important activity in many CCT churches, schools, and hospitals. It can't be argued that Buchman's visit caused all of this, but it certainly helped to lay the foundations for later events.

It should also be noted that the house party movement, brief though it was, was the first national church-wide movement in the history of the Thai churches. Previously, a wide gulf separated the northern churches from the southern and central churches. In 1921 the two Presbyterian missions (the Laos Mission and the Siam Mission) united into the American Presbyterian Mission, a move that also brought the churches under each mission into closer cooperation. At the same time, it was also the first important movement led by Thais, although one or two Presbyterian missionaries played important roles in the house party movement. Kru

Chareon Sakulkan (see HeRD #733) became the first Thai pastor to achieve a national reputation among the churches.

Finally, the house party phenomenon provides testimony to the fact that there was a widespread hunger among Presbyterian/CCT churches for a richer spiritual life. There was a desire for renewal, one that only grew with the passing of the years. The house parties addressed that need and foreshadowed an ever spreading search for renewal that led to the Song revivals and, years later, contributed to the emergence of the Pentecostal movement.

HeRD #735 - Karen Theology : Background to a Project

During the past hot season, the Office of History ran a six-week research project on the relationship of traditional Karen theology to the Karen church in northern Thailand. The project involved six Karen seminarians, studying at three different Thai seminaries. Its purpose was to explore the possibilities of recovering indigenous Karen theological resources for the life of the Karen churches. The project was conducted among the churches of the Musikee Larger Parish of the CCT's 19th District (a.k.a. the Karen Baptist Convention). I'd like to share some of the results of this project with you in a number of HeRDs, starting with this one.

The Karen indigenous theology project relied on a theological methodology worked out by a number of Asian theologians, particularly Dr. Archie Lee in Hong Kong. These theologians argue that there are two basic sets of "texts" necessary for the construction of Asian theologies. "Text A" consists of Asian cultural texts, such as classical religious literature, oral and written traditional material, and the "stories" of Asian people. Asian theologians argue that Asia has a rich religious heritage of its own, one that's given birth to all of the world's major religions. Asian Christians, thus, should construct their theologies out of the resources at hand in Asian cultures. Asian Christianity, at the same time, has to avail itself of the theological treasury contained in the Bible, or "Text B." This school of Asian theologians builds their theologies by bringing these two texts into dialogue with each other.

In the Karen setting, "Text A" consists of three major elements, namely traditional religious poetry (called "ta"), traditional tales and stories, and the understanding and practices of traditional Karens themselves. "Text B" is the Karen Bible, the New Testament and Psalms being available in two translations and the rest of the Old Testament in only one. The students divided their time between the study of ta, collecting oral data from traditional Karens and other knowledgeable persons, and studying selected passages from the Karen Bible. In addition to myself, the project was staffed by Thra'mu (Acharn) Esther Danpongpee, an articulate, theologically trained Karen who has studied in both Burmese and Thai seminaries. She provided essential linguistic guidance for the rest of us. With these tools and resources, we set out on something like a theological voyage of discovery. We more-or-less knew how other people sailed but had no charts of our own. Things worked out well-enough for all of that, and its some of the results of the voyage that I'd like to share with you beginning in the next HeRD.

HeRD #736 - Karen Theology: A Beginning Point

Theological research requires a basic set of language skills in at least one language. Professional theologians generally work in more than one language. It's very difficult do credible theological work in a language you haven't mastered, and one would assume that theologians would normally do their best research and writing in their mother tongue.

Karen theological research in northern Thailand, however, has to start with teaching its practioners fundamental language skills. The language is under massive attack by both central

Thai and English. Karen isn't a language of formal instruction at any level except for one Bible school. Many young Karen Christians learn the rudiments of reading and writing in their Sunday schools, but they have little opportunity to use these skills elsewhere. Those Karen with the best theological training use Thai as their language of theological expression, and they often don't know even basic theological terms in Karen. In the case of our six students, one read and wrote Karen with native speaker facility. A second did both very credibly. A third was also quite capable, though not up to the level of the second student. Two others could read fairly well but didn't write Karen at all well. One student started with almost no literacy skills.

The first thing we had to do when we started the theological research project, then, was work with all of the students on their reading and writing skills. Even the best student admitted she was rusty in Karen literacy. The point here is that Karen theology in northern Thailand necessarily begins with teaching prospective theologians basic skills in using their own language and encouraging them to stop using Thai as their primary medium for theological reflection. Karen theology, thus, takes as one of its first concerns the restoration and conservation of Karen as a living theological language.

HeRD #737 - Dialogue with a Dying Partner

We will recall from HeRD #735 that some Asian theologians have devised a method for constructing theologies that works between two "texts", the Asian cultural text (Text A) and the biblical text (Text B). They face a number of obstacles in carrying out this essentially dialogical process, among them the fact of globalization. The emerging world culture is deconstructing local, regional, and even national cultures at what appears to be an accelerating pace. Karen hill culture in northern Thailand, in particular, is rapidly dying as more and more young Karen take as their own the Thai version of the global culture.

The practice of the traditional Karen religion is itself dying away. Its practitioners generally don't have a very deep or clear grasp of the meaning of the rituals they perform. They remember only fragments of the Karen religious poetry and lore. They don't perform the full rituals of the past, preferring simplified versions of the formerly elaborate Karen ritual life. Now, some of their rituals and oral religious traditions have been recorded, but not in any systematic fashion--and those doing the recording are usually Christian Karen who put their own slant on the meaning of Karen oral traditions. The greatest single obstacle to constructing Karen theologies in northern Thailand, thus, is this growing deterioration of Karen culture (Text A), a deterioration that has been going on for many decades. It's difficult to obtain a clear picture of traditional Karen religious thought, especially because its remaining practitioners aren't usually very articulate about their religious beliefs. The problem is compounded by the fact that the boundaries between traditional practices and Buddhism are increasingly unclear. Buddhist missionary-monks apparently encourage and promote a quiet process of national religious and cultural integration that will lead to the eventual end of Karen ritual.

Karen theologians will have to conduct historical and anthropological research in order to dialogue with their own culture. In the process, they're moving against the torrential storms of globalization; and they also run the risk of constructing theologies that are irrelevant to the daily lives of Karen Christians, who have to find their way in a world where "being Karen" is itself problematic, hazy, and for many young Karen not even very important. On the other hand, it offers the possibility of salvaging a creative way of thinking about and relating to God--for the Karen themselves and for the larger church.

HeRD #738 - Yua is My Spirit

John 4:24 states that, "God is Spirit." On the face of it, this is an objective, descriptive statement that deals with God in the third person as a distinct, divine Being. The Thai version is similar in the sense that it too treats "Phra Chao" as a Being with its own objective reality of being a "Winyan". In Karen, however, the concept of God as Spirit is treated in quite a different way. John 4:24 in Karen states, "yua maethu maetha." This translates, roughly, as meaning "Yua (God) is heart and mind" or "Yua is heart and soul." Native language speakers of Karen, however, state that in effect it actually means that Yua is My heart and My mind, and that "maethu maetha" actually points to that which is central to one's being. The Karen rendering of John 4:24, in sum, states that, "Yua is the center, the heart of my being." It doesn't treat Yua as an objective, external Being, but rather it understands divine Being in terms of human, inner being.

There's a sense in which we might consider the Karen statement, "yua maethu maetha," as more "primitive" than the English or Thai conceptions of God/Phra Chao as Spirit/Winyan. On the other hand, once we begin to poke and probe the English and Thai statements their meaning dissipates in a cloud of theological doublespeak that can go on for hundreds of pages of densely argued text but never achieves the clarity of most sentences containing only three words. The statement that "Yua is the center of my being" is both clearer and more realistic in the sense that it overtly grounds the human understanding of the divine in human experience. The Karen statement also demands a faith commitment in and of itself that is lacking in English or Thai, both of which can state that the divine is spirit in an entirely objective way. "Yua maethu maetha" is a personal statement of how the speaker apprehends Yua. Yua is an internal reality, a matter of the heart and core of one's personal existence.

HeRD #739 - The Heart of God

It is apparently very difficult, if not impossible to render the concept of the Trinity into Karen. One indication of this fact is the Karen translation of "Holy Spirit," which literally means "the Heart of Yua." Although such a translation may not be strictly orthodox according to the councils of the early church, it does present us with a striking image of who God is and how God relates to humanity. It affirms the essential Oneness of God and brings humanity into a direct dialogue with God. Manifestations of the Spirit come from the very Heart of God, the Core of Divine Being. The abstruse arguments for the Trinity, largely irrelevant to the vast bulk of the church, are by-passed. Or, perhaps, it's better to say that the concept of the Trinity is reformulated as a set of biological relationships and images. The Creator God has reached into human life in two distinct ways, through the incarnational agency of the "Son" and through the divine Heart. We should note here again that, just as in the case of HeRD #738, Karen theology focuses on the subjective and relational aspects of God rather than objective ones.

HeRD #740 - Advancing Into the Past?

According to the students who took part in the Karen theology project at Musikee, many younger Karen scoff at the traditional Karen religious poetry, the ta. One of the students expressed the feeling that using ta in church life will only further alienate young people. In as much as this situation actually exists, it poses a challenge for Karen theology and raises difficult questions concerning the role of the theologian.

Karen theology necessarily has to avail itself of uniquely Karen cultural and religious sources of which the ta is particularly important, otherwise it isn't Karen. A responsible Karen theology also has to speak out of and to the consciousness of contemporary Karens. What

happens, however, if these two necessities contradict each other? How does a theologian deal with the situation in which a key theological resource is looked upon with disdain and profound disinterest by the younger generation? Karen theologians face a potentially difficult situation. On the one hand, it would seem necessary for them to challenge the Karen church to conserve the Karen cultural and religious heritage. On the other hand, their theologies must also speak the real world of increasingly Thai-ized tribal people. How are these two necessities balanced? Can a theologian articulate authentically Karen theologies in ways meaningful to contemporary Karens? One has to believe that Karen theologians can balance the two necessities and can reclaim a theology that is both authentic and relevant.

HeRD #741 - Search for a Relevant Heritage

HeRD #740 raised the perplexing question of the relationship of traditional Karen religious thought to the present and future of the Karen churches. The issue is one of the relevance of the Karen past to the lives of Karen people today, most particularly younger Karen. It's all well and good to talk about recovering traditional cultural resources for the life of the churches, but such a program will succeed only if the churches see value in those resources. This point was amply made in the meditation given by one of the Karen seminarians at a morning worship service for the group. He attempted to combine a verse of traditional Karen religious poetry with two different portions of Scripture, and in the process he referred to two popular contemporary Thai singers to illustrate one of his points. It was telling that his use of the traditional Karen indigenous source was strained and unconvincing while his reference to the singers was natural and to the point he was making. In his own world, the Thai pop singers are more immediate and compelling than a dying religious poetry.

One central task of the Karen theologian in Thailand may be to act as a bridge between two worlds, the traditional world of Karen spirituality and the multi-polar, multi-cultural, global village-ized world of the turn of the century Karen. Traditional Karen spirituality in its fullness is a thing of the past. Yet, it is also valuable. It can still speak to the hearts of Karen people today--but not entirely and not all of the time.

The Karen theologian, in short, will have to carry on a continuing dialogue between the contemporary and traditional worlds. One of the best places to carry on this dialogue is in sermons. Effective preaching is always and ever a dialogue between Scripture and parishioner in which the preacher acts as the go-between. The Karen preacher-theologian will bring traditional Karen religious thought into this dialogue as a third partner, seeking to recover from the Karen past those parts of it relevant to the church's contemporary situation. The preacher-theologian will also seek to create a desire in the contemporary Karen church to hear and use the traditional texts. I have no idea if such a program is possible, but it is difficult to seek how a viable, authentic Karen theology can emerge otherwise.

HeRD #742 - Yua in Search of the Woman

Traditional Karen religious poems are called "ta". The following is one stanza of a ta about Yua's (God's) search for humanity.

A woman lost her way in a steep place

Yua called after her with a horn

In a steep place, the woman lost her way

Yua called after her with a gong

The figure of the woman is interesting because of the varying interpretations of who she is. A Burmese Karen Christian compilation of ta states that she is Eve, the mother of humanity. Some informants, who shared variants of this ta with the students participating in the Karen theology project, told them that she is the wife of Yua. Others claimed that she is really Muekuela (Satan) in the guise of Yua's wife. The students themselves felt that the woman could be taken as representative of humanity. The ta, in any event, is rich in cultural images. The image of the steep place is appropriate to a hill people whose main form of transportation, traditionally, has been walking. The "gong" is the Karen gong that's used to call people to assembly. The Karen churches even today still call people to worship with a gong. My impression is that one could interpret the word for "horn" as "trumpet," in the sense that the horn is a loud one that can be heard at a distance.

This ta points to a couple of potential themes for Karen theology. First, Yua clearly shows a concern for others that can be translated into a concern for humanity. Although most of the students' informants claimed that they didn't know who Yua is and that Yua is far removed from humanity, a few stated that Yua still cares for humanity and knows what's going on in the world. The ancestor spirits (mue ka), for example, were given their duties to oversee humanity by Yua. It seems, thus, that Yua is indeed a caring deity. Second, Yua actively seeks after and calls after the lost one, be it Eve or Yua's unfaithful wife or humanity. Yua is a God in search of humanity. The possibility that the woman is Yua's faithless wife calls to mind the biblical Hosea's marriage to the faithless Gomer. Yhaweh longed and worked for the return of Israel just as Hosea sought the return of Gomer. In any event, this stanza from a traditional Karen ta portrays Yua as an active, caring God. The parallels with Christian theology are obvious.

HeRD #743 - A Restless Yua

HeRD #742 shared a stanza from a traditional Karen ta, religious poem. That ta describe Yua as being a God in search of humanity. A stanza from yet another ta adds substance to that description:

Yua is a God who doesn't take time to rest,

Yua is a God who always has a plan,

Yua is a God who isn't alone,

Yua is a God who always has a program.

A couple of notes. This poem was translated into Thai for me, and the phrase I've translated as "doesn't take time to rest" is "mai [not] chuey chuey". Those of you who speak Thai know that this is a difficult word to translate into English. Someone who is "chuey chuey" is someone who is inactive, even listless with overtones of laziness involved. The Karen has the same implications, or so I was told. The word "program" in the last line has the same meaning as "plan" in line two. The Karen original uses two different words, however, which is why I used "program".

Yua is on the move. Yua is busy. Yua has purposes. Yua doesn't live in isolation. This ta reinforces the image of Yua as an active and purposeful God. It also reinforces the sense that the Karen language deals in concrete rather than abstract conceptions of the divine. From what we've seen in previous HeRDs in this series on Karen theology, there is the impression that it will be

difficult to construct classic systems of theological thought. It seems difficult to put Yua under the theological microscope for close philosophical analysis. Yua isn't an Existence so much as a Relationship. I have to stress, once again, that I don't speak Karen and am making conjectures based on what a few native-language speakers tell me. If, however, these impressions are correct they would also suggest that future Karen theologians in northern Thailand will have to continue to rely on Thai and English IF they want to do more philosophical, systematic theology. By the same token, however, the Karen conception of Yua as an inherently incarnational God adds new texture and new images to our Christian understanding of how the divine relates to humanity.

HeRD #744 - A Wet, Dusty, Windy Yua

The Karen theological students participating in the hot season project on Karen theology spent two weeks living with and interviewing traditional Karens. One of the questions they asked was where Yua (God) came from. Various individuals claimed that originally there was a wind and Yua came from the wind, or there was a chaos composed of minute particles of dust and Yua came from the dust, or there was water and Yua came from the water. Some Karen creation stories even have Yua being born of primordial parents. Karen traditionalists agree on one fundamental point. Yua is a part of creation, the beginning point of creation; and everything else that exists was created by Yua.

In biblical theology, God existed before Chaos and created the world out of it. In traditional Karen theology, Chaos existed before God and God is born out of it. Each view has a strength and a weakness. The biblical view emphasizes the total Beyondness of God. God is the uncreated Creator. Christianity, however, has struggled for 2000 years to make sense out of how God the Divine Other can also be God the Incarnate One. Traditional Karen theology displays exactly a reverse situation. Yua is a part of creation, an inherently incarnated God. Yua is the created Creator. A Karen theology should have little trouble with Jesus, Yua become human. It's more difficult, on the other hand, to see Yua as the Ultimate One. If Yua is created from something else, is Yua truly God? Isn't there an Absolute Beyondness necessary to the conception of God? In the end, I suspect this is a matter of which "piece" of God/Yua we focus on. English and Thai Christian thinking very clearly put their first, central focus on the Absolute Beyondness of God. Traditional Karen theology, apparently, takes as its central focus the Incarnational Closeness of Yua to Yua's creation. Each perspective has a strength and a weakness.

Just how Karen Christian theology will deal with this whole issue remains to be seen. It could well be one of the key issues for that theology. The core understanding of Yua's divine nature, both as Transcendent and Incarnate, depends on the question of Yua's relationship to creation.

HeRD #745 - Water Buffalo Woes

The following is a delightful traditional Karen tale, which I leave to you all to interpret as you wish. I would suggest, however, that it could be an interesting sermon illustration.

Having accomplished the work of creation, Yua decided that it was time to return to heaven. One of Yua's minions, named Water Buffalo, asked to go along. That was fine with Yua, but before they went Yua had a job for Water Buffalo. He was to go and instruct Humanity that it should comb its hair three times a day and eat once a day. Water Buffalo lumbered off and delivered Yua's message that humanity was to eat one meal a day and comb its hair three times a day. Humanity, however, didn't like the skimpy number of meals allotted to it, and playing dumb, it asked Water Buffalo, "What? What did you say?" Water Buffalo became flustered and

blurted out that Yua wanted humanity to eat three times a day and comb its hair once a day. That happy reversal of Yua's message pleased Humanity but proved to be Water Buffalo's downfall. When he returned to Yua, Yua asked what he'd told humanity, and Water Buffalo repeated the faulty message. Yua became so upset that Yua punished Water Buffalo by changing him into the form of a water buffalo and making him a slave to humanity. That way humanity could raise enough food to eat three meals a day.

According to Karen lore, his story explains three things: first, why people eat three meals a day; second, why water buffalo have to work so hard for humans; and, third, why human beings look so funny and unkempt. They comb their hair only a third as often as Yua intended.

HeRD #746 - The Mother of All Stomach Aches

Another Karen traditional tale tells the following story:

With the passage of time, humanity found the Devil an increasingly bothersome presence and decided to do something about it. Humanity killed the Devil, but the Devil came back to life and continued to plague humanity. Humanity killed the Devil again, and it came back again. Finally, in desperation humanity captured the Devil, killed it, and ate it in order to be finally done with it. The Devil, however, on arriving in humanity's stomach declared that it had found a truly spacious, comfortable new home for itself. From that point on humanity has forever been plagued with the Devil, and now humanity can't do a thing about it because in order to do away with the Devil humanity would have to destroy itself as well.

HeRD #747 - Closing the Door on the Past

One of the things that became increasingly clear over the course of the students' study of traditional Karen religion was that traditionalist informants gave a very different picture of their religious faith from that painted by Christian converts. Elderly Christian converts frequently portrayed traditional religion as the worship of evil spirits. They claimed that the devil was involved in everything and that conversion freed them from an oppressive religious system. Traditional practices drained them of their resources, put them under daily fear, and couldn't really protect them from evil. Traditionalists, such as are left, tell a diametrically opposed story. They feel protected by the spiritual agencies they honor. They fear and love those agencies in the same way that a child fears and loves her parents, because those agencies ARE their parents and ancestors now removed to a higher plane.

At least two factors are at work here in terms of the Christian interpretation. First, Western evangelical Christians saw conversion as a break from an evil past. American historians have noted this tendency among converts during the periods of revivalist fervor in the 18th and 19th centuries. Converts invariably painted their former lives as being ones of terrible sin and suffering. The missionaries to the Karen in Burma came out of that same religious milieu, and taught their converts to see their former religion as central to their evil past. In other words, they learned an interpretation of traditional religion that not all of them (if contemporary conversion stories are any guide) really thought was all that bad. There are numerous reasons for conversion, most of which aren't a rejection of one's former religion as such.

Second, however, we have to remember that some, perhaps many, did convert because of the failings of traditional religion, esp. illnesses that went un-cured despite every effort to find that cure. (see HeRD #506). The point is that Christian rhetoric about traditional religion often reflects a learned set of attitudes rather than personal experience. In some ways, that rhetoric is as much an artifact of Western thinking as it is of Karen.

HeRD #748 - Conflicting Data

It needs to be emphasized that these HeRDs on Karen theology are little more than preliminary notes based on first impressions and minimal data. If there is more work done on Karen theologies in the future, much of what I've written here will prove to be muddled and misleading. It's difficult to see, furthermore, just what directions those theologies will take because of what seems to be a conflict between the field data the students participating in the Office of History Karen theology research project collected and the contents of the ta, the traditional Karen poems.

The students' informants uniformly avow that Yua (God) has left the world, assigning to other powers the oversight of humanity. They state that they don't know anything about Yua other than that Yua created the world and has now departed it. They do state that they believe that Yua still cares for the world. All of their ceremonies and rituals, however, are directed towards lesser spiritual powers that oversee their daily lives. Primary among these are the Spirits of the Ancestors (the word "spirit" here isn't quite correct, but there doesn't seem to be any word in English or Thai comparable to the Karen concept, MUE KA). In the ta, however, Yua is a God who is actively engaged in creation, close to and concerned about humanity. One ta the students themselves used in one of their morning worship services enjoins humanity to give itself totally to the worship of Yua because Yua sees and hears everything. Other ta, reported in missionary and Christian Karen sources, describe the creation of humanity and its fall from grace in terms strikingly similar to the Genesis accounts. At times, the ta also seem to indicate that Yua has abandoned the created world, but many of them suggest otherwise.

Clearly there will have to be a great deal of research done before these questions are resolved. It may be that there are some underlying themes that still aren't clear, or it may be that the ta contain a variety of portraits of Yua that are in conflict with each other. In any event, Yua's relationship with creation is a major issue in Karen theology.

HeRD #749 - Absent God

In HeRD #748, we saw that there is a conflict in the data concerning the Karen conception of Yua's relationship to the world. That conflict has to do with whether Yua (God) has abandoned creation or not. At this point, the more likely portrait seems to be that the Devil (MUE KAW LEE) has created so much chaos and evil in the world that Yua can no longer tolerate the situation and has withdrawn to heaven to await a change in earthly conditions. Prior to leaving, however, Yua negotiated with various spiritual agencies to look after humanity, and Yua finally settled on the Spirits of the Ancestors (see HeRD #748) as the ones best able to do the job. Yua then left and is still gone, according to traditional Karen in northern Thailand.

The idea that God has abandoned the world may well sound ludicrous to many Christians. How could God be so entirely irresponsible and apparently helpless? If this idea does prove to be a salient point in Karen theology, it can be taken to reflect central elements in Karen culture itself. The Karen, even more than other peoples in Thailand, have an intense dislike of interpersonal conflict, and they devote a fair amount of energy to conflict avoidance. When conflict does take place they frequently resort to a two-step strategy. They first patiently wait for the conflict to resolve itself. If it doesn't, then they remove themselves from the situation itself, hoping that future events will bring about the resolution they can't achieve themselves. The very act of withdrawal itself sometimes brings those creating the conflict to their senses. Within the Karen cultural context, then, Yua has taken a sensible, wise approach to dealing with the world's condition. Direct action will only lead to further confrontation and chaos. By the very act of withdrawal, Yua might be seen as giving humanity clear warning of the necessity of change.

Israel's Yahweh, according to the Old Testament, took the more direct approach, applying the principle of Divine Intervention rather than Divine Withdrawal. It doesn't seem to have worked any better. In either case, humanity remains in its original state.

HeRD #750 - Orphaned Creation

HeRD #749 described Yua (God) as having abandoned the created world in order to create the possibility of an eventual reconciliation. We saw that this divine strategy makes sense from a Karen perspective. If future Karen theologies do understand Yua in this regard, it obviously has a major impact on the rest of Karen theological thinking. This is especially true for the understanding of the human condition.

The biblical analysis of the human situation is that humanity has rebelled against God and in the process introduced chaos and sin into the world. Although some Karen religious poems, ta, agree with the biblical analysis by telling stories of how the first man and woman, under the prompting of the devil (MUE KAW LEE), ate forbidden fruit, it's far from clear that those stories represent the mainstream of Karen religious consciousness. The rebellious agent more often appears to be the devil, and humanity seems to have been originally innocent of any wrong-doing. Yua's departure has left creation orphaned, and Karen theological analysis may well describe the fundamental human condition as being that of an orphan. Interestingly enough, the Karen have numerous popular stories about orphans who make their way through the world by their wits. They seem to consider themselves as orphans in the sense that they have no king and no nation of their own. There may or may not be a connection between the Karen orphan stories and their belief that Yua has departed from the world.

If future Karen theologians develop "orphan theologies," the concept of humanity and creation as being orphaned offers numerous possibilities for development. It could, for example, bring humanity closer to the rest of creation by seeing the fundamental condition of both as being the same. While it's difficult to see the rest of creation as being in rebellion, one has only to look at the rapidly deteriorating forests and streams of the Karen hills to understand how they might share the orphan's condition.

HeRD #751 - The Karen Jesus?

There are those who would see the history of the earliest church as a search for understanding the person of Jesus, first in Jewish context and then in Greek context. The development in understanding of Jesus from Mark, through Matthew and Luke, to John gives weight to this perspective on early church history. If previous the HeRDs in this series on Karen theology are anywhere near correct, it's likely that Karen theologians will also have to engage in a search for the person of Jesus. They may have to "re-invent" him in some ways.

One fruitful avenue may be that of reinterpreting Jesus in terms of Karen millenarianism. The Karen have long experienced periodic episodes of millenarian enthusiasm, centered on one or another prophet, that offer the hope of the return of Yua and the emergence of a better world for the Karen. There are also religious poems, or ta, that hold out this same hope for the eventual return of the Absent Yua (God). It could be that Jesus becomes an agent for the Return of Yua. Whether or not Jesus has to be divine to carry out this role is unclear. It's also uncertain if Karen theologies will emphasize the Cross, depending on their interpretation of the human condition. As we saw in HeRD #750, it's not clear that humanity stands in need of redemption. In any event, future Karen Christian theologies will almost certainly see in Jesus the Way to create a more peaceful world in anticipation of the return of Yua. Building on the New Testament concept of the Kingdom of God, Karen theologians may argue that in Jesus Yua has already

initiated the Return but that the process of Return is still underway. Jesus, it could be said, became an orphan so that all of creation could regain its Parent. One can also imagine a Karen "Death of Yua" movement that will argue that abandoned humanity has to make its own way in the world, much like the orphans of the Karen tales.

HeRD #752 - Reading the Bible with Karen Eyes

The students participating in the Karen theological research project were asked to select biblical passages that they felt reflected a Karen perspective, and one of the passages they chose is Ephesians 2:1-10. The passage is congruent with a Karen perspective in at least three different ways. First, 2:1-3 describes the world as being under the power of "the ruler of the power of the air" (NRSV). This could be taken as a reference to the Ancestors. Orphaned humanity has taken on the aspect of "children of wrath." Second, Ephesians 2:6-10 describes the state of reconciliation, the key phrase from a Karen perspective being, "...so that in the ages to come [God] might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." This could be seen as a reference to the Day when the Divine Parent, Yua (God), returns. (2:7). Finally, standing between the state of being an orphan and the state of reconciliation is God, who out of great love for humanity brought it from a state of death to life in Christ (2:4-5).

There are still a number of problems, for example, Yua didn't abandon humanity to evil rulers but rather left it under the care of other spiritual powers, especially the Spirits of the Ancestors (MUE KA). It's almost as if Yua is humanity's biological parent, and the mue ka adopted humanity at Yua's request. The mue ka are far from perfect, however, and in some circumstances can be quite demanding and difficult to please. Karen traditionalists evince a strong degree of ambivalence about the mue ka, one combining respect and fear in varying degrees. As long as they behave properly and conduct the proper rites at appropriate times, traditionalists believe that their well-being is ensured. They recognize, however, that at times other more malevolent spiritual agencies stir up trouble, and it's not always easy to overcome their influences. All of this means that the current world isn't all evil, as implied in Ephesians 2. It has its good aspects as well, but it would be much better if Yua returned. Even so, the biblical images of a humanity abandoned to other powers and of a new age in which humanity is reconciled to God fit very well with the themes from Karen theology we've discussed in previous HeRDs.

HeRD #753 - Obstacles & Possibilities

There are several major obstacles facing the emergence of Karen theologies in the North, the most worrisome of all being the increasingly rapid deterioration of Karen culture itself, especially among young people. A Karen theological movement will necessarily base itself in the churches because there are no seminaries, religious studies departments, or other institutions in which Karen theologians can house themselves. There's not likely to be professional Karen theologians. This means that a viable Karen theological movement is going to find both its practitioners and its audience in the churches. The problem is that the Karen audience is becoming less and less Karen. A related issue has to do with Karen literacy. Most Karens 40 and older read only Karen, unless they've had a Thai-language education, which isn't all that usual. Most Karens under the age of 30 read Karen only with difficulty and generally read Thai far more easily. Theology requires a literate audience, and it can't be assumed that future Karen theologians will find such an audience. It should be mentioned in passing that using Thai in place of Karen isn't an option either as the world views expressed in each language are quite different. Key Karen religious ideas are translated only with difficulty when they can be translated at all.

On the other hand, Karen churches still show considerable interest in their own their own heritage. All of the students we've worked with the last two years have responded with an intense seriousness to the need to conserve their cultural and religious heritage. The fact that traditional Karen already believe in God make it easier to find points of contact than is the case among other Thailand cultures. The religious poems (ta), furthermore, are a gold mine for theological reflection. What's needed then is an agency or a mechanism that will promote the articulation of Karen theologies in northern Thailand.

HeRD #754 - Village Wisdom

Recently some older members of the Suan Duangrit Church, Ban Dok Daeng were talking about pounding rice as children fifty or more years ago. The routine was that they had to get up with the rosters and start pounding well before the sun came up, and when they came home from school they had to finish what was left over from the morning. When asked how they felt about all this as kids, they avowed with one voice that pounding rice was the chore they disliked almost more than any other. One of them observed, however, that, "If we didn't pound, we didn't eat." That's pretty much the way life is in general. If we don't pound, we don't eat.

HeRD #755 - Centennial Missive

In December 1928 Protestants in Thailand celebrated one hundred years of Protestant missions. The three-day birthday bash was held on the grounds of a royal garden and attended by the King, high princes, government officials, and thousands of others. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U. S. A. sent a letter, dated 13 October 1928, to its Siam Mission in honor of the occasion. It reads:

"TO THE MISSION IN SIAM OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

"Dear Brethren:

"By order of the 1928 General Assembly the following resolution is herewith transmitted over the signature of its Stated Clerk:

"The Assembly sends its greetings and the greetings of the whole church to our Mission in Siam on the occasion of the Centennial of the beginning of Christian Missionary effort there. The Assembly recalls the lives of the faithful and heroic missionaries who 100 years ago awaited in Siam the opening of the doors of China and who pressed in, the instant these doors were opened. It recalls also the long line of noble men and women who have borne witness to the Gospel by their labor and by their lives to the Siamese people, from the Malay peninsula to the very border of China and beyond. The Assembly sends to the present missionaries in Siam, its affectionate congratulations and the prayer for the rich outpouring of God's spirit upon all their work."

Yours sincerely,

[signed]

Lewis S. Mudge

Stated Clerk

[Seal of the PCUSA]

It's one of those little ironies of history that China is featured nearly as much as Siam in this brief letter. It was always the fate of the old-time Siam missions that their home boards were

far more interested in places like China, Japan, and India. Even when their eyes seemed to fix briefly on Siam, their glance still strayed northward "to the very border of China."

HeRD #756 - Attitudes Towards AIDS

In the earlier years of the AIDS crisis in Thailand, Christians shared in the general social fear of and prejudice against those who tested HIV-positive. Over the years, however, a number of congregations have taught a different attitude, and Chaichean Somphornchokchai wrote his M.Div. ministerial thesis (see HeRD #729) on the success of their instruction in fostering more positive attitudes towards AIDS sufferers. He studied three congregations, one Catholic, one CCT, and one Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT). What he discovered was a mixed picture.

Some 73% of his respondents disagreed with the statement that AIDS sufferers are ugly and objectionable (narungkiad) and only 2% agreed. Right at 69%, furthermore, disagreed with the statement that AIDS sufferers are "not good people" (khon maidee), while less than 1% agreed with that statement. These answers suggest that, in theory at least, a large majority of those who filled out the forms have no prejudicial feelings against people with AIDS. We can presume that there has been a change in attitude, and since the three churches have all emphasized AIDS education we can theorize, at least, that their educational programs have had some positive results.

There is an interesting twist, however. Just over 27% agreed (8%) or agreed somewhat (19%) with the statement that those who got AIDS through promiscuous sexual activity should be punished by society. And while 49% disagreed (16% disagreed somewhat), that figure is markedly less than were the two figures for those who disagreed that AIDS sufferers are objectionable or bad people. There's more ambivalence about AIDS when specific, immoral causes are attributed to the person infected. Still, one can argue that even in this last case there's still an inclination to view AIDS sufferers more positively than negatively.

HeRD #757 - Baggage

Viewilai Sangsawan, a recently graduated M.Div. Student at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, wrote her ministerial thesis on the Christian education program of the Nua Klao Church, Chiang Mai, a Pentecostal congregation associated with the Rom Klao Church in Bangkok. She specifically wanted to see how the congregation's training program influenced its members' understanding of conversion. She had some 60 respondents, and in their responses she discerned a clear pattern. These members almost always answered correctly questions that she had lifted from various training manuals without changes in wording. They less frequently answered correctly questions that didn't follow closely the wording used in their manuals. The majority could still answer correctly, but the spread of answers was generally larger. Most interesting were the responses to a number of questions that assumed a Buddhist perspective, sometimes even using identifiably Buddhist terms. The members tended to respond positively to the Buddhist perspective even when it contradicted the stated teachings of the Nua Klao Church.

Two factors, at least, may be at work here. First, it seems that the church has been fairly rigid in its approach to beliefs. It holds to the idea that there is a set of right beliefs that have to be taught. It seems to have been more interested in indoctrinating its members rather than teaching them, hence many of them can't handle questions that are worded differently from their indoctrination. Second, however, Thailand generally is still struggling with a rote memory educational system, and one suspects that a similar study of students taking almost any subject would discover the same pattern as Khun Viewilai found at Nua Klao.

What may be most important about her findings is the apparent tenacity of underlying religious attitudes in the face of a fairly aggressive training program for new members. Protestant churches still haven't come to grips with the fact that converts bring a great deal of assumed, covert baggage with them to Christianity. The Christian overlay, even when laid on rather heavily, doesn't seem to have much effect on that baggage. As I've already argued before in HeRD, Thai Protestantism is already indigenous. It just doesn't look that way.

HeRD #758 - Is Pastoral Care Important?

Ach. Mana Duangsuwan has just completed his M. Div. studies at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology and wrote his ministerial thesis on lay pastoral care. He studied the ways in which the lay members of the Sriphanalai Church, Doi Saket, Chiang Mai, give or don't give pastoral care to each other. Ach. Mana wasn't surprised to find that in actual fact members weren't giving each other a great deal of identifiably pastoral care, but he was somewhat surprised by the response to one of his questions.

Ach. Mana's questionnaire asked, "Is caring and looking out for each other in our church important to you or not?" Of 119 respondents, 41 (34%) responded negatively (not very important, not important, not important at all) and another 32 (27%) answered that it was only somewhat important. The remaining 34 (39%) stated that they were important or very important. One can look at this data in a couple of ways. Viewed positively, two-thirds of the Sriphanalai Church membership affirmed the importance of caring for one another. From a negative view point, however, some 60% of the congregation doesn't seem to see it as being all that important. It was clear from other questions that the respondents identified pastoral care with "caring and looking out for" the church's members. When asked specifically about the most pressing PASTORAL need the church had, the majority responded, "Caring For Each Other." Yet, it's possible that the members don't see pastoral concerns as being all that important to them. They see the need to care for others, yet they don't feel that personally it's all that important for themselves.

We shouldn't make too much of this as the data base is slim, but it does seem possible that pastoral care isn't all that important to the majority of members in this congregation. If that's the case, what about other churches? Does it suggest that people depend on other support mechanisms for their care? What does this mean for the heavy emphasis Thai Protestant church bodies are giving to the development of pastoral care? What does it say about the place of the church in the lives of its members?

HeRD #759 - Getting It Right

The electronic edition of the *Washington Post* for 22 May 1999 reported on research conducted by the Pew Research Center into 1996 media spending by the Clinton-Gore reelection campaign. That campaign invested "millions of dollars in early television advertising to specific, targeted areas of the United States," that is credited with giving the Democrats a quick, successful start towards reelection. The researcher stated of their strategy, "The irony is that it created the tremendous change in the way we think about political spending, and there is very little evidence that it did much." The Post article goes on to cite other evidence from the polling firm used by Clinton and Gore that, not surprisingly, contradicts the Pew findings. What's most interesting, however, is the input from a Republican pollster. By comparing Clinton's ratings to the general Democratic congressional vote, he found that the TV ads did make a difference, although not as much as the Democrats claim. All of this isn't just theoretical. The Gore campaign team is looking at using the same strategy for the 2000 election.

It's striking that three different groups, using the same data base, can come up with three different interpretations of the data. The motivation to interpret that data correctly seems to be rather high, since the stakes involved in making a right or wrong interpretation are also high. It seems that the Republican pollster may have used a more sophisticated way of looking at the figures. All three--Pew, the Democrats, and the Republican--compared data from targeted and non-targeted areas of the country, but the pollster also looked at how well one could expect the Democrats to do generally compared with the Clinton-Gore polling figures. If this interpretation is correct, it suggests that the Republican pollster has come closer to the truth of the matter than either the Pew study or the Democratic pollsters. He took a less obvious, more creative approach that was more likely to reach the heart of the issue.

Research isn't a science, even when its scientific. High quality research requires good data, competent researchers, and an insightful approach that is sensitive as well as sensible. The key is the researcher. Creative, competent researchers will get better data and will make better use of it. They're more likely to "discover" an insightful approach. It's hard, however, to get this mix. There are a lot of not very good researchers in the world, and even the good ones don't always "get it right."

HeRD #760 - Getting It More Right

HeRD #759 asserted that "Research isn't a science, even when its scientific." Another article from the electronic edition of the *Washington Post*, this one from 26 May 1999, describes how astronomers are coming closer to an accurate dating of the age of the universe. There's still a great deal of controversy about the matter, but what's happened in the last decade is that the range of figures has narrowed. In the 1980s, astronomers dated the age of the universe at anything from 10 to more than 20 billion years. Now, the range has narrowed to something like 12 to 14 or 15 billion years. The Hubble Space Telescope has made the difference by providing far, far better data on the rate at which galaxies are speeding away from each other, a figure that then allows scientists to gauge how long they've been traveling.

A couple of points. First, the differences in dating of the age of the universe depend on differences in manipulating and interpreting the data. Just as in yesterday's example of the differing interpretations on the role of TV advertising in political campaigns, the quality of the data, the skill of the researcher, AND the researcher's particular approach and perspective determine the results. Second, over time researchers will reach a general consensus, arguing over smaller and smaller differences of opinion and interpretation. This happens in the study of history as well. In major research fields, historians do reach a broad consensus while they continue to fight over the details of interpretation or the meaning of particular sets of documents. Which is to say that research in any field is a cumulative, on-going process.

This last point is important for church-based research. There's a tendency in church circles to become discouraged with research when one study fails to provide absolutely clear, totally useful answers to particular problems they're facing. They fail to understand that research is a cumulative process, and it takes time to build a general consensus in any given field.

HeRD #761 - The Way Towards Contextualization

There was a time when we talked about the "coming Age of Information" as if it was something on the horizon. We can drop the "coming." It's here. The articles cited in HeRDs #759 and 760 are but one more indication of how important the acquisition of information has become to our world. What we know has become as important as Who we know, maybe more important. My strong impression is that church bureaucracies are adapting themselves only slowly and

haphazardly to the world's entry into the Age of Information, when at all. They view research as more of a luxury than a necessity. Important decisions are made without adequate study of the situation they're intended to correct or address. It's ironic that, at the same time, there's huge amounts of time being invested in religious research, much of it by people seeking advanced degrees. There's an increasing amount of research on the church in Thailand, for example, but it's hard to see that this research universe is touching the "real" universe of the life of the churches to any meaningful degree. The Thai world we need to accommodate ourselves to and learn to minister to is the Thai version of the Age of Information. One doesn't hear much appreciation of that fact among church leaders here of any stripe, any persuasion.

HeRD #762 - Producing Insights & Knowledge

In its electronic edition for Friday, 28 May 1999, the Christian Science Monitor featured a story on the search for extraterrestrial life, a search which has been going on for years and growing in scope and intensity. Here's yet another major field of research that has gained the attention of the press. It's striking, when one pays attention, how many press articles there are on research of various sorts. Research, in the Age of Information, is news.

This particular article, interesting in itself, raises the question of the practical value of ET research and concludes, "To be sure, the first discovery of life may be years away. But even the search should produce new insights and knowledge." That's the point of all research, including church-based research. Well-done research as a matter of course produces more knowledge than is necessary to fulfill the requirements of its immediate research concern. It discovers ideas and produces knowledge that go beyond that subject. There are implications, new avenues, and unexpected spin-offs. The point is that our churches and church agencies can ill-afford to sit on the research sidelines, both in terms of sponsoring and making use of original research.

HeRD #763 - Theological Research

To wind up this mini-series on research, it seems to me that one of the most significant and exciting potential future trends for church-based research in Thailand is in the field of theological reflection. The Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA) has developed a model for encouraging Asian theological reflection that uses periodical consultations focused on particular subjects. Their next regional consultation will be held in Chiang Mai in January, 2000 on the theme of using Asian stories of creation for Christian theology.

With some adaptation, the PTCA model offers a practical means for encouraging indigenous theological research and reflection in Thailand. Participants have to conduct research and find suitable means to present the results of their research, be it a paper, video presentation, worship service, or other media. They learn by doing and by then interacting with others engaged in similar research projects. It can be an exciting process, one that produces new insights and deeper understanding. We saw some of that this past March and April in the Karen seminarians' research into traditional Karen religion, a program sponsored in part by the PTCA (along with the Baptist Union of Sweden). This coming October twenty-some participants will take part in a PTCA-sponsored consultation on theology and ministry in Thailand. If even relatively fruitful, this consultation could open the door to an ongoing program of theological research and consultations that just might encourage the Thai churches to articulate theologies more closely relevant to their own real life situations. In all of this I'm reminded of the quotation from the Christian Science Monitor article concerning the search for extraterrestrial life mentioned in HeRD #762, to the effect that while the final goal of such research may be years away "even the search should produce new insights and knowledge."

HeRD #764 - Some Things Never Change

In 1857 Sir John Bowring, on a special embassy to Siam, wrote:

"The diversity of the religious instruction of the Catholic and Protestant missionaries is an immense difficulty in the way of both. I am sorry to say, they frequently exhibit towards each other a spirit which is not that of Christian accord. The Catholic denounces the Protestant as a schismatic and a heretic, and the Protestant tells his hearers that the Catholic is but a teacher of a corrupt and indefensible faith. The whole field is too much occupied with jealousies and misunderstanding; and I have heard it alleged by natives against their foreign visitors--'They quarrel with one another; they do not understand one another; they teach different religions: how should we understand their difference? When they can agree about what we are to receive, we shall be more disposed to listen seriously.'"

- Bowring, THE KINGDOM AND PEOPLE OF SIAM, 1857. Oxford Reprint, I, 335.

HeRD #765 - Our Land Too

The 1928 Centenary celebration of the arrival of Protestant missions was a major social and cultural event in Bangkok, especially the opening ceremonies, which were attended by the King, Queen, and an impressive list of dignitaries. The event, held in a royal garden near the palace, lasted for three days, 6-8 December 1928. The opening received considerable attention in the local press. The Bangkok Daily Mail gave it two full columns in the center of page one, and the Bangkok Times carried the texts of some of the opening addresses, including one delivered by Dr. George McFarland on behalf of the Rev. John A. Eakin, the ailing Chair of the festivities.

One paragraph of Eakin's address is particularly interesting. It reads, "It was with no little trepidation, one hundred years ago, that the first missionaries came to this land of which they knew so little. To them, Siam seemed very far distant,--half a world away from their homes,--a strange land, with a strange tongue, strange customs and a strange people. But having found for themselves peace of soul, their hearts were filled with longing to share that knowledge with others,--and so they came. To many of those who came to this friendly land during this period, Siam has ceased to be strange, for it has become home; the strange tongue has ceased to sound strange for it is a means of communication not of separation as at first; the customs have ceased to seem strange, for many of them have also become our own; the people are no longer strange, for they are our friends who have welcomed us and who have made us feel 'at home.' And so, to those of us who to-day live in your midst, that early voyage into the vast unknown, is almost as hard to visualize as it for those who call Siam their native land: it is our land too,--by adoption."

When and if a full history of the Presbyterians in Thailand is written, this change from being aliens to natives by adoption will surely be a major theme.

HeRD #766 - Twenties Dialogue

HeRD #765 quoted a paragraph from Eakin's address to the King and Queen at the opening of the 1928 celebration of a century of Protestant missions in Thailand. Theologically and historically, one sentence is of particular note. Eakin explained the motivation for the missionaries in coming to Thailand by writing, "...having found for themselves peace of soul, their hearts were filled with longing to share that knowledge with others,--and so they came." Eakin was a veteran evangelist who had lived in Thailand for 45 years, and his phrase "peace of soul" reflects both those facts. He knew how to present the Christian message in a positive, culturally relevant way.

The 7 December 1928 issue of the Bangkok Times summarized King Prajadhipok's response by writing, "His Majesty then replied, speaking very clearly in English. He said that he was greatly please to hear the foregoing addresses. Some people might want to know why the Buddhists were so tolerant of the Christian faith and other creeds in Siam, and also why he and his predecessors had encouraged the missionaries. The reply would be that they rejoiced in all merit, and were glad to see merit made under the influence of any religion. He must thank the American Presbyterian Mission a great deal for the helpful work they had done for this country." The King went on to praise various aspects of Presbyterian work, especially its educational efforts.

There is a theological gap between Eakin's remarks and those of King Prajadhipok. The missionaries came with a message about how to find peace of soul, but the country accepted them because of their meritorious behavior. On the other hand, there is also some congruence in Eakin's viewpoint and that of the King. From the beginning, the Presbyterians consciously embodied their message in a set of humanitarian activities that benefited the people of Thailand. They "did" peace as well as preached it. The King, evidently, heard the doing more than the preaching and interpreted it in ways that made sense to him. Communication took place on a non-verbal level. That's dialogue, too.

HeRD #767 - Twenties Dialogue: Another Angle

Among the opening addresses at the December 1928 Centenary celebration of Protestant missions in Thailand, was one delivered by the Rev. Dr. J. W. Lowrie on behalf of the Rev. Dr. Arthur J. Brown, Executive Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. In the main, Brown thanked the King and Thailand for supporting the missionaries and avowed that the missionaries had only the good of Thailand at heart. One key sentence reads, "We feel that Jesus Christ has brought not only to Americans and Europeans but to all peoples of the world a knowledge of God and a way of communion with Him, a deliverance from the power of sin, a strength against temptation, and a peace and joy of life which are for all mankind.."

It's clear from all the reports that the missionaries carefully muted overt expressions of an evangelistic nature at the opening. One wonders, however, if Brown's words weren't a more subtle attempt to insert a Christian evangelistic message into the proceedings. Much hinges on the meaning of "a knowledge of God" and "a way of communion with Him." If Brown had written "the knowledge of God" and "the way of communication," he would have been openly asserting the idea that Christianity alone can lead to knowledge of and communication with God. Using "a" rather than "the" considerably softens his presentation of missionary motivations, but we have to suspect that Brown was still alluding to the exclusiveness of Christianity, if in a way that was polite and sensitive to the occasion. Yet, it's not quite clear. It seems possible that Brown wanted to do two things with this sentence: first, to deliver an evangelistic message; but, second, to do so in a way that was sensitive to the moment and context of delivery. If not dialogue, at the very least this type of sensitivity moves in that direction.

HeRD #768 - Running Amuck in Bangkok

The front page of the Bangkok Daily Mail edition for Friday, 7 December 1928, carried two major headlines. One is, "Their Majesties Open Centenary Exhibit Showing 100 Years of Mission Progress." This story warranted two columns and a photograph. Gentle readers of HeRD might wonder why a missionary centennial celebration would warrant such attention from the press. The Daily Mail's other major headline might help explain. It reads, "Royal Elephant Runs Amuck in Bangkok Streets." The sub-heading adds, "Thousands Flee From Mad Beast." Actually, two elephants were involved. The first paragraph of the article states, "With trunks waving

madly, five-foot tusks flashing menacingly and trumpeting in a shrill and terrifying manner, Sirinag and Dougkam, two elephants of the Royal Stables, located in a corral by the side of the Ministry of Justice, started on a rampage this morning at 11 o'clock which may lead to the death of Sirinag by drowning and the incapacity of Dougkam by injuries." All I have is a front page clipping and so don't have the full details. The two bulls, in any event, got into a fight, broke out of their pen, and took the fight into the streets. Crowds gathered, then fled, then gathered again.

December 7th, 1928, was a big day for crowds. They followed rampaging elephants in the morning, and then in the afternoon and evening they attended the missionary doings at the Royal Saranomya Gardens. This, plus the presence of royalty, helps to explain the press coverage of the Centenary celebrations. The measure of what constituted a "big story" in December 1928 was rather modest. As an aside, one has to feel a little sorry for Phya Vorabongse, Minister of the Royal Household, who was in charge of the elephants and also of the arrangements for the King's presence at the centennial. It must have been a busy day for the Phya.

HeRD #769 - Differing From All Its Sources

Trinterud, in his book on colonial Presbyterianism, *THE FORMING OF AN AMERICAN TRADITION*, opens with a description of its two main sources, English Puritanism and Scottish Presbyterianism. Each of these sources came to the colonies in a modified form, however. English Puritanism came via New England, while Scottish Presbyterianism was received largely from northern Ireland. Trinterud states, "It was inevitable, therefore, that American Presbyterianism would arise without any one clear-cut pattern, and that in the attempt to establish for it forms and standards the original sources as well as the modified sources would all make their claims. A number of subsidiary sources also would make their contributions, Huguenot, Dutch, Welsh, and German. Finally the American wilderness itself would challenge all these older traditions and practices, and the Presbyterianism of America would emerge as something differing from all its sources." (p. 15)

There's nothing surprising in this. One could engage in the same analysis of historical antecedents for any religious body anywhere in the world and come to largely the same conclusion. It's just that in the study of Thai Protestantism we have to keep in mind that it too is the product of multiple origins that emerges as "something differing from all its sources." Just to take the Protestant side of things is to discover an almost incredible degree of plurality. The main source coming out of the 19th century is American Presbyterianism. The American Baptists contributed an important subsidiary element. Less apparent, but of incalculable importance, is the influence of Chinese Protestantism, mediated through close contacts with the Chinese churches in Bangkok. Even less obvious is the presence of Karen Protestantism, quietly fermenting in northern Thailand since the early 1880s. The opening years of this century added the British Churches of Christ, with their own roots going back partly to the American frontier experience. The Anglicans, working out of Christ Church, started up work that same year. Then came the Seventh Day Adventists, the Christian & Missionary Alliance, and the Jehovah's Witnesses. All of this prior to World War II. Then comes the post-War explosion in Protestant missions in Thailand.

To truly understand the formation of either the Church of Christ in Thailand or the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand, one would have to carefully trace these missions back through their own ecclesiastical roots. That would be an awesome task, and we haven't even started to talk about the cultural roots of Thai Protestantism! What's important to remember, however, is that out of all of this mix with its varying degrees of influence there has emerged something "differing from all its sources."

HeRD #770 - Needed: A Two-Sided Model

HeRD #769 suggested that present-day Thai Protestantism is something quite different from its historical antecedents and sources. Valentine's article on Afro-American behavior, *HARVARD EDUCATIONAL REVIEW* (May 1971), adds weight to that suggestion. He argues that previous behavioral models for interpreting black culture and behavior in the United States were one-sided. They looked at blacks as being either members of the mainstream culture or as belonging to a distinctive ethnic culture. In fact, black Americans are both members of the mainstream and ethnic cultures, and each of their cultures has distinctive modes of enculturation. Each, that is, contributes to the formation of black Americans' personalities and life ways. It's misleading to study them as being products of a single culture, because they aren't.

The application to Thai Protestants seems obvious. On the one hand, they share in the mix of national, regional, local, and ethnic cultures that comprise contemporary Thailand. On the other hand, they're part of a complex religious sub-culture with its own mix of historical sources. Any viable model for the study of Thai Protestantism has to take into account of the dual nature of Thai who are Protestant and Protestants who are Thai.

HeRD #771 - Turning Point

Mary Campbell, a young missionary who arrived in Chiang Mai in April 1879, drowned in the Chao Phraya River less than two years later, in February 1881. Her death, at the age of 23, was a deeply felt loss by all who knew her. It's worth wondering about the impact her death had on two other lives.

The first was Dr. Marion Cheek, the Laos Mission physician who was traveling upriver with her. He had studied the sand bar where Campbell went swimming before she went in, and when he heard the cries for help he dove into the water to rescue her. He actually had her hair in his grasp when a nearby, flailing swimmer knocked her from his grasp. On recovering the body he spent a fruitlessly long time trying to revive Campbell, and later correspondence with the Board of Foreign Missions indicates that he was shattered by his failure to protect his charge. In the 1880s, Cheek's life turned further and further away from missionary work, and he eventually became a businessman who separated from his wife and lived a life his former colleagues in the mission considered dissolute. There are other reasons given in his correspondence for his drift away from the Mission, but one can't help but wonder what impact Mary Campbell's death might have had on Cheek and, perhaps, his sense of a personal relationship with God.

Campbell came to Chiang Mai with her classmate and close friend, Edna Cole. They lived and worked together in the closest harmony, and the first thought many of their friends had after Campbell's death was, "Poor Edna." Her death was a serious blow for Edna, who soon took an early furlough. In 1885, at the request of the Siam Mission, she transferred to Bangkok and went on to have an outstanding career as the principal of Wang Lang School, now Wattana Academy. It's all but impossible to believe that Cole would have left Chiang Mai and her closest friend, had Campbell lived, and the Laos Mission would never have agreed to having both Cole and Campbell transfer to Bangkok. Campbell's death in 1881, thus, had a major impact on Cole, and through her on the history of the Wang Lang School, the lives of hundreds of young Thai women, and, ultimately, the course of women's education in Thailand itself.

HeRD #772 - Fate, Providence, or Mere Happenstance?

The Judeo-Christian tradition is founded on the proposition that God acts in human events. It's a powerful idea, one that has had a major influence on Western thinking and behavior.

But...if we go back to HeRD #771 and seek to discern God's role in events, the whole proposition becomes as difficult in detail as it is powerful in general. Was it providential that Mary Campbell died? Did God kill her? Was it providential that Cheek should fail to protect his charge? Did God cause the profound trauma he felt at her death? One answer to these questions has been, "Don't ask them." We are God's creation and must humbly submit to whatever comes about. Any punishment or pain is deserved by a rebellious humanity, and any gracious providence is an undeserved sign of God's goodness." It's an answer that trashes the theology behind Jesus' ministry, namely that God is a Compassionate God. Where was the compassion in Mary's death and Cheek's torment?

There's no satisfactory answer to the question of human suffering in the past and present. If we call it "fate," then who or what determines our fate? If we argue that everything is "mere happenstance"...well, that philosophical assertion raises a whole set of issues of its own. There are organizing principles, such as love and affection, as well as physical laws that point, at the very least, to a Principle, a Reason, or a Something Beyond the Chaos. In the end, we have to be satisfied, more or less, with what seems to be the standard Christian answer to the problem of suffering: we're created in God's Image as free and creative agents in our own right, and God as Loving Creator relates to us as free beings. Unlike God, however, our freedom and creativity is contingent, restricted, imperfect, and tends towards chaotic and destruction. God is present in events working to gently reduce the chaotic destructive tendencies in our natures. This isn't a satisfactory answer, particularly when counseling people in grief with hard, angry questions about the way someone they loved died in undeserved pain, agonized suffering. It isn't really a satisfying answer to the historian, either. The human past is filled with a depressingly large amount of evil, petty as well as massive. Yet, many Christians report a sense of inner support, sustaining calm in times of intense stress. For them God is involved in bringing love out of hate, order out of chaos, and relief to suffering. Other Christians, living their faith, attempt to be love, order, and relief in suffering. It's in all of this that we have to finally say, in faith, that God is present.

One wonders, then, whether Cheek was able to hear God's presence in the tragedy of Mary Campbell's death. It seems not. Cole, apparently, could.

HeRD #773 - Historical Sketch

If one had to choose the single-most important Thai Protestant church history book ever published it would probably be HISTORICAL SKETCH OF PROTESTANT MISSIONS IN SIAM 1828-1928. Edited by Dr. George B. McFarland, with substantial assistance from his wife, Bertha Blount McFarland, the chapters of the HISTORICAL SKETCH touch on virtually every major theme and point to every important issue in the history of that first century. Take, for example, the second paragraph of McFarland's Preface (p. xiii). It states, "In many of its details the story of this century of Foreign Mission work in Siam is unique in the annals of the Church and were it to be fully told would make a thrilling story--true, but stranger than fiction. It is a story of faith; it is a story discouragement's of, at times, an almost overwhelming nature; it is the story of prayer--the sort that 'removes mountains'; it is the story of the 'sower who went forth to sow'."

At first glance these words might strike one as mere verbiage, a manner of pious posturing. McFarland seems to be bending over backwards to make more of the history of Protestant missions in Thailand than it really deserves. Perhaps, but one might also suggest that this paragraph opens doors on a number of relevant issues worthy of further reflection. Starting with our next HeRD, I'd like to look at some of those issues. They're not the sort of thing historians usually trade in because they tend to be theological, but these issues are important to

our Christian understanding of the Christian past in Thailand, of courage and determination of the rarest type; it is the story of great triumph over discouragement

HeRD #774 - Just How Unique is Unique?

HeRD #773 quoted the second paragraph of McFarland's Preface to the HISTORICAL SKETCH OF PROTESTANT MISSIONS IN SIAM 1828-1928. The first sentence of that paragraph reads, "In many of its details the story of this century of Foreign Mission work in Siam is unique in the annals of the Church and were it to be fully told would make a thrilling story--true, but stranger than fiction." (page xiii). It's probably harder to make a case in the '90s that the story of Protestant missions is thrilling than it was in the '20s, but the question of the uniqueness of that story is still a lively one.

In one sense, of course, every event is unique just as every car manufactured on an assembly line still comes out somewhat different from the other cars. If by unique we mean "distinctive," however, then it's more difficult to argue that the Protestant missionary experience in Siam between 1828 and 1928 is unique. It's very much of a piece with the 19th and early 20th centuries international Protestant missionary movement, particularly in its American version; and students of Thai Protestant history can gain a great deal from the study of that version. This is especially true of the history of Protestant missions among Native Americans. The Indians were American Protestantism's first cross-cultural mission field and long remained one of its most important fields. American historians have devoted considerable attention to the history of Protestant missions among the American Indians, and the results of their work are extremely helpful to those who would study the history of Protestant missions in Thailand.

Berkhofer's SALVATION AND THE SAVAGE (1976) is an excellent example. Berkhofer takes inter-cultural relations as his focus and in regard to the relationship between White missionaries and the Indians suggests that, "Both groups behaved according to their own culture systems." (p. 1) That's hardly startling, but Berkhofer obtains a number of helpful insights as he pursues that perspective. More in HeRD #775.

HeRD #775 - Civilization vs. Christianization: The Great Debate

Berkhofer's SALVATION AND THE SAVAGE (pp. 3-5) argues that 19th-century Protestant missions to the American Indians were divided into two camps. One side called for the Christianization of the Indians before attempts were made to civilize them. That is, convert them first and bring them into the mainstream of American culture later. The second camp called for just the reverse, civilize them first. This second camp felt, for example, that literacy was an important part of being a Christian. How else can Christians read the Bible for themselves? Berkhofer notes that the Presbyterians and Congregationalists tended to side with the civilization-first camp, most fully represented by the Quakers.

One can ramble at will through the records of the two 19th-century Presbyterian missions in Thailand and find nary a trace of that debate. The missionaries went about emphasizing literacy, setting up presses, starting schools, and vaccinating everybody in sight as a matter of course. It wasn't, however, all a "matter of course," unless you were a Quaker, a Congregationalist, or a Presbyterian. It's crucial to our understanding of Thai Protestant history generally that we realize that the predominate Protestant missionary presence between 1860 and 1960 was a "civilize-first" mission. That fact has been of central importance to ALL of Thai Protestant history since 1860. It can be argued that the post-World War II growth of evangelical and Pentecostal missions and churches is a resurgence, perhaps even a revolt of the Christianize-first camp. Presbyterian missionaries in the 1950s and later, meanwhile, transformed the

ethnocentric civilization-first approach into movements for rural and urban development. One could go so far as to argue that the apparently fundamental split between "evangelicals" and "ecumenicals" in the Thai church today reflects the on-going presence of this decades long debate over whether converts should be taught to read before or after they convert.

Berkhofer's book on missions to the American Indians, thus, opens up a major theme for the study of the history of missions in Thailand. Which brings us back to the point made in HeRD #774, namely that the history of Protestant missions in Thailand isn't all that unique, despite McFarland's assertion to the contrary.

HeRD #776 - The World Outside

The last two HeRDs have taken exception to McFarland's assertion is the Preface to HISTORICAL SKETCHES that the story of Protestant mission in Thailand is in its details, "unique in the annals of the Church." The history of Protestant missions to the American Indians offers a clear example that this isn't the case. Beyond scoring points against McFarland, who can't defend himself anyway, there is an important point to this argument. It's that the secondary literature on missions to the Indians offers historians of the church in Thailand a source of valuable insights for their own study.

The following quotation, from Berkhofer's SALVATION AND THE SAVAGE (p. 68) is an example: "Missionary work, Christian charity, and church membership thus brought the Indians into a new mental relationship with the world outside the tribe. They were no longer Indians alone but Christians, or at least members of a denomination stretching beyond the tribal boundaries across the United States." Substitute "northern Thai" for "Indians," and there's a book in that single sentence. Or, insert the words "Karen in Thailand" in place of "Indians," and you have another book! Very little attention has been given to the impact of Protestant missions in Thailand on the convert's "mental relationship with the world outside." Deeper insight into that impact would be invaluable.

If I were to select two fields of historical study that Thai seminarians should be required to take, other than Thai church history itself, the first would be early church history. Numerous HeRDs over the last couple of years have made the point that there are numerous instructive parallels between the founding of the early church and the establishment of the church in Thailand. The second field would be the history of Protestant missions to the American Indians. Students could learn a great deal about the Thai church from such a study!

HeRD #777 - The Concept of Culture in Missionary Thinking

The following quotation from Berkhofer's SALVATION AND THE SAVAGE (pp. 157-158) is fairly long, but it bears directly on the question of the widely held sense among the Presbyterians and others that they'd "failed" in Thailand. Berkhofer argues that Protestant missionaries to the American Indians assumed that Indian churches had to be both self-propagating and like White churches. They assumed, that is, that the Indians could be self-sufficient religiously only if they became like White Christians. He goes on to write,

"Yet the more time consumed in teaching the Indians to plow and wash, the less time for prayer and catechism. By trying to provide a civilized foundation for Christ's Church, the missionaries lost the goal in the attempt to gain it. On the other hand, not to teach civilization meant the Indians would never achieve a basis for a self-sustaining religion and so the mission could never be closed. This dilemma only existed because the missionary mind EXPLICITLY

divorced the elements of culture, unlike the theorists of today. In reality, civilization and Christianity had to go hand-in-hand, and this explains the slow progress of missionization."

I'd like to pick up on just one point, namely the importance of the concept of culture to missionary thought. It's not clear that Berkhofer is correct in writing that the missionaries divorced the elements of culture, religion and technology, for example, from each other. The Thailand missionaries, at least, saw a clear connection. The link, however, was a single dimension, mechanical one. If you push button "A" then effect "B" will take place. If they Westernized the peoples of Thailand they would necessarily have to become Christians as well. "A" leads to "B". We now understand culture, I think, to be more of a natural, multi-faceted, interlocking set of processes, skills, institutions, relationships, beliefs, values, manners, and attitudes. When you push one button, all sorts of unexpected consequences can take place.

HeRD #778 - Not the Same

This mini-series on parallels between missions in Thailand and those to the Native Americans has largely sought to show that the work in Thailand wasn't particularly unique, not in a meaningful sense. Still, there were differences. Berkhofer, in his book *SALVATION AND THE SAVAGE* (p. 158), for example, indicates that many missionaries to the Indians felt that they had failed to truly civilize the Indians. He states, "...at the same time the missionaries were bringing a variety of American civilization into the forests, that civilization at home was rapidly changing in technological aspects. While this did not alter the missionary approach to the transformation of Indian character and life, it could not help but widen in white minds the gap between white and Indian ways. Even if the Indians had achieved the material condition the whites possessed at the commencement of missionization, the Indians would still have been considered backward in light of the subsequent change in American civilization." In other words, rapid technological change made it impossible for the Indians to catch up. Berkhofer is writing about the period of 1787-1862.

The Presbyterians in Thailand didn't suffer under this particular sense of failure. They long took considerable pride, rather, in the role they played in the Westernization of Thailand. Part of the difference may have been that they didn't intend to integrate their churches into American society. Rapid change in the U.S. didn't directly impinge on their work in Thailand. The converts, furthermore, lead the rest of society in adapting to Westernizing change, particularly in the field of education. There was a time in northern Thailand when, if you wanted to introduce a change such as the use of toilets, you went to the Christians first.

We've probably done enough with missions to the Native Americans, but I'd like to return to a key point. Those missions provide historians of the Thai church with important insights into the history of Thailand Protestantism. They help us to better understand the historical background to missions in Thailand. They help us to understand missionary thinking. Even when things were different in Thailand, a knowledge of the history of missions to the Indians provides us with insights into the Thailand experience.

HeRD #779 - Faith & History

The second paragraph (p. xiii) of McFarland's Preface to the *HISTORICAL SKETCH OF PROTESTANT MISSIONS, 1828-2928*, asserted the uniqueness of Protestant missions in Thailand, at least in its details. We've argued here that its similarities to missions in other places is more readily apparent. The ones in Thailand weren't all THAT unique. McFarland goes on to write, "It is a story of faith; it is a story of courage and determination of the rarest type; it is the story of great triumph over discouragement of, at times, an almost overwhelming nature..."

These words call to mind a personal story. During the Spring Term 1987 at the University of Maryland, I presented a paper on missionary history in Thailand to one class. In the course of the paper, I attributed missionary behavior to their religious faith. One of my classmates took strong exception. He wanted to know why they REALLY behaved the way they did and utterly rejected religious motivation as being "real". The ensuing discussion left me standing pretty much out in the cold as the class generally seemed to agree that pious words were nothing more than a cover for deeper, darker motivations.

Beyond the irritation and the frustration of the moment, that class raised for me the issue of the role of religious faith in human behavior. I confess I was shocked to discover that my classmates couldn't see that people really and truly do act on their faith. How else can one account for Daniel & Sophia moving to Chiang Ma with their two children in 1867? What hidden motive could there be? Money? Prestige? Power? They were already well set up in Phet Buri and the North had nothing to offer them but unknown dangers and uncertainties. Or, again, what hidden motive could there have been to McGilvary's publicly standing before an angry Chao Kawilorot in 1869 and accusing him of murder? Whatever else it is, the story of Protestant missions in Thailand IS a story of faith, courage, and determination. Of course, there's also failure, stupidity, cowardice, bull-headedness, and a lot of other human "stuff" mixed into the equation. McFarland's words, nonetheless, aren't simply missionary rhetoric. They reflect an important reality about the history of Protestantism in Thailand.

HeRD #780 - Prayer & History

McFarland's Preface to the HISTORICAL SKETCH (p. xiii), goes on to state that the story of Protestant missions, "...is the story of prayer--the sort that 'removes mountains'." This is tough. While all historians should be open-minded enough to understand that religious faith and beliefs are real sources of human behavior, it's much harder to argue that prayer is a factor in historical events. We've made the point often in HeRD that history, as a field of research, can't admit divine agencies of intervention into human affairs. All of us, excepting only a few philosophers, take it as a matter of course that when we turn on the tap water flows out. If it doesn't, we go and investigate the problem and always find a cause for its not flowing. Prayer doesn't offer us a visible link between cause and effect that we can agree on. The idea that prayer is answered is itself a statement of faith, no different than the belief of others that illness is caused by evil spirits. So, in one sense, McFarland's statement about prayer isn't really appropriate to an introduction of a book that claims to be historical.

Still, I would argue that prayer can be seen as a factor in history in another way. That is, people behave on their faith in prayer. They take chances they might not otherwise take. They do or don't do certain things because they feel that God has answered their prayer in one way or another. Prayer instills confidence. It instills calmness and feelings of well-being. These, we must insist, are factors that influence human behavior, and the historian should take account of them. It's important to understand, then, that the history of Protestant missions in Thailand is a story of prayer, the kind of prayer that the missionaries believed moved mountains.

HeRD #781 - The Sower & The Seed

Dr. McFarland's Preface (p. xiii) of the HISTORICAL SKETCH concludes its summary description of the story of Protestant missions in Thailand by stating that, "...it is the story of the 'sower who went forth to sow'." (Matthew 9:37-38) It's hardly surprising the McFarland, son of a missionary family and a devout Christian in his own right, should close out with a central image out of 19th century missionary literature. Time and again, the missionaries write of the white fields of grain waiting for the harvest. Buell, for example, in a letter to the Presbyterian Board of

Foreign Missions in 1843, stated that on a trip to Phet Buri he felt the force of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-23). The missionaries were the sowers, and this "dark-minded people" was the field. The seed was "the truth we sow." Emma Hitchcock, writing 55 years later in a Laos Mission "Bi-monthly Letter" (July 1898), draws on the same passage in Matthew as McFarland. Her comments open with the pious wish that the home churches would send more harvesters and laborers to the field.

The concept of seed-sowing is crucial to understanding how the missionaries viewed themselves. Throughout the 19th century and into the 20th, they generally saw themselves as the ones who sowed, rather than the ones who reaped. They were scattering the seed, bringing the message, initiating the process. They prayed that there would be a great harvest, but they put their hope in God for that harvest.

This self-understanding was both a help and a hindrance to the actual carrying out of missions. On the help side, it allowed the missionaries to persevere in the face of the very difficult evangelistic situation in Thailand. The results of their work were modest and won only at great cost--in terms of personnel, finances, and even prayer. The sense that there would be a great harvest in God's good time sustained mission work in the face of the trying situation in Thailand. On the other hand, missionaries tended to just keep doing the same things over and over again, even though those things didn't lead to very fruitful results. Critical self-reflection and sensitivity to the need for evaluation and adaptation are largely missing from missionary writings in the 19th and earlier 20th centuries. Their rationale, rather, was that God's good time just hadn't come yet. They'd keep on with keeping on until it did. The image of the sower, in sum, was a significant one. It helped the missionaries in Thailand articulate a conservative, nose to the grindstone attitude of hard work and no change.

HeRD #782 - The Faith of Others

"The faiths of others all deserve to be honoured for one reason or another. By honouring them, one exalts one's own faith and at the same time performs a service to the faith of others. By acting otherwise, one injures one's own faith and also does disservice to that of others."

- from King Asoka's "Rock Edict XII" quoted in a draft chapter by Mark Hensman

HeRD #783 - The Only Conceivable Source

Commenting on the thinking of colonial American Presbyterian ministers in 1720, Leonard J. Trinterud in, *THE FORMING OF AN AMERICAN TRADITION* (p. 37), makes the following summary observation, "Even of the better ministers, the greater number were very slow to grasp the meaning of the American situation. They continued to live, think, and act as though they were still a part of their homelands. They made no move to found local schools, or local institutions such as had sprung up so quickly in the New England colonies. The homeland remained the only conceivable source of all education, culture, and standards. The frontier conditions were soon to break down all these old orders, leaving some men to continue living in an unreal world of yesterday while impelling others to attempt the creation of new forms and new orders adequate for preaching the Gospel in the frontier situation."

These comments bring several thoughts to mind. At the most general level, it's hard for most people to adapt quickly to changed social and cultural conditions. Some people have that skill, and they're to be envied; but most of us require time, hard lessons, and embarrassing experiences before we fit ourselves at all into a world significantly different from the one we grew up in. This was certainly true, more particularly, of nearly all of the Presbyterian

missionaries who served in Thailand between 1840 and 1940, to say nothing of many Thailand missionaries of various sects and denominations today. For the "old-time" Presbyterians, at least, Trinterud's words apply directly. I would go so far as to say that even his observation that the colonial Presbyterians failed to establish LOCAL schools and institutions applies to them. The foreign-style institutions they founded were "local" only geographically, not culturally or socially. For them the United States was certainly "...the only conceivable source of all education, culture, and standards." Trinterud's words are applicable to our situation here in Thailand in another sense. The old orders are disintegrating around us as well and at an ever-accelerating rate. You don't have to MOVE to the frontier anymore to LIVE on it. In a very real sense, the whole world has become "the frontier." And, just as in colonial America nearly 300 years ago, some of us continue to live in the world the way it was while others try to create "...new forms and new orders adequate for preaching the Gospel in the [Thai] situation."

Is it distressing or comforting that a quotation from a book published in 1949 about conditions in 1720 is still pertinent today?

HeRD #784 - The End Result

In HeRD #782 we saw that Trinterud, in his book THE FORMING OF AN AMERICAN TRADITION, makes the point that early American Presbyterian ministers had little sense of how to adjust to the new natural and cultural environment of Britain's American colonies. His final conclusion, however, indicates that over the course of many decades, the Presbyterian Church did adapt, did learn to become the "Body of Christ" in the American situation.

Trinterud writes, "The relevance of a Church is found in its character as the Body of Christ in history. Never since the colonial era has American Presbyterianism been so much a Church in history. Nothing in colonial life was alien to the pioneers of the Church. No part of human life fell outside the reign of God and the responsibility of the Church. Therefore, for these Presbyterians, the birth, though in agony, of a new nation on a savage frontier was according to the purpose of God. To live, then, as the church of some distant homeland, the perpetuator of order foreign to this new land, the Church of a select origin, was to deny that the new nation was the creation of God with a destiny of its own. To be the Body of Christ in history meant to be an American Church, with a divinely directed mission in American history, and not a mere colonial offshoot of some foreign Church which had neither part nor lot in American life." (p. 308)

It was only in the 1920s that Presbyterian missionaries began to take seriously the necessity of replicating their own colonial experience in Thailand, that is allowing the Thai church to become the Body of Christ in Thai history. Even then, the commitment of many individual missionaries to the process of the decolonialization of the Thai church was only half-hearted at best. My personal sense is that the decolonialization process is still going on in the C.C.T., by fits and starts. My sense, from talking to a few leaders from other Protestant church groups, is that many evangelical missionaries have just begun to define the issues involved in decolonialization and have yet to reach the stage of making a commitment to it.

HeRD #785 - I Know

Peter Svenson, an artist turned American Civil War buff, has written a fascinating book entitled BATTLEFIELD: FARMING A CIVIL WAR BATTLEGROUND (Faber and Faber, 1992), in which he recounts the story of his purchase of 40 acres of Virginia farmland situated squarely on the site of the Battle of Cross Keys, a minor confrontation that took place in the Shenandoah Valley in June 1862. The book recounts Svenson's growing love for his land and fascination with

the battle. At one point he details his discovery that in 1976 there had been a reenactment of the battle on the property what later became his property. As he surveyed the photographs and read the account of that reenactment, he felt that it had been almost a travesty with its pickups and autos and blaring radio music. He writes, "...there had been more amiss during those three days of pretend. Judging by the crude graphics included in the text, I could see that the reenactors mistook several key positions. Ignorant error had compounded error, and the general mis-orientation, once established, had put the whole reenactment awry. I knew, because my quest for truth had led me over and over the ground. I was beginning to see that certain experts weren't really experts at all, but just authority figures whose mistakes went unnoticed. In some instances, it was the careless inking of a battle line on a map; in others, it was the misreading of an official report." (p. 112)

The "experts" Svenson alludes to are local students of the battle, individuals who thought they understood the battle without having either walked the fields time and again or carefully studied the documents in detail. Svenson had gained an empathy for the events of June 1862, both by walking the ground of the battle repeatedly and by reading those reports with care. How well Svenson really knew the events of that battle is a question we can't decide, but his method, his approach are right on. One has to go over the documents and the ground as well before its possible to reach that stage of being able to say, "I know" -- and to know that you really do know, whatever the armchair experts claim or the skeptics may think to the contrary.

HeRD #786 - In Love with the Past

For me, personally, what's most fascinating about Svenson's book, *BATTLEFIELD*, (see HeRD #783) is that it documents his growing love for learning about the past. As he grew to love his land he also acquired a real feel for its past, to the point that his knowledge of its heritage was an important element in his love of the land. As is true with all fields of knowledge, I suspect, those who have this love of the past find a deep satisfaction in putting its story together. While they generally want their knowledge of past events to be of value, I doubt that very many historians root around in the past from purely utilitarian motivations. It's fun, it's exciting to take a subject that no one knows much about, some set of events in the past, and dig and dig and dig until you can put the story together . Sometimes you come across that one document, maybe just a paragraph in a long letter, that illuminates all of the bits and pieces of information you've collected. And then the lights suddenly come on, full and bright. Then, you know more fully, more completely what you knew only dimly, if at all before. That's deeply satisfying, especially when you can then put all the footnotes in place, arrange the bibliography, and add something, however modest, to a larger body of knowledge. Svenson, finally, was smitten with the study of the past to the point where he felt it necessary to write a book that told the "real" story of the Battle of Cross Keys and contribute thereby to a better understanding of one small aspect of one military campaign in the American Civil War.

HeRD #787 - Stubborn Fact

"The stubborn fact remains, however, that nothing is ever as simple as scholars would wish it to be."

- A. N. Wilson, *JESUS*, p. 56

HeRD #788 - It's All in the Document

Historians, unlike most other scholars, can't study their subject matter directly. The past is past and gone, and all that we have left from it are various forms of documentation. How the

historian understands and interprets those documents is crucial to the writing of history. A. N. Wilson's book, JESUS, is an instructive case in point. The book advocates a non-theological, historiographical attitude based on Wilson's interpretation of the four Gospels.

Wilson takes a distinctively negative, distrusting view of the Gospels, seeing them as being entirely mythic in their intention. He contends that the historical data in them are found only in "strange lapses" by which historical details have accidentally adhered to the Gospel stories. (p. 107) These details allow the historian to "...glimpse behind the scenes and discover a world which is wholly at variance with the traditional picture of things." (p. 102) Wilson almost seems to think that the Gospel writers intentionally obliterated the actual Jesus in order to put a mythical, made-up Jesus in his place. For two thousand years, according to his view, pious Christians have fallen victim to and perpetuated this false, mythic Jesus, and Wilson has taken it upon himself to undo all of this by debunking and deconstructing the Gospels. He is "out to get" what he considers a foolish, simple-minded piety based on a nonsensical, willful misinterpretation of Jesus and has undertaken a detailed attack on the Jesus of Christian piety. His goal is to demonstrate that there is no historical reality to the Second Person.

Wilson has made one fatal error. He's assumed that the Gospels are the cause for Christian misinterpretations of the real Jesus. Rather than placing them in the context of their own time, he interprets them in the context of how they've been read in subsequent centuries. Wilson fails to put aside his negative feelings about later Christianity as he reads the earlier Gospels. More in HeRD #789.

HeRD #789 - Literalists and Anti-Literalists

HeRD #789 reported on A. N. Wilson's attack in his book, JESUS, on the Gospels and Christianity's failure to preserve the actual Jesus. It concluded with the claim that Wilson has misread the Gospels by failing to put them in their own place and time. He has allowed the subsequent centuries of Christian thinking to color his view on the Gospels themselves. Wilson is what we might call a biblical anti-literalist, one who is passionately opposed to literalistic, pious readings of the Bible. In his anti-literalism, however, Wilson takes on the characteristics of the biblical literalists themselves. He has a theological agenda just as much as they do. For the literalists, Jesus is the divine Son of God, and the Gospels are absolutely true factually. For Wilson, the mythical Son of God is unreal, and the Gospels are untrustworthy even though they do, accidentally, contain some historical details. Neither the literalists nor the anti-literalist begin with the Gospels themselves in their own setting and try to work from the Gospels towards the actual Jesus.

My own sense, as a Christian and a historian, is that it's important for us to gain insights into the actual Jesus, and to do that we need to steer a more central course between the rocks of literalist piety and anti-literalist impiety. The Christian historian should have no interest in debunking OR protecting traditional Christian views of Jesus. The sole concern should be with looking through the Gospels towards the actual Jesus. Such a program will find the Gospels more trustworthy as repositories of historical data than Wilson allows. It will also serve as a more sure antidote against the excesses of literalistic misconstructions of Christian origins than Wilson's anti-literalism, which isn't all that different, really, from literalism itself.

HeRD #790 - A Possible Origin of the Song Revivals

HeRD returns from time to time to the Song Revivals of 1938 and 1939, both because they are fascinating in their own right and because of their significance to 20th century Thai

Protestantism. As we've pointed out before, the Song Revivals had a pre-history stretching back some 20 years or more. Just how far back "or more" really takes us is an open question.

Trinterud's book, *THE FORMING OF AN AMERICAN TRADITION*, offers a possible answer. In his narrative on colonial American Presbyterianism, Trinterud devotes considerable space to the Great Awakening, which he sees as being a central, formative event for Presbyterians. His description of the birth of American revivalism in the Awakening calls to mind the Song Revivals in a number of ways. Colonial Presbyterian churches were small, scattered, and suffered from a lack of committed clerical leadership. There was a desire for change in many quarters. The revival experience was powerful as it turned a largely cold, formal religiosity into a warm, enthusiastic piety. Churches grew. Half-hearted members came alive. People who had no interest in formal religion or any religion at all were converted. And intense controversy surrounded the spread of revivalist sentiment through the churches, a controversy that for a time led to a formal split into two rival Synods. The revival came to life in Presbyterian churches through a series of visits by the English revivalist, George Whitefield, whose tours are reminiscent of John Song's visits to Thailand. Although there's a great deal that's different between the American colonial revivals of the 1730s and the C.C.T. revivals of the late 1930s, the central dynamic seems strikingly similar.

Are these similarities coincidental, simply examples of a larger set of revivalistic experiences? Perhaps, but it's also possible that there's a more direct link as well. The American revivalistic experience that began with the Great Awakening had a strong continuing influence on American Presbyterianism, even in its more conservative Old School form. It's at least possible, maybe likely, that if someone carefully traced Song's Chinese Protestant origins and the revivalistic heritage of the Presbyterian missions in Thailand that clear links could be established between them and the colonial American Great Awakening. We might liken revivalism to a recessive gene among Presbyterians, just waiting for the right environmental conditions to make itself known. Or, again, it was an element in the collective consciousness of Presbyterian churches that was transmitted to the C.C.T., again, waiting for the right conditions to come to the forefront, as it did in the 1920s and 1930s. This is entirely speculative, of course, but also worth further investigation.

HeRD #791 - Gentlemen Preachers

After the 1750s, more and more colonial American Presbyterian clergymen were able to acquire a college education, and the presbyteries were more and more inclined to require a college education for ordination. Trinterud, in *THE FORMING OF AN AMERICAN TRADITION* (p. 202), tells the tale of one cleric, Jacob Green, who disagreed with these trends and urged limiting educational requirements for ordination. Green, writing in 1775, claimed that from New York to Georgia the Presbyterians lacked some 300 ministers, while other denominations were expanding rapidly with less well-educated evangelists. He wrote, "These new parts [i.e. frontier areas] of our land want men for preachers that will live with a small salary, men of self-denial, men that will take every prudent method to subsist in the world. The method we have been in, has been first to make men gentlemen and then make them preachers; and our candidates have no idea of being gospel ministers without living politely. This method is hurtful to religion for it will always leave a great part of the Churches destitute of ministers." The Presbyterian Church, however, continued to strive for higher ordination standards, partly as an antidote to heresy "born of ignorance" and partly out of a distaste for "shoddy preaching."

We find here yet another parallel with the CCT's experience in Thailand . Even before World War II, both camps mentioned above had emerged, one arguing that a trained, high-quality clergy was necessary to the development of the churches and the other observing that a

well-educated clergy was also an absent, unattainable clergy for the great majority of churches. It seems likely that there's a direct link between the colonial American Presbyterian experience and that of the CCT, a church originally founded out of Presbyterian missions. There's no question but that the 19th-century Presbyterian missionaries inherited and brought with them a valuation of a highly educated clergy. What's interesting is that that value led the church in Thailand to the same debate on the problem of an overly-educated clergy that couldn't meet the needs of rural churches. What happened in the U.S. is that some frontier Presbyterians split off to form a new church, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, more responsive to frontier leadership needs. Many hundreds of thousands of other potential Presbyterians ended up as actual Methodists as Baptists because those denominations put far more pastoral leaders out on the frontier, albeit leaders who frequently weren't all that well-trained. The CCT, on the other hand, evolved a more mixed approach in which partly approximated the Methodist or Baptist style by the presence of less well-trained Bible school graduates. It was mostly these individuals who became pastors in the first expansion of pastoral care in the early 1980s. The CCT also retained, however, and is now moving forcefully in the direction of a better-educated clergy, and more and more pastors have at least a bachelor's degree in theological education.

HeRD #792 - Amen, Jacob

HeRD #791 reported on Jacob Green's concerns about trends in colonial American Presbyterian ministerial training. Trinterud, in *THE FORMING OF AN AMERICAN TRADITION*, notes that one thing in particular irked Green about that training. He was "...impatient with the great amount of time spent by students in learning dead languages which they would soon forget." Amen, Jacob. Many others have since shared your impatience.

HeRD #793 - Trends in Thailand Protestant Research I

In the course of other research, I recently compiled a bibliography of 66 English-language theses and dissertations on Protestantism in Thailand. Although the bibliography is by no means exhaustive or complete, it is extensive. It also provides fodder for an analysis of trends in research on Protestantism in Thailand, which we'll pursue for a couple of HeRDs or more.

The oldest entry on the bibliography is: Fuller, Paul H. "The Christian Approach to Hinayana Buddhism in Siam." B.Th. thesis, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1929. The next oldest is: McClure, Helen F. "Basic Factors in the Construction of a Bible Curriculum for Christian Schools in Thailand." Master's thesis, Biblical Seminary in New York, 1942. If there are other theses of this vintage, they're few and far between. Interestingly enough, there are no citations from the 1950s, which means that Fuller's and McClure's theses pre-date the emergence of an academic movement towards the study of Protestantism in Thailand

Since 1960, the picture looks like this:

Theses & Dissertations on Protestantism in Thailand

<i>1960s</i>	<i>1970s</i>	<i>1980s</i>	<i>1990s</i>
5	7	22	30

There's nothing particularly startling in this distribution. What it documents clearly, however, is that there has been an explosion in the study of Thailand Protestantism since 1980, one that has continued down to the present. If there is a surprise at all, it's that there have been so many theses and dissertations, and that there is so much being invested in the academic study of the

Protestant church in Thailand. It's worth noting here, in passing, that the list includes 34 doctoral dissertations, 30 master's theses, 1 bachelor's thesis, and 1 licentiate thesis (from Finland).

HeRD #794 - Trends in Thailand Protestant Research II

Of the bibliography of 66 English-language theses and dissertations on Protestantism in Thailand introduced in HeRD #793, it will come as no surprise that two-thirds, 44, were written at North American schools (all but 1 in the United States). Of the remaining 22, 12 were written in Asian schools, 4 in Europe, 3 in Australia and the Pacific region, and there are 3 more I'm not sure of the location of the school. These figures are somewhat deceiving in that at least 10 European missionaries have written theses in Europe or the United States for degree-granting bodies located in the U.S. Still, at this point, the U.S. is very much the center for the English-language academic study of Thai Protestantism. As far as can be told from the list, there doesn't seem to be any trend away from the central role of American academic institutions. This can esp. be seen in the case of the Asian schools. Where 30 of the 66 theses (45%) were written in the 1990s, only 4 of the 12 Asian theses (33%) have been written in the 1990s. By way of comparison, 22 of the 66 theses (33%) were written in the 1980s, including 5 of the 12 Asian theses (42%). If anything, then, there seems to be a slight trend away from Asia in the written of English-language theses.

Another important pattern is the origins of the writers themselves. Of the 66 theses, 23 were written by Thais, 8 by other Asians, and 34 by Westerners (farang). (For the remaining person, it's hard to tell his origins from his name). These figures indicate that Thais themselves have taken an active part in the English-language study of Protestantism in Thailand. One can look at this figure in one of two ways. On the one hand, the Thai and other Asian role is clearly significant, even in the English-language literature, and this is surely a mark of the growing academic competence of the Protestant churches of Thailand. On the other hand, some might feel uneasy that so much of Thai intellectual reflection on Protestantism in Thailand is taking place in English and overseas.

HeRD #795 - Trends in Thailand Protestant Research III

Yet another way to look at the 66 English-language theses and dissertations on Protestantism in Thailand introduced in HeRD #793 is by theological orientation. This categorization is a bit tricky, but worth the effort. Of the 66 theses and dissertations, just 4 have been written by secular scholars, that is by individuals without clear church affiliations. This suggests that as a field of academic study Thailand Protestantism has received little attention outside of the church itself. One other was written at a Protestant seminary, but by a Buddhist scholar, thus happily defying all general categories that I can think of.

If, however, we deal in broad categorizations of "ecumenicals" and "evangelicals," a theological differentiation that makes sense in contemporary Thailand, we come up with the following breakdown: identifiably ecumenical theses and dissertations number 20 (30%) while 37 (56%) were written by evangelical researchers. I'm not able to identify the theological orientation of the remaining 4 researchers. I've taken into account the school the research was done at in making this categorization. In several cases, individuals related to the Church of Christ in Thailand are found in the "evangelical" category and in a couple of cases individuals related to the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand are categorized as "ecumenicals."

This gauge of theological orientations is rough, at best, and shouldn't be taken too seriously. If it shows anything, however, it does indicate that the more conservative elements related to Thailand Protestantism are contributing significantly to the study of this field. My

sense, however, is that by and large the evangelical and the ecumenical circles write mostly each for their own circle. There is only limited crossover between them. If anything, I have the impression that evangelical theses and dissertations tend to make more use of ecumenical research than the other way around.

HeRD #796 - Trends in Thailand Protestant Research IV

HeRD #795 presented a very general categorization by theological tradition of the 66 English-language theses and dissertations on Protestantism in Thailand introduced in HeRD #793. It reported that 56% of the entries in the bibliography were written by "evangelicals" and 30% by "ecumenicals." When we look at the subjects researched, there seems to be only some distinction between subjects chosen by evangelicals and those of ecumenicals as well as between Thai, Asian, and farang researchers.

All five of the entries on CHRISTIAN EDUCATION, for example, were written by farang, 4 of the 5 being authored by evangelicals. Four of the 5 entries on CHURCH ADMINISTRATION & LEADERSHIP TRAINING, on the other hand, were written by Thai researchers, including only one evangelical among the 4. In a third category, there are just 5 theses and dissertations concerning PASTORAL CARE & COUNSELING, written by 3 Westerners and 2 Thai, 3 ecumenicals and 2 evangelicals.

It will come as no surprise that 12 of the theses were on EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING OR CHURCH GROWTH. This is the largest single category. Of the 12, 6 were done by farangs, 3 by Thais, and 3 by other Asians. All but two of these entries were written by evangelicals. Another 11 theses and dissertations take as their subject the RELATIONSHIP OF CHRISTIANITY TO CULTURE and the contextualization of the Christian message. Again, 6 were done by Westerners, 4 by Thais, and 1 by another Asian. Eight of the 11 were written by evangelicals. In a related category, 7 individuals wrote on the RELATIONSHIP OF THE BIBLE TO CULTURE to one or another aspect of Thai culture. Of the 7, 4 are Thai and 3 farang; 3 are ecumenicals and 4 evangelicals. Another 8 works were produced on various facets of MISSIONARY WORK & HISTORY, written by 4 farangs, 2 Thais, and 2 other Asians. The 8 included 3 ecumenicals and 5 evangelicals. In other subjects, there are no clear patterns, except that of SOCIAL ISSUES. There are only two theses or dissertations in this category, both written by Thai ecumenicals. Some analysis of all of this follows in the next HeRD.

HeRD #797 - Trends in Thailand Protestant Research V

HeRD #796 gave an analysis of the subjects treated in 66 theses on Thailand Protestantism (see HeRD #793) by theological orientation and by national origins. The results of this analysis confirm what seems generally obvious, rather than providing startling, unexpected insights. First, over half of the theses, 38 in number, focus on issues relevant to evangelism, Christianity and culture, Bible and culture, and missionary work and history. Of these 38, fully 27 were done by evangelicals and only 11 by ecumenicals. As we saw in the last HeRD, of those theses & dissertations dealing with evangelism and church planting directly, only two were done by ecumenicals. These figures indicate, first, that evangelical scholarship in Thailand is primarily focused on issues having to do with spreading Christianity. These 27 items represent nearly three-fourths of the total of 37 evangelical theses. Ecumenical theses & dissertations tend to cluster around specific ministries of the church. It's interesting to note, again, that the only two items concerning social issues were both written by Thai ecumenicals. Another item of interest is the fact that of the 6 theses written on the Bible and Thai culture, 4 were written by Thais, 3 of whom are ecumenically-minded. We can summarize, then, that evangelical scholarship is largely interested in issues of evangelism and communicating the Gospel. Ecumenical scholarship tends

to be more concerned with ministries of the church. This summary is a huge over-simplification based on a small sample.

Yet, it may reflect some realities of the life of the Protestant church in Thailand. First, there's the ideological reality. Evangelicals, as their name implies, continue to be concerned to win people to Christ. This is why their missions came to Thailand, and their churches still emphasize the centrality of evangelism over all other ministries. Those of an ecumenical bent are generally less interested in evangelism as such, and more interested in creating viable ministries for the church. This would seem to be in keeping with their more open attitude towards the world around them. There's a less clear pattern among the Thai writers, evangelical or ecumenical. Each seems to generally follow the lines of their ideological orientation. If there is any distinction, it seems that Thai Protestant scholars of both camps are somewhat more interested in the life of the local church and in ministries related to it than are Westerner scholars of Protestantism in Thailand.

HeRD #798 - Full & Redolent

"We must take into account that mission and church history are not only full of God's grace, but also redolent of the sins of His people."

- Jan A. B. Jongeneel, in *Swedish Missiological Themes* , vol. 86 (1998), p. 652.

HeRD #799 - Hitchcock Lamp

Ach. Prasit Pongudom, a colleague in the Office of History, and I are translating Curtis' book, the LAOS OF NORTH SIAM, in cooperation with a local press. Translating is a painstaking process, as any of you who have done much of it can testify; and one reason for the pain part of it is that the translator has to understand what's going on. You can't just skip over things. In this HeRD and the next one, I'd like to share two instructive examples with you, both taken from Chapter III of Curtis.

In that chapter, Curtis makes passing reference to a "Hitchcock Lamp." Never heard of it. I supposed it was some sort of gas lantern. A trip to the Web (www.historical-lighting.idirect.com) revealed that, "First produced in 1876, the Hitchcock Lamp Co. manufactured their mechanical lamps as table lamps, bracket lamps with reflector, and as hanging lamps. Made of pressed brass, it was originally nickel-plated. The wide, ornate stem houses the motor mechanism. A clock-work spring mechanism drives a horizontally mounted fan, drawing air up from the base, through the stem and upward between the font and font casing to the burner. Encased with a draft deflector, the burner is able to produce a flame without the need of a chimney. Wound from the bottom of the base, this mechanism can run for approximately ten to fourteen hours." The web site goes on to observe that, "Not widely accepted because of its manufacturing cost, it was however, to be recognized later on in North America and abroad, as being one of the most commonly renowned of all mechanical lamps. Its usefulness did prove successful in both the commercial and industrial markets. Period of production: 1876-1905."

The Hitchcock lamp was, evidently, state of the art for the turn of the last century. It cost more than the usual lamp, but it was recognized for its utility and its quality. Although we don't know how the particular lamp Curtis alluded to came into the possession of a member of the Laos Mission, this type and quality of item fits very well with the general picture of missionaries as innovative modernizers. We have to assume that quality merchandise was important, because you couldn't just go out and buy a new one or go to a repair shop down the street. Beyond that,

the missionaries tended to bring new gadgets out to Thailand with them, and Curtis' reference to a Hitchcock lamp comes, thus, as no surprise at all.

HeRD #800 - Crokinole

In Chapter III of her book, *THE LAOS OF NORTH SIAM*, Curtis mentions in passing that while traveling up river in 1895 she and three other missionary women passed some of their free time by playing a game called "crokinole." If I'd ever heard of it, I have long since forgotten, which meant another trip to the Web. Low and behold, it's not just a game, but if the relevant web sites are any indication its a religion.

According to "CROKINOLE! The OFFICIAL Site!" (www.crokinole.com), "Crokinole is a skill & action table game played on a round or octagonal wooden board by two to four people playing individually or in teams. It is a member of the shuffleboard family of games. The object of the game is to get as many of your own (team's) playing pieces (wooden discs about the size of a checker) as close to (or into) a small recess at the center of the board as possible, while at the same time, knocking your opponent's discs off of the playing area, or as far from the center recess as possible. This is accomplished by 'fillipping' (flicking the disc with your finger) from a shooting line near the edge of the playing area. Eight posts act as obstacles surrounding the center recess." Other web sites indicate that the game probably originated in Canada, perhaps as early as the 1860s. There seems to be a Mennonite connection of some sort as well. The crokinole boards, apparently, can be quite elaborate and the best of them are considered to be well-crafted pieces of art.

Curtis' mention of playing crokinole opens a neat little window on the leisure-time life of missionaries in 19th century northern Thailand. First, it's a fairly elaborate game, and the board is rather large. One has the impression that the missionaries didn't travel lightly, and the ownership of a crokinole board lends some substance to that impression. One web site said that crokinole boards should be treated as if they were a piece of furniture! Second, it might not be coincidental that crokinole isn't a card game, as I suspect that card-playing missionaries in the North was still a thing of the future in 1895. Third, and not at all surprisingly, the missionaries brought their leisure-time activities with them from home. It's doubtful that the games the northern Thai played had much appeal to them. There is an important larger point here, however, and that is that these American Presbyterians sought to recreate for themselves their own culture in the North, as best they could.