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Lead Essay

A Small Future



The term "reification" is hardly a common one, but it names an important phenomenon, which Berger and Luckmann (1966) state is "the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly supra-human terms." The *Oxford English Dictionary* (Compact Edition) defines "reification" as being, "The mental conversion of a person or abstract concept into a thing." Stated somewhat differently, the term means assigning to commonly held, socially constructed ideas, beliefs, or values the same reality that is usually given objects of nature. As the Berger and Luckmann definition suggests, it can also mean equating such ideas, beliefs, or values to divine reality. It is a relatively new term, the first usage given in the OED is from 1846. It evidently has some marxist connections, being used to describe the way in which economic systems, such as capitalism, are taken to be virtually a part of the given natural world.

When we live "at home" in the cultural world we grew up in, we assume that our social and cultural ways are entirely "natural" because everyone observes them. While we don't say that the way we eat, dress, or relate to the people around us are natural, in fact we largely think of those things as being so, especially where we have had little or not exposure to other societies and cultures. Some years ago, Thai friends who were about to visit the United States for the first time quizzed me very carefully about wearing shoes in American homes. They planned to stay with an American family, and one of them inquired, quite seriously, how far into the house they should go before taking off their shoes. "You wear them even in the bathroom? Even in the bedroom?" he asked. In Thailand, anything associated with the feet is considered low and unclean, and to this Thai couple it seemed "unnatural" that people would wear their shoes anywhere in a home. Taking off one's shoes before going into a house or temple, such as is done in Thailand, is entirely a social convention. There is nothing right or wrong, natural or unnatural about it as such, unless, of course, you live in Thailand in which case it is incredibly wrong and rude to wear shoes in a private home, in a temple, and in some offices and other designated public spaces. The point is that humans in every culture tend to think of the ways in which they believe and act as being as "natural" as a tree or a stone or the night sky; they *reify* their social world, making it a part of the order of nature itself.

The concept of reification applies with particular relevance and force when it comes to religion. Believers, over time, create a religious tradition, which they then take to be not only a true statement about reality but also a veritable part of the natural order itself. Many Protestants Christians are firmly convinced that their personal and denominational views on the nature of the Bible, for example, are true and encapsulate reality. The Bible *really* is the inspired, infallible Word of God and, as such, an irreducible component of the divinely created natural order. In the world of religion, then, reification may be understood as the process by which believers take their religious tradition to be a part of the divinely created natural order of things.

When taken to the extreme, as is frequently the case, reification becomes a form of idolatry. Believers normally assign ultimate meanings to their set of doctrines, rituals, and patterns of behavior, otherwise they would not believe in them. There is, however, a thin, but highly important line between assigning ultimate meanings to religious thinking and behavior and taking that thinking and behavior to be itself ultimate. What we might call "high" Theravada Buddhist thought argues that Buddha images have no meaning or significance in and of themselves; they are no more than visible symbols that remind the faithful of the path to salvation taught by the Buddha. In truth, however, popular Thai Buddhism treats Buddha images as much more than mere symbols, believing that the images have holy power and are in and of themselves sacred. Using Christian terms, the temple faithful transform a set of human beliefs into a key part of "divine" reality. That is reification which, again in Christian terms, is also idolatry. That is to say, that while Buddhism is not an idolatrous religion some practicing Buddhists have so reified the precepts and paraphernalia of their religion as to become idolaters (in the Christian understanding of the concept). Buddhadasa and other Thai religious reformers agree, which is why some Buddhist reform movements in Thailand have dispensed with Buddha images entirely. A parallel in the Christian faith is bibliolatry, a widely found Protestant form of reification-idolatry that transforms the Bible into a sacred object of its own power. The humanly created religious artifact is recreated in the believer's thinking into something with godlike power and significance.

The ultimate reification of religious thinking and behavior, in the Christian world, is found in our conception of God. "God" is, by the very definition of the word, ultimate. God is sovereign-omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. There is, again, a thin line between understanding God as Ultimate Reality and assigning that same characteristic of ultimate reality to our conceptions of God, for example Christian doctrines describing God as triune. The doctrine of the Trinity is nothing more or less than a human conceptualization of God, which Christian believers worked out through many intense disputes over hundreds of years and have continued to elaborate on down to the present. Yet, we Christians capitalize the word (in English, anyway) and the great majority of Christians believe that God really is Triune. They believe that the doctrine is not an invention by the church to try to make sense of the Christ event in the context of both Jewish and Greek religious thought but rather the True Nature of God. That is reification. It is also idolatry. It is the belief that the concept of the Trinity is not human invention but, rather, the actual (and only true) reality of God.

The ancient Hebrew prophets condemned the idolatries, the reifications of their own day and their own religion with unstinting vigor. What many, probably the great majority of contemporary Christians fail to understand is that today the idols we Christians cherish and worship in place of God are mental ones, not metal or wooden ones. And, in Thailand at least, it is our worship of these sectarian idols that foments disunity within the church and gives Christians a bad name in the larger society.

It is entirely normal for people of religious faith to find meaning in a set of doctrines and hold to a set of rituals and patterns of religious behavior. The trouble arises for Christians, at least, when we turn our ways of thinking into divine revelations, which we think we can comprehend and control. Our faith becomes a reified form of idolatry-and a veritable denial of our faith, our

trust that God is the Ultimate Beyond that somehow is also intimately within working to heal what is broken.

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Ban Dok Daeng
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Articles

The Wiang Pa Pao Consultation on Evangelism in the Northern Thai Context

Herb Swanson

About This Article



This paper summarizes discussions held over two days at the Dong Phra Phorn Camp, Amphur Wiang Pa Pao, Chiang Rai Province. The consultation was held as a part of a research project funded by the Luce Foundation on "Northern Thai Christianity in its Buddhist Context," headed up by Dr. Don Swearer of the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University. A very different version of this paper is slated to appear as a chapter in a book based on the research done for that project.

Introduction

The issues involved in the relationship of northern Thai Protestant Christians to their Buddhist context is, first and last, a question of the religious, ideological, and behavioral boundaries that divide the faith communities from each other. The old-time Presbyterian missionaries laid down for their churches a clear, rigid boundary against Buddhism that could not be compromised, let alone erased. They used a number of strategies to create, preserve, and expand that boundary, the most important of which was the evangelistic communication in word and deed of the Christian message. Evangelism dominated their thinking, and it suffused their strategies to the point that no other motivation carried so much importance for most of them. Daniel McGilvary's autobiography provides a classic description of that importance; he remembered that when his family first arrived in Chiang Mai in 1867 people frequently asked them why they had come. He and Sophia explained that, "We were come with messages of mercy and with offer of eternal life from the great God and Saviour. We were come with a revelation of our Heavenly Father to His wandering and lost children."¹ Dr. Charles Crooks spoke for nearly all of his colleagues over the years when he stated that if the missionary purpose was to be accomplished, "it is essential that the primary aim of all missionary enterprises be evangelistic."²[2]

The missionaries knew that they would eventually have to entrust all of their work to the "native" church, and they fully intended that the northern Thai church would continue to place its primary emphasis on evangelism. The Rev. William Harris wrote in 1898 that one of the pressing needs of the Laos Mission was to develop a program that would enable the "native

church" to become "a great evangelizing force in this country." His colleague, the Rev. W. F. Shields, writing that same year summarized the feelings of the vast majority of his colleagues in the mission that, "To me the evangelistic work is so necessary to the life of the church that a failure to do it is the death of the church."³ The missionaries, that is, expected that the northern Thai church would continue to use evangelism as one of its chief means for defending and expanding the boundaries that they had created for it. The ministry, or mission, of evangelism thus comprises an important indicator of how Christians have related to their Buddhist neighbors over time. If northern Thai Protestants have largely preserved the missionary emphasis on evangelism intact, their relationships with their Buddhist neighbors and their experience of their Buddhist context will be of a nature very different from it will be if they no longer hold to that evangelistic emphasis.

The purpose of this article is to report on a consultation held on Friday and Saturday, 21-22 February 2003, with a group of northern Thai evangelists, which consultation focused on the question of evangelism in the northern Thai Buddhist context. The consultation was held at the CCT's Dong Phra Phorn Camp, Amphur Wiang Pa Pao, Chiang Rai Province, and it had no speakers, no addresses, and no formal program. The sole purpose of the consultation was to provide a venue in which northern Thai Christian evangelists could share experiences and insights regarding evangelism in the Buddhist context.

The 31 registered participants for the Wiang Pa Pao discussions included 27 men and 4 women. They came from the following CCT districts:

District	Location	Participants
One	Chiang Mai-Lamphun	10
Two	Chiang Rai	7
Four	Phrae-Uttaradit	3
Five	Nan	5
Seven	Chinese Presbyterian	3
Fourteen	former Leper churches	2

One participant is working for an evangelism program of another denomination. Their number included eight pastors. Virtually all of the participants had some background in carrying out evangelism, and most of them are experienced evangelists. Because of the remote location of the camp (89 kms north of Chiang Mai), most of the participants took part in all of the sessions; only two participated in just one or two sessions. The general tenor of the meetings was serious, intense, and from the beginning to end, it never lacked for participation. The participants evidently cared deeply about the subjects discussed.

It should be noted that nearly all of the participants are members of churches that have their origins in the work of the Presbyterian Laos Mission; these churches today all belong to the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT). The Wiang Pa Pao discussions provide insights thus into the ways in which northern Thai Protestants have preserved and modified their evangelistic missionary heritage three generations later. They, first, provide a rough measure as to whether or

not contemporary Presbyterian proselytization of Buddhists is as aggressive as it was in the missionary era. They, second, offer insights into how both northern Thai Buddhists and Christians experience the boundary that lies between their two faiths. They, finally, give us some sense of how those who are most likely to be alienated from the Buddhist context and most critical of it actually feel about that context today.

The Discussions

Session I: What is Evangelism?

The first session began at roughly 1:30 pm, Friday afternoon, February 21st. It was devoted to a plenary discussion of the question, "What is evangelism?" As the participations presented various definitions, it became clear that one issue much on their minds is the relationship of verbal communication of the Christian faith to non-verbal forms of that communication in a Buddhist context. Some participants insisted that evangelism does not necessarily and invariably entail a verbal presentation of Christianity, while others were equally insistent that, eventually, evangelism included verbal witnessing. The difference in the two emphases was largely one of tactics rather than strategy, and all of the participants clearly agreed that evangelism is a communication process with a goal. It presents a message aimed at convincing people who are not Christians to become Christians.

As the discussion progressed, it became apparent that most of those present felt that evangelism necessarily includes both telling people about the Christian faith and demonstrating Christian love in visible ways. In one particularly enlightening exchange, one individual agreed that Christians must be good examples, but he still averred that they must at times speak the Christian message. A second speaker concurred with these comments and went on to note that the best way to combine speaking and effective loving is by doing evangelism on a personal, one-to-one basis. A third participant, while not at all disagreeing with these comments, stated that a sense of love, both in actions and words, was key to presenting the Christian faith in a northern Thai context. He noted that Western missionaries in the past engaged in aggressive evangelism that included criticizing Thai culture and religion; the missionaries used Jesus, he argued, to try to gain a religious "victory" over the Thai people. He went on to state that (roughly translated), "A better way to show Jesus to Thais is through loving actions. There has to be both a verbal presentation and loving actions." Still another person reinforced the thought that evangelism will not be effective in northern Thailand if it is only a matter of words-if it lacks actions as well. She urged that evangelism has to be seen as a process rather than a discrete act.

During the course of this entire first session, the participants virtually ignored mass evangelism, publicity campaigns, revival meetings, and the like. Private conversations around the dinner table suggested that these evangelists felt that mass evangelistic strategies do not work with northern Thais, and discussion later in the consultation provided examples where Christian mass communication approaches had actually proven disastrously offensive to northern Thai Buddhists. One veteran evangelist said later on in the meetings that he himself had gone through a "conversion" of sorts, from depending on printed literature and evangelistic crusades to doing personal evangelism. A young pastor from a rural church near Chiang Mai stated, " 'direct sales' doesn't work; people don't like it and will flee from it." He used the term "direct sales" in

English, meaning aggressive public relations-style salesmanship. Looking in another direction, all of the participants agreed that Christian evangelism should wrap itself in northern Thai cultural forms to one degree or another, but few felt that cultural forms held the key to successful evangelism. Time and again, speaker after participant asserted that the only fruitful way to conduct evangelism in northern Thailand is through loving personal relations.

Much of the discussion in this first session actually anticipated the topic of the second session, which had to do with evangelistic methods. In the meantime, a number of participants continued to "chew" on the definition of evangelism, playing with various individual words and sometimes contradicting each other in their preference for one word or another. One or two individuals found this exercise trying, and one person, in particular, stated with some obvious impatience that whatever words are used for "evangelism," the important thing is the Gospel. Another participant laid much of the matter to rest by observing that all of the several words bandied about as terms for evangelism were helpful, each in their own way. Each adds something to our understanding of evangelism as a communication process involving both loving and telling. To which statement, yet another participant responded by concluding, "Yes, that is right. In the end, however, Jesus is the key. Jesus is the heart of the matter."

The sense of the consultation after this first session, then, was that evangelism is generally, but not invariably, a process of verbal communication mixed with loving actions. It is not aggressive, abusive, or given to gimmickry. It is, at its most effective, loving and other oriented. It is personal. Absent from the discussion (and, by and large, from the consultation) and in contrast to the older missionary approach was any anti-Buddhist rhetoric.

Session II: What is the most effective way to do evangelism in a Buddhist Context?

Session II began at roughly 7:00 pm, Friday, February 21st, after the evening meal. After a brief summary of the afternoon's discussions, the consultation proceeded to consider the question, "What is the most effective way to do evangelism?" The participants were divided into three smaller discussion groups by the simple method of counting off by threes and went to their respective corners for an extended consideration of the question. As usual, the discussions were lively with every individual contributing at least once and, for most, several times. At the end of the allotted period, each group was asked to post the results of its discussion, recorded on large sheets of paper, and all of the participants were invited to peruse each of the summaries. There were no formal presentations of the discussions of each group, such summary presentations (in the experience of the author) being frequently long-winded and often representing only the personal opinions of the reporter. We closed with a brief further discussion in which the participants offered their reactions to their own group discussions and the summaries of the other two groups.

The three individual groups, as might be expected, did not differ a great deal in their conclusions as to what constitutes the best way to conduct evangelism. Group One emphasized personal evangelism based on creating good relationships with individuals, families, and larger communities. The group insisted that the evangelist herself must live a good Christian life, one that sets a good example for others. The group felt that from this base of interpersonal relationships the evangelist can then use a variety of communication strategies to reach people

with the Christian message. Group Two described three aspects necessary for the conduct of successful evangelism: first, build personal relationships; two, take part in community life; and, three, feel a personal sense of commitment to evangelism. Group Three created a three-tiered set of activities. The highest level, again, emphasized building strong, positive personal and communal relationships. Such activities included establishing cell groups that included potential converts ("inquirers" in the old missionary language) and teaching English. The second level involved community and social action, and the third and lowest level of evangelistic endeavor called for the use of northern Thai cultural forms in communicating the Christian message.

To this point, the question of the use of culture in evangelistic communication had not received a great deal of attention, and Group Three put it on the table in a somewhat hesitant, retiring manner that suggested it was not a major issue. In fact, it did become a major issue, one that was anticipated by comments made during the small group discussions by participants in one of the groups. One of those participants argued that when Christians attend Buddhist ceremonies, such as funerals or temple festivals, it is crucial that they not wai (bring the palms of their hands together in the raised position of respect) during formal Buddhist ritual. In this way, Christians show their faith in a silent, non-participatory form of evangelism. It should be noted here that in the eyes of many Thais failing to wai during Buddhist ritual is considered extremely bad manners and disrespectful of religion and of those taking part in the ritual. The received tradition of Protestant Christians, however, has been that to wai during Buddhist ceremonies is tantamount to worshipping a false god.

Other members of the group did not notice this point then, but the larger issue of Christianity and culture was now lurking in the background. The small group discussions also began to consider how northern Thai Buddhists looked upon their Christian neighbors. One participant argued that Christians are now more accepted in village life than they used to be as can be seen by the fact that Christians are now more often selected to be local leaders - perhaps, he speculated, because Christian leaders are more honest and capable than are other leaders in the villages. Another participant, however, was skeptical and claimed that the general image others have of Christians is that "we are the people who distribute pamphlets." These comments were made as part of the more general discussions on how to evangelize northern Thais and the insight that personal relationships are the key. The unresolved question behind these two observations, in fact, concerns the attitudes the general northern Thai populace take towards Christians.

One of the district leaders from Nan summarized the collective sense of the small groups as described on their sheets in three points. Effective evangelism, as she summed up the discussions, depends upon: building personal relations with individuals, their families, and their community as the starting point; showing love and carrying out acts of social help are also very important as is using local culture as the means of communication. The rest of the consultation readily accepted her first two points, regarding building relationships and showing love, but the third point jolted the large group into an intense discussion of the problems of using local culture in the church. Inevitably, the question came back to one of the central issues facing virtually all northern Thai Christians and their churches, namely the intimate relationship between northern Thai culture and Buddhism. As stated by one participant, the question is one of propriety. What can Christians do and what are they forbidden from doing? Questions related to

performing the wai in Buddhist ritual contexts, as mentioned above, are simply a subset of this larger issue.

It happened that a visitor, who works for the CCT's Pastoral Care & Theological Education Unit, attended this session, and he offered the following four point test for Christian use of cultural forms in the life of the church, including for evangelism: Does the action under consideration honor God? Does it violate our personal conscience? Does it create obstacles for evangelism? Does it cause other church members to stumble? While such guidelines sound simple and practical, they still require judgments that many northern Thai Christians may feel inadequate to make for themselves. The potential for conflict and misunderstanding is not reduced, nor are the inner conflicts of individual Christians who have to weigh religious strictures in light of and even against social expectations.

Session III "How Can the Churches conduct Effective Evangelism?"

After a short break on Friday evening, February 21st, the consultation reconvened for its third session, a general session on the subject of the best way for local churches to carry out evangelistic ministries. How, that is, do the churches relate to their Buddhist contexts in light of Christ's commandment in Matthew 28 to make disciples of the world? It should be remembered that this consultation was composed almost exclusively of members of ethnic northern Thai churches belonging to the Church of Christ in Thailand, the oldest Protestant denomination in the country. Other, invariably more conservative Christian groups view the CCT as being weak in evangelism, and this consultation of CCT evangelists fully agreed with that assessment. They feel disappointed with their denomination and its churches, and most of what followed in this session was an attempt to understand why CCT churches do not engage in evangelism more actively.

The discussion began with the statement by one participant that the churches have to know the Gospel. He emphasized the importance of Christian education. If the churches do not conduct strong programs of Christian education, they will not be able to conduct evangelism effectively because the members do not know their faith. Another participant immediately followed these comments with the question, "Why is it the churches do not do evangelism?" He proceeded to answer his own question by asserting that the problem with the churches is that they do not know the Bible. Church leaders do not explain the Bible according to what is actually written. This being the case, he asked rhetorically, how then can they conduct evangelism.

The discussion then turned to trying to find the causes of the CCT's failure in evangelism, one speaker arguing that a key problem lay in theological education. The churches do not select theological students and, by implication, a strong personal faith and a commitment to evangelism is not one of the criteria for their selection. Another participant added that pastors are another serious problem because they do not show a commitment to evangelism, and he urged the consultation to focus on them as a key source of the problem of evangelism. A third member of the consultation tried to shift the discussion back to the original question of how the churches can best carry out their own evangelism by urging that church members must focus on their life in Christ. They have to be willing to volunteer, that is to give themselves in carrying out the work of the church. In the course of things, he went on to say, they must also know how their

religious faith differs from that of other religions. He then concluded by returning to the Christian message, the Good News. Jesus is life, he stated, and the issue of evangelism actually has to do with the nature of life in Christ. These comments, however, led another participant to return the consultation's attention to the pastors by arguing that members will live out their evangelistic commitment only when pastors show them how to do so by example. The problem is that pastors show no interest in evangelism; they seem to think that their only job is "to keep members from leaving the church." Pastors should teach their members that evangelism is a duty, and they should teach members how to plan for and carry out evangelism. Standing outside of this discussion for a moment, the course of these conversations suggested that for the large majority of members of CCT churches evangelism does not play a part in their relationship to their larger society. Members do not see themselves as evangelists. They do not see their relationships with people of other faiths as opportunities to witness for their own faith.

An elder from Wiang Pa Pao stated that one way to begin to do evangelism is to lay the groundwork for evangelism by becoming involved in local government and local activities. Christians should start with social involvement in order to show people that they have new lives. They should teach people to do what is good. One of the participants from Nan observed, however, that many churches are involved in local community life, including local government, and people often trust church members to be community leaders. In fact, in some communities church members behave too much like the rest of the community, for example in their drinking habits. Even with all of this involvement, however, the churches do not carry out evangelism. Involvement in local community life, she concluded, does not in and of itself hold the key to evangelistic success.

The discussion then ranged back and forth across the question of why the churches fail to carry out evangelism and what they should do to correct the failure. Some participants strongly emphasized the nature of evangelism as a duty, arguing that the churches failed to understand its evangelistic duty and failed to teach that duty to its members. At the same time, one participant noted, the churches also fail to demonstrate their Christian love of others; they fail to involve themselves in a loving way in the lives of their local communities. One individual offered the use of prayer as a concrete example of what churches can do. He stated that church members should go and pray for non-Christian neighbors who are ill. Such prayers, he noted, sometimes result in miraculous healings, which in turn communicates God's compassion to those who are not Christians.

Still, the main course of this discussion on local church strategies for evangelism returned persistently to the fact that local church leaders, particularly pastors, do not have a commitment to evangelism. Some participants urged the need for training programs in evangelism, and one elder from District Four, Phrae-Uttaradit, called for training of local members in personal communication skills in their own churches. He pointed to the necessity of church members being able to share their faith in a personal way with their neighbors—a non-threatening way that did not make those neighbors feel negative about the Christian faith.

It will be noted that throughout much of this discussion relatively few concrete and positive suggestions concerning the ways churches could carry out successful evangelism were made. The

tone of much of the conversation was negative and discouraged, and even the call for training of local members did not ground itself in a clear sense of what members should be trained to do specifically. Some participants felt that the focus of such training should be on motivation, that is, on creating a deeper awareness of the importance of evangelism. Others warned that it is useless to send out untrained people to do evangelism because they do not have the knowledge and skills necessary to do it well. In spite of the fact that most of the participants in this consultation were experienced evangelists, their discussion of local church involvement in evangelism was surprisingly theoretical. A participant from District One, Chiang Mai, for example argued that Bible study is an important key to fostering evangelism. If church members will only read their Bibles, they will "wake up" as Christians and the churches will begin to make progress in evangelism. How such an approach actually works was not made clear.

Only one young pastor, from District Four, offered a concrete example of what can be done. He described how he had been working in his congregation for some eighteen months trying to build an evangelistic team. Working with the church council, he had set goals for evangelism and then involved a number of members in a team ministry. He indicated that the members did not actually need special training for evangelism. They already had the communication skills they needed, the problem being that the church had never made use of their skills. It was at this point that the pastor from District One observed, as we saw above, that the "direct sales" approach does not work; people do not like it and will flee from it. He stated that those engaged in sharing their faith with people of other faiths should use the model of Christ, which was shown in Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus. Evangelists, that is, should only gradually introduce religious topics into their conversations with other people.

Exchanges of this type, in which the participants debated the pros and the cons, the possibilities and the obstacles of evangelism in a Buddhist context indicated the seriousness with which the consultation took these discussions. It treated evangelism as a serious form of interfaith communication and recognized that it cannot be gimmicky—that it involves some sense of being concerned for and oriented to the other. Although, obviously, the more personal approach can still be superficial and a form of headhunting proselytization, the participants in the consultation seemed largely concerned to move beyond simply getting people to change their religious affiliation. They shared a sense that evangelists have to live on the boundaries of their faith and know how to speaking personally and meaningfully across those boundaries.

The evening closed with the question, "Do you know of churches that provide models for how to conduct successful evangelistic programs locally?" An elder from the Pa Gniew Church, Wiang Pa Pao, shared his church's approach, which is to use the Christian organization, Compassion, to help connect with their community. Compassion provides scholarships for children to go to school with the expectation that the children will become involved in a program of Christian education. Among other activities, the church sponsors a major Christmas celebration for the children and their families, and the elder stated that for some time now there have been a growing number of parents and families of these scholarship children who are converting to Christianity. The church's evangelism team, which formerly spent most of its time traveling to distant villages, now spends all of its time locally. The associate pastor of First Church, Chiang Mai, stated that their congregation has received roughly four hundred new converts in three

years, part of the reason being the hard economic times in Thailand. The congregation is especially active in reaching out to young people with the aid of a cell group program. The church also trains its young people to carry out evangelism, especially in the two large Christian parochial schools, Dara Academy and Prince Royal's Academy.

The pastor of the Lamphun Thai-Korean Church, also from District One, shared his congregation's approach to evangelism. It is a new church, and when it first started, it had to engage in a great deal of local advertising including distributing tracts. As a few people began to come, the church leadership then had to actively follow up on each person. From nearly the beginning, it depended on cell groups for both its outreach and nurture work, and the church grew only gradually. Down to the present, the congregation places prospective new members into cell groups, where they receive training in the Christian faith even before they begin to attend worship on Sunday mornings. Prayer, this pastor stated, is an important part of the cell group experience; he firmly believes that miracles take place with prayer and it is these miracles that attract new members to the church.

Finally, the head of a church-planting project based in Chiang Mai shared the experience of her center in evangelism. Her work, she noted, is not church based but rather based on a center that emphasizes the use of northern Thai music and culture. Most of their work is with young people, and they are now working with three to four groups of young people who initially came to them to learn music and are now actively interested in becoming Christians. She stated that such work requires patience but has its own rewards.

After these brief presentations, the consultation came to a close for the evening with a series of statements from several participants that highlighted the importance of growth for local churches; the importance of churches having a vision in order to grow; and the thought that people who do evangelism gain rich personal blessings for their efforts. The final word from the last participant was "God is still God. The issue is not one of more or better resources."

Session IV: "Why do people convert?"

The very question of the Christian experience in Buddhist contexts assumes that there is a boundary between the Christian and Buddhist communities of northern Thailand. In our first session on Saturday morning, February 22nd, the consultation considered the motivation converts have for crossing over that boundary to become Christians. What is it, in other words, that motivates people who are not Christians to change their religious affiliations? We again divided into three discussion groups, and with their usual liveliness and intensity of purpose each group worked up a list of reasons of why people convert. Each group, as before, produced a large sheet of those reasons that were posted at the end of the discussion period, and all of the participants were invited to peruse the sheets. Each list was quite long and generally similar, containing such reasons for conversion as: studying the Bible through correspondence courses; experiencing or observing miraculous healings; the example of Christian friends and relatives; belief in Christian teachings, especially ethical teachings; and boredom with their former religion or feelings of being oppressed by the demands of traditional Thai religiosity. Some of the groups also listed what they considered less than happy reasons for conversions, such as a desire for attention or expected financial benefits.

One person, after reading over all of the sheets from the three groups, summarized their contents by concluding that people convert to Christianity because they are experiencing a life crisis, which they cannot resolve with the religious and other resources they have at hand. Such crises open the door to conversion. A second participant offered a helpful four-point summary of all three sheets. First, people convert to Christianity out of a concern for issues of life after death, issues that are very important to most northern Thai. Second, converts are often tired of their former religion and, most especially, they are disappointed in the highly publicized immoral behavior of some monks. Young people are especially put off by the emphasis on older people and on money that seems to pervade contemporary northern Thai religious life. Third, converts are impressed with Christian lives and experience love from Christians. Finally, They see that Christ is God and is powerful. A third person summarized the small group discussions of the reasons why people convert to Christianity with five very short points. Converts have heard the Gospel. They want to escape evil spirits. They want eternal life. Christian prayer healed them. They are seeking blessings in this life. Seeking a central thread in all of these reasons for conversion, another participant argued that the key to conversion is that all potential converts are people who are looking for something. They are seekers who find what they are in quest of in the Christian faith.

One pastor, himself a convert to Christianity, closed the session with something of a personal witness. He said that as a young man he was profoundly impressed by Christian ideal of servanthood exemplified in the lives of Drs. Tom Dooley and Albert Schweitzer. He believes that God was at work in that impression, calling him personally to Christian faith; conversion, that is, is the recognition of God's call in our own lives. God's call, he claimed, is mediated to us in personal life experiences by which converts meet and find God.

This session, Session IV, and its consideration of the issue of why people convert brought to a close the consultation's discussions concerning evangelism, which we will remember began with the question of how to define evangelism in Session I, went on to reflections on evangelistic methods in Session II, and then discussed the role of local churches in the conduct of evangelism in Session III. It was clear throughout these discussions that the participants largely shared the older missionary understanding of the importance of evangelism. They expected pastors to assign evangelism a central place in their ministries. They made such statements as, "The church that does not grow in numbers will die." They, as we saw above, deeply lamented the fact that so few CCT churches seem to be committed to evangelistic outreach. The participants were also aware of and sensitive to the particular situation they faced in their northern Thai religious and cultural contexts. They did not, however, as a group reflect the old-time missionaries' aggressive disdain for Buddhism-with one or two notable exceptions. The consultation, collectively, did not articulate an anti-Buddhist position, and the criticisms expressed by individual participants generally were in line with concerns that many faithful Buddhists themselves express concerning certain aspects of contemporary Thai Buddhism.

The question raised in Session IV concerning why people convert, however, set the stage for the consultation's final session, a plenary discussion that addressed directly the question of the relationship of Christians to their Buddhist contexts in northern Thailand. The final session did

not represent then a break with the other session even though the topic was apparently quite different. It brought the discussions, rather, to a culmination.

Session V: How do you feel about living in a Buddhist society?

As the consultation approached this final session, the participants were increasingly aware that the clock was ticking its way towards Saturday noon, February 22nd. The original "contract" governing the consultation was that it would end faithfully at noon, and while no one suggested otherwise several participants voiced the opinion that the time allotted for the consultation was too short and the issues too many, too complex to resolve in a mere 24 hour period. The final session certainly reflected the sense that there was more to say than time allowed as the participants collectively worked on their apparent feelings of ambivalence regarding northern Thai Buddhist society.

The discussion, in fact, opened in a decidedly negative manner. One of the participants from Nan stated that Buddhists generally do not display a sense of respect for things that should be respected, especially in religion. They do not even show respect for their own monks. He claimed that Christian young people have a better sense of how to show respect and that Christians find it very difficult to accept the lack of religious sensibilities on the part of their non-Christian neighbors. A second participant from Nan agreed, saying that in this environment of disrespect Christians face the particular problem that Buddhists generally do not accept Christians and, in particular, are not willing to listen to them or allow them a social role. She related her experience of living in a Buddhist village where there are no other Christian families. She said that not too many years ago she decided to organize a kindergarten in the village, but some of the leaders tried to stop her because they thought she was engaging in evangelism-the school, that is, was a gimmick to convert their children. She related that she went ahead anyway and now the kindergarten is going well, and she made the point that Christians can overcome their neighbors' prejudices and resistance through sincerity.

A third participant from Nan observed that Christians often feel tense and nervous in their relationships with their Buddhist neighbors because they are not sure how to behave in interreligious situations. He stated that he has numerous Buddhist friends who are community leaders, and these friends complain to him that Christians do not respect them as Buddhists. When they, as Buddhists, attend Christian worship services and celebrations they do everything the Christians do. They sing. They pray. They participate fully. But when Christians go to the temple, they fail to show proper religious respect. Most particularly, they fail to wai, a failure that is very offensive to the temple faithful. Buddhists, he went on to say, do not understand that participation in their rites and ceremonies puts us in danger of breaking certain biblical commandments. To them the Christian failure to conduct themselves "properly" is nothing less than a matter of disrespect for the Buddhist religion. This participant said that for him, as a community leader himself, one of the most difficult issues he has to face has to do with cremation ceremonies. As a part of the Buddhist ritual before a cremation, honored guests are asked to offer robes to the monks irrespective of whether they are Buddhists or Christians. It is simply not acceptable in the context of dealing with death for Christians to refuse to do what seems to them to be an act of religious worship. This participant has had to take part on many

occasions; he does not feel happy about the fact; and now he generally does not go to cremations just so he can avoid having to take part.

As the discussion moved on, it became readily apparent that the question of whether or not Christians should wai during Buddhist rituals was both a major point of friction between the two communities and a somewhat divisive issue among the participants themselves. Just, however, as the difference of opinion concerning when and when not to wai was emerging one of the elders from Wiang Pa Pao virtually cut off the discussion by stating at fervent length that Christians absolutely cannot raise their hands in the Thai gesture of respect, the wai in any Buddhist context under any circumstances or for any reason. Absolutely. Christians, he argued, must be brave and stand up to the social pressure put on them when they refuse to wai. In his experience, if a Christian is brave enough to resist participation once, then people will know the Christian position and not call on that person again—for example, in giving cloths to monks at a funeral. Christians, he went on to state, can wai monks as people, but otherwise they must take the public stand that as Christians they cannot wai in any situation involving a showing of respect to what Buddhists hold to be sacred. Christian, he avowed, must be strong on this point.

Although no one responded directly to the absolutist position taken by this elder, it was clear that he did not speak for the majority of participants in forbidding the wai in virtually all situations where Christians are in a Buddhist context. Indeed, the comments of the next participant, a pastor from Phrae, could be seen as an indirect rebuff of a hard-line position on interfaith relations. That pastor stated that he had once lived for a brief time in southern Thailand and he would much, much rather live in a Buddhist context than a Muslim one. In a Buddhist context, members of minority religions are allowed to practice their own faith freely in a society that values peace and tolerance. Still, another participant noted, however, that the Buddhist notion that "every religion teaches people to be good" makes it harder to evangelize Buddhists because they do not see the point to conversion. All religions are headed in the same direction. And, this participant went on to say, if Christians become overly aggressive Buddhists will fight for their own religion. Although he did not state it in this manner, this elder felt that Buddhist attitudes of live and let live in terms of interreligious relations is a two-edged sword. It is fine as long as Christians are quiet. It is less good if Christians are committed to converting Buddhists to the Christian faith. Another elder agreed, saying that Buddhists expected Christians to take the same tolerant attitude towards other faiths that they have, and they do not like it at all if Christians fail to do so.

This last exchange on Buddhist tolerance opened the floodgates to a variety of observations on the opportunities and obstacles facing Christian evangelists in Buddhist contexts. One person stated that the concept of merit making made it difficult to convert people because they did not want to give up their store of merit. A second person claimed that, on the other hand, Buddhism is incomplete and felt to be so by some of its adherents; this makes it possible for Christianity to provide that which is lacking. Following up on the idea of incompleteness, a third person stated that in his opinion Buddhism is growing weaker because of the misbehavior of certain monks, which makes it easier to do indirect evangelism.

An elder summarized these various feelings by saying that he personally feels *sabai chai* (content) about being a Christian in a Buddhist society, while also feeling sorry for Buddhists. He said that he personally knows a missionary working in Pakistan who told him that the missionaries there have no freedom to do evangelism. In Thailand, Christians do have that freedom, and this elder concluded that Christian evangelists should see Buddhist society as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. In spite of some problems, it is easier to carry out evangelism in a Buddhist society. This observation brought an immediate rebuttal from another participant, who stated that the problems of doing evangelism in a Buddhist context should not be minimized. Christians still have to struggle, still have to take a stand for their faith. To which statements, yet another person said that, in the first place, if Christian evangelists want an easy environment they are not serious about preaching Christ; and, secondly, the fact is that evangelists do not face actually serious problems in Thailand in any event.

In a somewhat extended statement, the associate pastor of First Church, Chiang Mai, stated that Christians can feel at ease about their social and religious context; it poses them no serious problems. His closest neighbors, he said, are Buddhists who are very good to his family and look out for them. His wife is a teacher in a government school, and they have fine relations with her colleagues. He agreed that Christians need to feel secure in their faith and that there are certain things that Christians cannot do, but at the same time, he expressed his personal sense of shame at the ways some Christians behave towards people of other faiths. He cited the widely known example of a Christian group that erected large, ugly yellow signs advertising Jesus on major highways throughout Thailand as an example of how Christians behave improperly in their Buddhist context. The local and provincial governments always call First Church, he said, whenever there is a problem with Christians, and it is difficult to explain to them that First Church and the CCT are not responsible. He recalled, as one particularly hurtful case, when the local Seventh Day Adventists held public services in the heart of Chiang Mai on the subject, "Is there really a Nippan [Nirvana]?" An irate Government official called First Church and berated Christians with strong, harsh language for creating ill feelings between religions. The pastor called on Christians to behave in a more sensitive way and affirmed the importance of doing things to work with the community, which helps Buddhists to see Christians in a positive light. A second pastor from the First District, Chiang Mai, agreed that there are no real obstacles in being a Christian in a Buddhist context and told the story of how he was invited to attend a program at a local school that also involved several monks with whom he sat as if he was one of them.

Other participants reacted to these comments by reaffirming the less open, more cautious attitude expressed earlier in the sessions. Christians must make a clear, brave stand. Christians have to demonstrate their faith. They cannot have any God but God. Christians should not participate in cultural events with religious overtones, such as taking part in the string tying ceremonies at weddings, which are the way, northern Thais give blessings to the newly married couple. One elder affirmed that he too has many good Buddhist friends but Christians still have to take stands for their faith. He also observed that if Christians generally treat their neighbors well, those neighbors will not fault them for failure to *wai* or take part in certain situations.

Still another participant caught something of the inherent tension involved in the views being expressed in the consultation when he stated that Christians have to be accepted by Buddhists before they can effectively witness to their own faith to Buddhists. Although he did not state the matter directly, he seemed to be saying that if Christians are too bold, too fixed in avoiding participation in Buddhist ceremonial life they risk destroying their acceptability as witnesses to the Christian faith. Other comments and observations came fast and furious as time wound down to the close of the consultation that by-and-large reflected the sense that Christians have to both act in loving ways and yet have to maintain their own identity and their evangelistic witness. One person emphasized the importance of loving relationships. Another person emphasized the importance of being constantly alert to opportunities for witnessing. And then it was time to close, which we did with worship and lunch.

Observations & Conclusions

As has been already noted in the introductory remarks of this article, these northern Thai evangelists do not live simply in a Buddhist context. They also have their own historical Christian context, which influences their attitudes towards Buddhism and Buddhists. In general, with perhaps only one or two exceptions, they seem to have largely rejected the older missionary ideology with its blanket condemnation of Buddhism as heathenism, and they understand that living in a Buddhist context is far from onerous. Their contemporary attitudes reflect those that developed among Presbyterian missionaries in the 1920s and 1930s and can be described as comprising an ambivalent and not always consistent set of disparate attitudes. Buddhists can be good people, but they still are not saved. Buddhism has its good points, but that goodness pales before the Throne of Grace. Recent research into the attitudes of a like sized group of theologically trained CCT church and denominational leaders found a similar pattern of a majority of respondents advocating more positive towards the Buddhist context than was generally true in this consultation.⁴ [4] That is to say, the participants in the Dong Phra Phorn consultation represent a somewhat moderately conservative to conservative understanding of Christianity in a Buddhist context. They have drifted away from a hard-core anti-Buddhist mentality, but their concern for evangelism has limited the extent of that drift to the point that they still largely share the old-time missionary understanding of the centrality of evangelism. The church, nearly all of them agree, must put evangelism first on its agenda, and individual Christians should always seek opportunities to witness to their faith before non-Christians. Viewed historically, then, it seems that, excluding a hardcore reactionary element, the CCT has moved perceptibly away from a bald rejection of everything Buddhist to a more complex, ambivalent, and thoughtful position that mixes acceptance and rejection in varying degrees.

It was clear from the last session, however, that the northern Thai church's missionary heritage still shapes its relationship to its Buddhist contexts in several ways, most notably in the attitudes Buddhists have towards Christians. The consultation reflected a painful awareness of the image many northern Thai Buddhists continue to have of Christians, which is that Christians are closed-minded religionists who are only interested in stealing the temple faithful. The participants viewed this negative image of Christianity as being one of the obstacles to successful evangelism, and it seemed clear that they saw a need to transform Christian relationships with their neighbors of other faiths from ones based on judgmental condemnation

to relationships of mutual love and respect. Most of those present seemed to agree that Christians have to be sensitive to the religious sensibilities of their neighbors, and they regretted instances of insensitivity-not withstanding their basic feeling that Christians cannot wai in many situations where Buddhists expect them to do so. The pastor from Nan who does not want to attend Buddhist cremations because he is expected to participate in the ceremonies exemplifies the general attitude of the participants. They do not want to offend their neighbors, but they feel that biblical injunctions against idolatry limit their options for participation without offense in the religious life of their neighbors.

This dual context of changing Christian attitudes and the need to overcome an "image problem" shapes the way the participants understand evangelism itself. They share a perception that evangelism is a communication process that must solve the question of how to share the Christian faith with people of other faiths. By-and-large they agree that evangelism can include a number of non-verbal forms of communication but, at the end of the day, Christians must necessarily communicate their faith verbally. The collective wisdom of the participants preferred building loving personal relationships to mass meetings, revivalistic campaigns, and other glitzy multi-media approaches.

One is struck, at the last, at the ways in which the participants in this modest two-day consultation share certain religious concerns with their Buddhist neighbors and relatives. Jackson describes, briefly, how Thai Theravada Buddhism has long emphasized the right-practice of religion (orthopraxis) over right-believing (orthodoxy), a pattern that he notes reverses the Christian emphasis on doctrine over practice. Buddhist salvation, he notes, "ultimately depends upon religious practice rather than belief."⁵ Without insisting that Buddhism in Thailand has influenced Christians to place a similar emphasis on right practice, it is well worth noting that the participants in this consultation devoted considerable time to issues of right-behavior vis-à-vis Buddhism and seemed content with only passing doctrinal affirmations. One might just as well attribute their attention to issues of Christian orthopraxy in a Buddhist context to Old Testament injunctions against idolatry as to the Buddhist context itself; perhaps both are involved, as might be any number of other causes. The point is that, whatever the cause, these 31 northern Thai Christians, all committed to evangelism, perceptibly share a Thai religious "habit of mind." In their particular case as Christians, that habit of mind concerns itself with how to behave properly in the presence of people of another faith and their rituals.

It would seem, then, that in some ways at least northern Thai Christians replicate "the Buddhist context" within themselves. While they may find certain elements within that context alien to them and even threatening, the results of this consultation suggest that northern Thai Protestant Christians may not stand apart from the Buddhist context nearly so much as their heritage would suggest. Clearly, the participants find important meaning in their Christian faith. They believe, as do Christians around the world, in a personal, loving God known to humanity through Jesus Christ, and they agree with their missionary mentors that it is a Christian's duty to share this saving knowledge with others. Yet, unlike their Protestant forbearers, they concern themselves centrally not with what they must believe to be saved, but rather with what they must do and not do to rightly live out their allegiance to God. Perhaps we need a new category to encompass their particular approach to the Christian faith, something like "Theravada Protestantism."

In the end, however, the theme that stuck out perhaps most clearly in this consultation was the participant's search for a balance between verbal and non-verbal forms of evangelistic witnessing. The majority of those present seemed to favor verbal witnessing as the primary means for bringing non-Christians into the faith while realizing that loving actions have to accompany the words; a minority seemed to prefer relying centrally on loving actions while agreeing that eventually there have to be words, too. These evangelists, collectively, do not want to trick or fool people into conversion. They do not want a phony or spur of the moment mere switching of religious labels. They realize that, finally, they have to approach northern Thais of other faiths as northern Thais themselves with a loving, verbal message that makes contextual sense. They are still wrestling with how best to make sense within northern Thai culture, but they as they wrestle they are evidently and quietly moving towards some degree of reconciliation with their Buddhist context.

¹Daniel McGilvary, *A Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao* (New York: Revell, 1912), 78-79.

²Charles H. Crooks, "Institutional Evangelistic Work," *Assembly Herald* 22, 5 (May 1916): 248.

³Shields to Brown, 30 August 1898, v. 15, BFM; and, Harris to Brown, 8 June 1898, v. 15, BFM.

⁴Patricia McLean, "Thai Protestant Christianity: a Study of Cultural and Theological Interactions between Western Missionaries (the American Presbyterian Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship) and Indigenous Thai Churches (the Church of Christ in Thailand and the Associated Churches of Thailand-Central)" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2002), 235.

⁵Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadasa: Theravada Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), 21.

What Does Seoul Have to do with Bangkok? Church Growth in Korea & Thailand

Herb Swanson

Introduction

 For over a century, Protestantism in Korea has widely been considered the greatest evangelistic success story in Asia with Protestants today numbering roughly 25% of the total Korean population. In his study of the Korean church, Palmer contrasts its rapid numerical growth to Asian Protestantism generally, and he specifically compares it to the "worst case" scenario in Thailand (Palmer, v). The Protestant churches of these two countries, Thailand and Korea, thus share one thing in common: they are both well known for their church growth record, Korea for its almost miraculous "success" and Thailand for its dismal "failure."

The successes of Protestant church growth in South Korea since World War II loom large over the Thai church, standing in the eyes of many as a continuing judgment against it for its failure to achieve what the Korean churches have achieved. The widespread presence of Korean

missionaries in Thailand, the large amounts of Korean funding for evangelism, the numerous conferences and seminars featuring Korean speakers, and free trips to Korea for Thai church leaders reinforce the impression that "the Korean success" offers a model for the churches of Thailand. Some Korean missionaries still come to Thailand today consciously intending to import that model, offering it to the Thai churches as an Asian alternative to Western models for evangelization and church life. Understanding the nature of the Korean Protestant experience is thus important in the Thai context.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on some of the important similarities and differences between the Protestant churches of Korea and of Thailand. Although the reasons for the Korean Protestant success story in church growth are numerous, there appears to be a consensus among the students of Korean Protestant church growth regarding the key components of that success. They have to do with the state of religion in the late nineteenth century when Protestantism first appeared in Korea, with the strategies of the first generations of missionaries involved in the evangelization of Korea, with the Japanese colonization of Korea, and with the nature of traditional Korean religious consciousness itself. The result of this mix of historical events and forces has been what some now call "the Korean miracle," the explosive growth of Protestantism in Korea in the years after World War II.

The rapid growth of Christianity is not a recent phenomenon nor is it limited to Protestantism. As Kim points out, early Catholicism grew very quickly, and even after World War II Catholicism has grown relatively rapidly, although not at the pace of some of the larger Protestant denominations and groups (Kim [1], 35-38, 47-48). Accounting for the Korean success in evangelism, therefore, requires that we look at a number of factors, and in general there are two sets of factors involved in the growth of Christianity in Korea widely held by scholars as being the keys to explaining Korean Protestant church growth. The first set includes those that have been beyond the control of the churches, external factors that the old-time missionaries often called "providences." These include the geo-political setting of Korea, its historical experience within that setting, and the ways in which the first generation of Protestant missionaries initiated their work. The second set of factors has to do with the ways in which the Korean churches have accommodated their Protestantism with Korean culture and Korean nationalism.

These two general factors, then, provide us with a framework for comparing the Thai experience with that in Korea. The situation in Thailand, as we will see in what follows, was and is very different from that of Korea. It is in those differences that we find the explanation for the "success" of Protestantism in Korea and its "failure" in Thailand. We need to emphasize from the beginning that there is no one factor that is the explanation for a high rate of church growth in Korea and the low rate in Thailand. We have to look at the combination of factors in each nation in order to understand the causes of their higher or lower rates of growth.

External Factors

Protestants, historically, have lived under particular conditions in Korea and in Thailand, conditions that they have had to contend with but could not control. These conditions include not

only the political and diplomatic settings of their nations, but also the strategies used by foreign missionaries in introducing the Christian faith to their peoples. They also include the nature of indigenous religious consciousness and the condition of competing religious institutions, especially Buddhism in Thailand and Confucianism in Korea. Taken together, these factors significantly shaped the formation and historical development of the churches of Korea and Thailand.

The Geo-Political Context

One of the most consistent themes in the literature on Korean church growth before World War II is that Protestantism entered Korea at an auspicious time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both externally and internally, the ruling elite was facing near chaotic political conditions engendered by debilitating internal factionalism and external colonial pressure from China, Russia, and especially Japan. Modernization had become a further destabilizing issue in the face of widespread Westernization throughout Asia. The increase of Japanese power in the early twentieth century, which eventually led to Korea becoming a colony of Japan in 1910, only served to increase the sense of political and social crisis in the country. The common people of Korea suffered greatly throughout the era when Protestantism first appeared in the country both at the hands of their own political leadership and under Japanese rule.

The importance of the suffering of the Korean peoples for church growth is that the work of the first generation of Protestant missionaries benefited from that suffering. Many Korean intellectuals and the general populace were deeply interested in Westernization. They saw the benefits that Japan derived from modernization, they wanted those same benefits for Korea, and for many years the Protestant missionaries were the only representatives of the West who could help Korea acquire what they wanted from the West. Rather than resisting missionary influence, thus, the people generally welcomed it. (Clark, 256-257; Ro, 159-163). Which is to say, Protestant Christianity was initially viewed, at least in part, in a positive light and seen as a source of possible assistance to the Korean people and nation.

In Thailand (Siam), the Protestant missionaries established themselves permanently in the 1830s when Western colonialism, particularly in the form of British imperialism, was emerging as an increasingly worrisome problem. Unlike Korea, however, Siam met the colonial threat as a relatively well-governed and politically unified state (see Englehart, esp. 107ff); and while it had to give up both large tracts of territory and substantial control over its own economy especially to the British, Siam was able to maintain its political integrity with the support, albeit somewhat passive, of the British (see Tuck, esp. 239ff). Equally as important for our purposes here, the Siamese government itself became the primary promoter of Westernizing modernization and was able to co-opt the missionaries and other Western agencies, casting them in a secondary, supporting role.

At the same time, the Protestant missionaries, although they were Americans and thus not representatives of a colonial power that threatened Siam, looked like other Westerners and, to an extent, were identified with the British and French colonialists. There is some evidence in the correspondence of the American State Department with its consulate in Bangkok that the

American Presbyterian missionaries for many years generally sided with the British in political and diplomatic matters. (see Partridge to Fish, 10 October 1871, v. 3-4, United States Government). Thus, where Japanese colonial aggression in Northeast Asia created favorable circumstances for Protestant missions in Korea, Protestant missions in Siam benefited little from their role in modernization.

There was some tendency in Korea, evidently, to identify Protestantism with modernization as a total package. According to this premise accepting the Christian faith was an important step towards acquiring the benefits of the West (Chung [2], 24). Thai intellectuals, beginning with King Mongkut, rejected any correlation between Western religion and Western technologies, and Mongkut himself pressed for the reformation and modernization of Buddhism. He was clearly unimpressed with missionary Christianity as a religious system (Lord, 177-178). The Presbyterian missionaries in the nineteenth century repeatedly predicted that the Thai people, who were also interested in things Western, would surely come to see that the Christian religion was the foundation of Western civilization and, thus, accept it in place of Buddhism as the national faith. That sequence of events, obviously, never took place.

Korea, thus, faced an aggressive Asian colonial power in Japan and did not have the wherewithal to thwart a colonial takeover, while it also failed to assert political control of modernization. The first generations of missionaries and converts were able to capitalize on these conditions in introducing Protestant Christianity to Koreans. Siam, by way of contrast, was able to withstand the European colonial threat to its independence by a combination of generally wise leadership and the largely passive support of the British, who did not have any political intentions towards Siam and did not want to see it fall into the hands of the French either. Protestant missionaries, in sum, had less room to maneuver in the geo-political situation of Southeast Asia compared to their colleagues in Northeast Asia.

The Religious Context

An important factor contributing to the general sense of crisis in Korea in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the fact that its traditional religious structures were in serious decline, even before Protestant missionaries first entered the country in the mid-1880s. Buddhism and Taoism had long been discredited, and by the end of the nineteenth century the Korean people generally had lost faith in Confucianism as well. It seemed to be a religion for the upper classes that was irrelevant to the lives of common people. Koreans were increasingly returning to reliance on traditional "shamanism" as well as a number of new religious movements that had close affinities with shamanism. Most commentators understand shamanism to be an ancient Korean religious system involving supernaturalism, the manipulation of spiritual powers by ritual, prayer, and exorcism. It includes the use of magic and the interpretation of dreams and was the ancient indigenous religion of the common people, especially women, by which they sought security and prosperity. Shamanism disappeared long ago as an independent religious system, but scholars argue that it has survived in various guises from ancient times down to the present. Its growing strength in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was one sign of the religious and national distress of the Korean people.

This unstable, deteriorating religious and spiritual situation facilitated the introduction of Protestant Christianity into Korea in at least two ways. First, it meant that the Korean people were receptive to new religious options, ones that would provide them with the meaning and religious vitality that was missing in the country's traditional faiths (Chai-Sik Chung [1], 526; and Chai-Sik Chung [2], 22). Second, Koreans did not identify "Korean-ness" with any one religion (Kang, 124). In sum, Korea 's unstable religious condition, in conjunction with its political and social situation, offered a wide open door to Protestantism. Just as importantly, the situation in Korea also offered Protestant missionaries with a "level playing field" religiously, one where they could compete well with Korea 's older religions and its other new religious movements.

Again, the situation in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Siam was quite different. Siam had just one dominant religious faith, a combination of Buddhism and animism, which was strongly rooted in the political and cultural life of the people. Down to the present, it has widely been understood that to "be Thai" means to be a Buddhist; and there has been not a little prejudice against Christianity as being an alien religion that is inappropriate to the Thai people. There are some indications in the late 1860s in Chiang Mai and the early 1880s in Phet Buri that both northern and central Thais were receptive to Christianity. Taking advantage of that receptivity, however, required unusual circumstances and a unique evangelistic approach, and such peculiar combinations of circumstances and approach have seldom occurred in Thai church history. In general, Buddhism was and remains the dominant religious force in Thai society and is a key indicator of Thai-ness. The missionaries in Siam, thus, played on a playing field where all of the competitive advantages were heavily weighted towards Buddhism.

Aiding and abetting the introduction of Protestant Christianity into Korea was the traditional Korean belief in a supreme, personal religious being called Hananim. Commentators on Korean church growth repeatedly contrast the situation in China, where there was no indigenous term for the Western Christian concept of God, with that in Korea where the people already believed in a ultimate power similar to that concept. According to Palmer, Koreans traditionally believed that Hananim is a "personal deity" with something of an "anthropomorphic character" linked with traditional stories of creation. The term's most general meaning is "Heavenly One" (Palmer, 7-8). He also notes that there are a number of parallels between the mythic Korean and biblical creation stories and concludes that there is "some reasonable basis for drawing analogies between old Korean concepts and biblical ideas of God." (Palmer, 15) He goes on to argue that,

Hananim was a point of contact with Korean culture the like of which missionaries in China did not have. As a personal transcendent God, clearly the supreme deity of the Korean people, Hananim was uniquely suited to prepare the Korean people for belief in the Christian God. (Palmer, 18)

Kim fully agrees with Palmer's assessment, arguing that the importance "of this terminological consistency cannot be under-estimated." Where in most of Asia Western and indigenous Asian religious conceptions regarding the ultimate have been in conflict, he notes, in Korea there has been no such conflict. He argues that this congruity between Christian and local religious

concepts is part of the explanation for the rapid growth of the Korean churches because "Koreans found a mirror image of their own supreme God in the imported faith." (Kim [2], 123-124)

As an aside, it should be noted that the Korean situation is not unique in Asia, particularly among the upland tribal peoples of South and Southeast Asia. Many of these people have a treasury of creation stories that include some form of a personal creator deity, which have provided extensive Christian missionaries with an important point of entry for evangelism. In Burma and Thailand, the outstanding example is found among the Karen people and their traditional belief in Yua, the Creator. (See Esther Danpongpee, "Karen Stories of Creation" in [HeRB 1](#)). It is clear that Karen evangelists have a considerable advantage over Thai ones, as Karen converts can see their new faith is augmenting their belief in Yua. Christianity seems less alien, more familiar as a result.

Thailand, again, presents us with a quite different situation. Protestant missionaries carried over the term *phrachao*, first used by the Catholics, as the translation for the English word "God," but the term carries no clear associations to a personal Deity. The literal meaning of *phrachao* is "holy lord," and the Royal Thai Institute dictionary (1999 edition) defines *phrachao* as meaning, first, the Buddha, second, Buddha images, and, third, "an important deity" (thep phubenyai). Even this last term does not carry any clear connotations of a personal God in the Western Christian sense; admittedly, one could translate it as "Supreme God," but to do so inserts English concepts of deity that are not inherent in the Thai. While modern-day Thais with some education or exposure to Islam or Christianity will probably understand that *phrachao* can mean "God," that certainly was not the case in the nineteenth century. Thailand is one of those nations where Christian religious conceptions have been in conflict with indigenous ones, and the missionaries had to struggle to communicate Protestant meanings across the wide theo-linguistic gulf between English and Thai.

In sum, the chaotic religious situation in Korea in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries plus important conceptual parallels between Korean and Protestant religious concepts meant that Koreans were receptive to the Protestant message as being one that seemed congruent to their situation. In Thailand, just the opposite was the case. There was a strong indigenous religion in place, religious conditions were relatively stable rather than chaotic, and the potential parallels between Western Protestantism and Thai Buddhism were far less obvious. On the face of it, there was little overt congruence between Christianity and Thai religious consciousness. What the people heard and saw was an alien religion.

The Missionary Context

In order to understand the Protestant experience in any Asian culture or society, it is important to understand how Protestantism was first introduced into that culture or society. A people's first experience with Protestantism generally sets the course for succeeding developments, and while changes can obviously take place in later years there is a general tendency for the history of the later church to flow more or less in the channels first dug for it in its initial years. Three factors related to the missionaries themselves have been particularly important in the history of the founding of Protestantism in Korea from the 1870s and 1880s, and these factors help us to understand the situation in Siam as well as Korea.

First, when the first Protestant missionaries arrived in Korea in 1884 there were already small groups of converts who had heard the Christian message from missionaries working in Manchuria in the 1870s. The New Testament was already translated and in the hands of the converts in Korea, and there was active evangelism being conducted in several parts of country as well. Grayson concludes that when the first foreign missionaries arrived in Korea, "The Church was already established; it only needed further cultivation to begin to flourish." (Grayson, 303). Korean Protestantism, that is, had begun to take shape and voice some years before missionaries arrived. The situation in Siam was yet again entirely different. There were no Protestant communities waiting for the first missionaries, and, in fact, most of the initial missionary effort in Siam was directed towards Chinese immigrants. It took decades before the missionaries could establish any significant number of churches or even to complete the translation of the New Testament, by which time Protestantism was thoroughly identified with the West as a foreign religion.

Second, in 1890 the Presbyterian missionaries in Korea invited the Rev. John L. Nevius, a Presbyterian missionary working in China, to present to them his innovative program for church planting and development. Nevius argued that the foreign missionaries should limit their role in the churches as much as possible. They should promote local leadership and provide no more than an absolute minimum of financial support, either for building churches or paid evangelists. The churches should be encouraged to be the chief engines for evangelism and, to that end, Bible study groups should be pushed strongly so that the churches would gain their own knowledge of Scripture as quickly as possible. The Presbyterian missions in China rejected Nevius' plan as being unworkable there, but some of the fledgling Protestant missions in Korea, notably the Presbyterians, quickly implemented it-particularly in terms of financial self-support. Clark argues that while the Presbyterians, at first, failed to give the Korean converts a full roll in the work of the churches, they eventually realized their mistake and took concrete steps to empower Korean church leadership. He states that, when given that opportunity, the Koreans were able to quickly take a hand in the management of Christian schools, hospitals, and other work because they were already generally self-supporting and self-governing within their own churches (Clark, 235-238, cf. Palmer, 27-28). Clark, writing in the 1930s, goes so far as to claim that, "the Nevius Methods have been the final determining factor in the results attained in Korea." (Clark, 270). As we will see, below, Korean pastors have long played a key role in accommodating faith and culture to each other in Korea and in responding to the national aspirations of the Korean people. It is hard to believe that a church fully dominated by missionary leadership could have successfully engaged in either of these activities.

One of the most striking and important consequences of the use of the Nevius Plan had to do with the missionaries themselves. Palmer points out that the missionaries saw many parallels between the Korean situation and experience and that in the Bible, and that,

The missionaries held favorable attitudes towards the native people and their traditional way of life. They not only had confidence that Protestant Christianity was relevant to native culture, but they insisted that Koreans could be trusted to take it under hand without having it suffer serious distortion thereby. (Palmer, 33)

Thus, while the missionaries still tended to dominate certain aspects of the work and to display certain negative attitudes towards Korean culture generally, they trusted the churches they founded to be true, faithful churches that could carry the responsibility for evangelizing Korea themselves.

Yet again, the situation in Thailand was fundamentally different. When the predominant American Presbyterian mission began its work in the 1840s, missionary leadership in every phase of the work was taken for granted. In the 1890s, the Presbyterian mission in northern Siam, the Laos Mission, did flirt briefly with the idea of employing the Nevius Plan, but it went no further than a narrow emphasis on financial self-support most clearly embodied in a policy of not employing "native" evangelists. After a few years, the mission retreated from even that policy and, while some missionaries claimed that the Laos Mission had tried the Nevius Plan and found it wanting, such was not the case at all (See *Khrischak Muang Nua*, [Chapter 6](#), 103ff). The Presbyterian Siam Mission never seriously considered the Nevius Plan. In both missions, the missionaries retained full control of virtually all aspects of church and mission work well into the twentieth century.

The question of trust is crucial here. Unlike what Palmer describes happening in Korea, in Thailand Protestant missionaries generally took a highly negative view not only of Thai culture but also of the ability of Thai converts to divorce themselves from their culture. They had what can only be called a strong prejudice against the ability of Thais to lead their own churches (see *Khrischak Muang Nua*, Chapter 4 and following; see also *HeRB* 5, "[The Poor Lost Sheep at Phrae Revisited](#)"). A few missionaries, notably the Rev. E. P. Dunlap of the Siam Mission and the Rev. Robert Irwin of the Laos Mission, disagreed with the highly negative attitudes of their colleagues and worked to empower local church leadership, with some success (for Dunlap, see Swanson, *Towards a Clean Church*; for Irwin, see *Khrischak Muang Nua*, Chapter 6, *passim*). My own research suggests that the Presbyterian missionary failure to trust and empower their converts has been a crucial factor in preserving the inherently alien nature of Protestant Christianity in Thailand.

The difference between Thailand and Korea is striking, and Clark argues forcefully, as we saw above, that the one reason the Korean churches have grown at a rate unprecedented in Asian history is that the first generations of missionaries in Korea were the only Protestant missionaries in Asia to employ the Nevius Plan seriously. He somewhat overstates the case for the importance of the Nevius Plan, but his point is well taken if other chief factors are given more consideration than he gives them. Based on the cases of Korea and Thailand, it is fair to say that churches founded by missionaries are far more likely to act in a responsible and trustworthy manner if they are given responsibility and treated as trustworthy. We should add that it is clear that the missionaries working in Thailand and Korea, otherwise, shared precisely the same general set of ideologies and attitudes. They conducted much of their work along lines exactly like those carried out by Protestant missionaries throughout the world, especially in emphasizing the use of education and medicine as tools for evangelization. The missionaries believed in the superiority of Western civilization no less in Korea than in Siam. Indeed, Dunlap and Irwin, although innovative in their trust of Thai church leadership, were otherwise among the most theologically conservative Presbyterian missionaries to serve in Siam. The one

difference between them and their colleagues-and between the missionaries in Korea and Thailand generally-is in the matter of trust and empowerment.

The third factor concerning the missionary context of the Korean and Thai churches is one that is actually similar in both countries, but worked out differently in each. The missionaries in both Thailand and Korea sought to respond to human suffering with a patently Christian form of humanitarianism. They established clinics, hospitals, and dispensaries in both nations; they initiated the use of Western medical treatments in both. They attacked certain social institutions or conventions that they considered inhumane, and they especially sought to improve the lot of women in society. They established schools, industrial projects, and other work aimed at social and moral improvement.

The consequences of missionary attempts to heal human suffering, however, played out differently in the two countries. In Korea, human suffering appears to have been more intense, particularly after the full Japanese occupation of Korea in 1910, and the missionaries and churches became one of the leading agencies addressing that suffering. They were agencies that were not identified with the Japanese, but were, as we have already seen, positively linked to the people's national aspiration for modernization and independence (see Chung [1], 530; Clark, 260-261). In Thailand, the humanitarian efforts of the missionaries were widely appreciated, and the missionary record contains numerous references to the praise and thanks of government officials from the King on down for those efforts. That thanks did not translate into an identification of Christianity with the struggles and aspirations of the Thai people, either in central or northern Thailand. In the absence of immediate colonial domination and persecution such as experience by the Koreans, indeed, there was not even much of a Thai national consciousness until the opening decades of the twentieth century. Streckfuss argues that Siam only developed a concept of "Thainess" in reaction to French intentions on Siamese territory, which were based on the argument that most of the various peoples ruled by Bangkok are not "really Thai." (Streckfuss, esp. 143-144)

Conclusion

Differences in geo-political, religious, and missiological conditions between Korea and Thailand, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries up to World War II, go a long way towards explaining the differences in church growth between the Protestant churches in these two countries. The virtually chaotic political internal situation in Korea, Japanese colonialism, Korea's unsettled religious situation, missionary strategies, and the ways in which Protestantism identified with the plight of the people-all of these factors established a solid foundation upon which to build the Korean Protestant church. In Thailand, meanwhile, the nation's political institutions were relatively stable, colonialism was a less pressing (although still potentially dangerous) threat to national independence, missionary strategy was markedly untrusting of church leadership, and missionary humanitarian activities were not identified with national suffering and aspirations. There was not a foundation for church growth.

We must, however, be wary of concluding that the Korean church has grown rapidly and the Thai church slowly because of these external factors alone, especially in the case of the Korean churches. In Thailand, it seems that the church has not, until recently, had the opportunity to

take responsibility for its own life to the degree that it can effectively respond to the sociocultural and religious context within which it works. Even today, the anti-culture ideology of the majority of Protestant missionaries in the past and of many even today continues to saddle the churches with a crippling ghetto mentality that frustrates rather than facilitates conversions to the Christian faith. In Korea, meanwhile, it was not a foregone conclusion that the church would necessarily grow as rapidly as it has because of the factors discussed in this section. We turn now to the ways in which Korean Protestants have capitalized on these factors.

Internal Factors

The "external factors" of Korean church growth discussed above created a set of favorable conditions for the rapid spread of Protestantism, but the Korean churches themselves have played a central role in Protestant demographic expansion. Here, the contrast between Korea and Thailand becomes, if anything, even sharper. Where the churches of Korea had options in their response to the Korean context, the situation in Thailand largely deprived the Thai Protestant churches of viable options in their way to respond to their political and social context. The Korean church, thus, was able to lodge itself firmly within Korean life and identify itself with "Korean-ness," whereas the Thai church retained an alien identity if simply could not shake.

Identification with National Suffering and Aspirations

The first generations of Protestants, during the era of Japanese domination (1910-1945), charted a response to the Korean colonial situation that combined ministering to the suffering of the people with a generally passive attitude towards Japanese rule itself. It was left to the Korean churches and their leaders to transform the missionaries' caring but passive approach into an active identification with the suffering and national aspirations of the Korean people. Christian leaders played a prominent role in various attempts to resist the Japanese occupation, and the Japanese colonial government soon initiated a policy of repression aimed at Christians that including imprisoning thousands of church members and the burning of many church buildings. Christians were hardly the only Koreans subjected to colonial brutalities, but they both played a leadership role and suffered reprisals totally out of proportion with their small numbers. In the process, they also were able to identify Protestantism with Korean nationalism, and while Clark is probably correct that few people before World War II converted to Christianity as a result (Clark, 262-263), the larger point is, once again, that Protestantism was able to lodge itself in the mainstream of Korean life. Given the nationalistic commitment of Korean Christians and their willingness to suffer for that commitment, the general public could hardly deny their genuine "Korean-ness." Chung contends that because of Protestant struggles against and under the Japanese occupation Koreans came to accept Christianity, "as a tremendously positive force in the nation's struggle for independence and development." (Chung [2], 28; see also, Ro, 167-69; and Kim [1], 42-45)

The small Protestant community in Siam also suffered persecution from the later 1930s through the end of World War II, but the circumstances were entirely different. That persecution was carried out largely by Thai government officials as part of an undeclared policy to force Christians to return to Buddhism under the premise that all loyal Thais must be Buddhists.

Christians, that is, were persecuted in the name of Thai nationalism and were seen as traitors to the nation rather than its defenders, as was the case in Korea. It is true that the dominant Presbyterian mission had supported the emergence of Thai patriotism beginning especially in the reign of King Vajiravudh (1910-1925) on the premise that good Christians make good patriots. In the indigenous totalitarian climate of Thailand in the later 1930s, however, there was no way in which the churches could have benefited from the missionaries' attempts to present Thai Christians as good patriots.

Accommodation with Korean Religious Consciousness

Still another factor contributing to Korean church growth is the fact that Korean Protestantism has been able to identify with and draw upon a wide range of indigenous religious themes to the extent that it may itself be considered an indigenous religion. This is true in spite of the fact that most Protestants continue to reject Confucian-based ancestor worship. Kim's article in *Sociology of Religion* (Kim [2]) presents with particular clarity the case that the churches have been able to identify with indigenous religious consciousness, and his article provides a useful starting point for our arguments here.

Kim argues that the Protestant churches of South Korea have been successful evangelistically because the message they preach is largely congruent with Korean culture. He states that there is a strong affinity between the Protestant message and practices, on the one hand, and traditional Korean shamanism, on the other. Koreans found Protestant doctrines and values thus, "to be compatible with the values that they were familiar with." Korean pastors, he also claims, consciously sought to shape Korean Protestantism, "in accordance with the tradition-bound religious inclinations of Koreans." (Kim [2], 129) Kim concludes, "...the remarkable growth of Christianity in South Korea rested heavily on minimizing the contradiction between the new doctrine and Korean values and on reducing the conflict between the new faith and Korean traditional religions." (Kim [2], 130)

Specifically, Korean Protestantism is strongly this worldly and parallels the thought-ways of traditional Korean shamanism in their mutual emphasis on the practical needs for living of average people including health, material prosperity, and social as well as religious salvation. Materialism, he contends, is an important element in both Korean shamanism and Protestantism, and he holds that Protestants have actually incorporated shamanistic-like rites into their faith. The Korean church's "gospel of success," in sum, neatly parallels shamanism. (Kim [2], 119-122). Youngsook Harvey agrees with Kim and notes that shamanistic-style thinking and rites have a particular hold on Christian women. She links, for example, Christian women's prayer groups with shamanism as both being similar in ideology and activities, and she describes various activities carried out in those prayer groups that show similarities to shamanism. She argues that Shamanism, like Christianity, has been a place where women could find solace, emotional release, and exercise some control over their own lives (Harvey, esp. 165-167).

Korean Christians, Kim suggests, particularly draw on traditional conceptions of God (Hananim) to reinforce their materialistic, shamanistic approach to religious consciousness and practice. They emphasize God's role as Saviour, the one who answers their prayers and is the source of their happiness (Kim [2], 124-125). He writes, "The masses, for whom the entreaties to Hanamin

or spirits had been traditionally lined with their material wishes, identified the Christian God as the supreme deity who can liberate them from their miseries, grant them material wishes, and bring them happiness." (Kim [2], 125) Young-ho Kim argues that the Christian appropriation of materialistic shamanism has nationalistic implications as well, namely Christians fully agree with the belief shared by those Koreans who belong to various new religious movements that Korea is the axis mundi, the center of the world, and the Korean people are a specially chosen people. Kim traces this belief back to traditional shamanism and observes that one of the ways it manifests itself among Korean Christians is in their belief that the Korean church will be the vehicle for the renewal of Christianity in many other nations (Young-ho Kim, esp. 123-124; see also Kim [1], 110).

In their book *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism*, Brouer, Gifford, and Rose, contend that conservative Korean Christianity, especially Pentecostalism, relies on a set of practices that also parallel traditional shamanistic ones. These include, most notably, exorcisms, faith healing, and charismatic revivalism with its emphasis on the indwelling of spiritual powers, namely the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. They note that the Korea's other new religious movements also rely on similar vehicles for evangelism. Referring to the powerful role of traditional shamans in exorcisms and rites of "self-effacing ecstasy," they state.

The Korean Pentecostal pastor is just such a powerful officiant. Through the processes of speaking in tongues, prophecy, and other gifts of the Spirit, he allows his body, given up to ecstatic experience, to be the conduit of the Holy Ghost's overwhelming power. Such shamanistic power, added to the other considerable attributes of the Christian faith, allows the Pentecostals to emulate and possibly outperform the spirit power evoked in the other new religions. (Brouer, Gifford, & Rose, 113)

Kim agrees that Korean pastors function much like the traditional shamans, arguing that pastors especially emphasize those passages in the Bible regarding the "healing potential" of God and of Christian belief (Kim [2], 126).

There is, in sum, a widespread agreement among scholars that contemporary Korean Protestantism has incorporated, knowingly and unknowingly, many of the practices and thought-ways of traditional Korean shamanistic spirituality. Kang makes the point that Korea has a long tradition of drawing from many different sources-notably shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism-for its religious life, to the extent that it could be said that Koreans were not one or the other but were all three of these religions, mixed together (Kang, 98-104). Chung simply states that syncretism is one of the basic characteristics of Korean religiosity, which religiosity stresses "this worldly" values (Chang [2], 33). It is hardly surprising that Korean Protestantism shares, to one degree or another, in that syncretism.

Although relatively little work has been done as yet on the relationship of Thai Christian religious thought to its culture compared to the impressive amounts done on that of Korea, it seems apparent that Thai Christians do draw heavily on their Buddhist parent culture for their own expressions of the Christian faith. Hughes, more than twenty years' ago, made the point that northern Thai Protestant attitudes towards soteriology (doctrine of salvation) are far closer to those of Thai Buddhists than they are to Western missionaries (Hughes). Research that I have

done recently suggests that northern Thai Protestants have accommodated their Christian faith and Asian culture in numerous ways, to the point that one can argue that northern Thai Protestantism is an indigenous, albeit distinctive religious faith (see "Dancing to the Temple, Dancing in the Church," in [HeRB 3](#) and, "Northern Thai Attitudes towards People of Other Faiths."). It does seem likely that the Thai church has drawn on the syncretistic religious resources of Thai society and culture just as much as have the Korean churches. To the extent that is true, however, the accommodation of church and culture in Thailand has not translated into the type of positive relationship with Thai culture that is so evident in Korea. As we have indicated already, there is still a tendency to see Thai Protestantism as being an essentially alien religion. Korean Protestants, thus, are able to radically reject traditional Korean Confucian ancestor worship and still maintain a widely accepted indigenous identity. In Thailand, in the other hand, Christians are held in low esteem largely because they reject the rites and rituals of Thai Buddhism and spirit worship. As we have already seen, the conditions that have allowed Korean Protestantism to be accepted widely as an indigenous Korean faith simply do not exist in Thailand. However Thai Protestants, that is, frame their relationship to their mother culture, they have had great difficulty convincing other Thais in any numbers that Protestant Christianity is a viable, indigenous religious alternative.

Conclusion

While it is not unanimous, there does seem to be some scholarly consensus concerning the central cause of Korean church growth. When taken together, the three external and two internal factors we have discussed here allowed Korean Protestantism to identify itself, in large degree, with Korean culture and society. It has taken on the aspect of an home-grown "new religious movement" that shares certain core traits with other NRMs and, indeed, outdoes them in many ways as an indigenous Korean faith. As Grayson states, "The growth of the seed which was planted, however, can be explained in large measure by the association of Christianity with a sense of Korean nationalism and culture." (Grayson, 128)

However we look at the matter, Protestantism's situation in Thailand is fundamentally dissimilar to that in Korea because the mix of factors discussed here has worked out quite differently. Siam faced Western rather than Japanese colonialism. Siam had a relatively strong central government that was able to co-opt the process of Westernization-modernization. The nineteenth-century missionaries initially employed strategies that limited rather than fostered strong local church leadership. Where the Korean churches were able to function as widely accepted representatives of the people's desire for freedom and development, Thai Christians were at various times considered traitors to their country. The Korean churches have been able to accommodate faith and culture in syncretistic ways that facilitate church growth, while such accommodation in Thailand does not seem to correct society's general disinterest in what is seen to be an essentially alien religion.

We began with the question, "What Does Seoul Have to do with Bangkok?" Viewed from within the Thai context, the comparative study of the Protestant church experience in Thailand and Korea sheds important light on the Thai church's experience in at least two ways. First, it serves to underscore the importance of missionary policies in fostering or impeding church growth by

taking advantage or failing to take advantage of geo-political factors beyond their immediate control. The Korean experience, most importantly, reminds us that the Protestant churches of Thailand have operated in a more restricted arena because of the way factors external to it have played out since the 1830s. In that sense, the Protestant experience in Thailand is historically more typical of what has happened in many other Asian nations, most notably China.

Second, studying the different situations in the two nations should serve as a warning that Korean answers are not immediately relevant to the Thai churches. Those answers were shaped in response to a set of conditions peculiar to the Korean situation in Northeast Asia. They are not any more applicable to that of Southeast Asia than are the answers other missionaries import from Europe, America, and even other parts of Asia. While Korean successes in evangelism, moreover, are impressive, they also raise a number of difficult theological concerns, partly because that success seems to incorporate materialistic and self-serving cultural values that seem almost a denial of the Gospel. One can well wonder if many Korean churches, like many in the United States, have not in more recent decades "sold out" to culture to such an extent that they have lost the ability to transform broken human culture. This is not to say that the churches of Thailand have nothing to learn from Korea; it is to say that the Protestant churches of both nations have things to teach each other. In order to learn from each other, however, requires a clear-headed understanding of the churches' situations in each nation-and sensitivity to the great differences in those situations.

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Short Items

Globalization: the Risk

"Yet there is growing concern about the direction globalization is currently taking. Its advantages are too distant for too many, while its risks are all too real. Its volatility threatens both rich and poor. Immense riches are being generated. But fundamental problems of poverty, exclusion and inequality persist. Corruption is widespread. Open societies are threatened by global terrorism, and the future of open markets is increasingly in question. Global governance is in crisis. We are at a critical juncture, and we need to urgently rethink our current policies and institutions." (page 3)

Summary statement from the final report of The World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, entitled "A fair globalization: Creating opportunities for all." The report was issued on 24 February 2004.

Thai Church History: One Measure of the Field

The stacks of the Yale Divinity School Library contain an impressive number of single volume histories of Christianity, and out of curiosity one day I pulled down a half dozen of them to see how much space they gave to the history of Christianity in Thailand. Not much, as it turned out. Of the six, four did not have index entries for Thailand, Siam, or even Southeast Asia. Of the remaining two, each containing over 600 pages, Thailand rated one full sentence in one and a single phrase in the other. In both cases, the single fact given is that Christianity has had little numerical impact on Thailand.

One of the two books that does at least mention Thailand is David L. Edward's *Christianity: The First Two Thousand Years* (Orbis, 1997), a tome of 630 pages that contains about 300,000 words of text. The author gives Thailand exactly 8 words of its own (my calculator makes that 2.6666667E-5 percent, a figure I admit I don't understand). I should note that except for Viet Nam none of the countries of mainland Southeast Asia do much better, not even Burma (see page 568).

The study of Thai church history is a small field, microscopic actually when viewed from the perspective of the history of Christianity from its beginnings down to the present. What is endlessly fascinating to me, however, is that from the "inside" the field seems huge. Even Protestant history in Thailand has more to it than any one or two scholars can possibly encompass; and, of course, the issues involved in the study of Thai church history are as broad in many ways as the global church itself. The statistics presented here, thus, actually tell us more about the incomprehensible immensity of church history itself than about the smallness of church history in Thailand

The First & Only Mormon Missionary to Siam

In August 1852, Brigham Young, President of the Church of Latter-day Saints (LDS) called a missionary conference to promote Mormon foreign missions. That conference selected four individuals to establish a mission in Siam, and in late October of that year these four men became part of a wagon train composed of 38 Mormon missionaries who were going from Utah to Asia by way of California. In January 1853, they sailed from San Francisco with ten other Mormon missionaries who were bound for India, and they finally arrived in Calcutta in April 1853. They soon found that it was all but impossible to travel from India to Siam, and two of the four went to Sri Lanka, hoping to find their way to Siam from there, but they failed and finally gave up. The other two went to Rangoon, but they also found it was incredibly difficult to travel on to Siam; and one of these two also gave up. Elam Luddington, however, persevered in his goal of establishing a Mormon mission in Siam, eventually found his way to Singapore, and on 6 April 1854 finally reached Bangkok.

Things did not go well for Luddington in spite of the fact that he arrived in Bangkok at an auspicious time, early in the reign of King Mongkut, a modernizing monarch who was generally friendly towards foreign missionaries. The European community rejected him, the local population was not interested in his message, learning Siamese turned out to be difficult, and he reported that he was stoned twice. At one point, he wrote to the Mormons in England that he was living in the midst of "wild savages" and "wild beasts." His difficulties in Bangkok were compounded by the fact that the Mormon missionaries received little in the way of financial resources or institutional support from Utah. On 12 August 1854, Luddington left Bangkok and after a difficult passage arrived back in Utah in 1855. The LDS did not return to Thailand until the early 1960s, many years after it had ceased to be Siam.

Luddington's claim that he was stoned twice is extremely dubious, at best. As far as I know, stoning has not been practiced in Thailand, and it is difficult to believe that a Westerner would have been stoned in Mongkut's Bangkok. It is far more likely that Bangkok proved to be too difficult for Luddington and his references to savages, wild beasts, and tales of stonings served to justify going home. Even so, Elam Luddington has the distinction of numbering among the earliest generation of Western missionaries to Siam, if only briefly.

Source: Britsch, R. Lanier. *From the East: The History of the Latter-Day Saints in Asia, 1851-1996*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1998, pages 14-33. Note: I have added an entry on the "Latter-day Saints in Thailand" to the website Dictionary, based on this same source.

Sarah Blachly Bradley: Round II

Readers will remember that [HeRB 8](#) contains an article on the life of Sarah Blachly Bradley before she married Dr. Dan Beach Bradley. That article was based on research that I did at Berea College and Yale University during the summer of 2003, research that left a good deal of

information yet to be found. In particular, I was not able to trace the Blachly family back beyond their residence in Trumbull County, Ohio, in the early 1800s. Having run out of time in the U.S., I had to let matters stand.

And stand they did until earlier this year when I received an email from Donna Bell, a descendant of the Blachly family who informed me about a book entitled *Blatchley Physicians and Pioneers: A Family History of Descendants of Thomas Blatchley 1635-1929*, written by Shirley Hathaway Stebbings (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1983). This past summer I was able to get a copy through the Yale Divinity School library, and while it turned out that the book is a family history of a collateral line of descendants to that of Sarah Bradley, the book does offer further information into the family history of Sarah herself.

According to a footnote, Sarah's father, Miller Blachly II was a physician who was born in 1773 in New Jersey and her mother was Phoebe Bell, born in 1774. They were married in 1794 and eventually moved to Mercer County, Pennsylvania and from there to Weathersfield, Ohio, in about 1803 (page 130). Without going into all of the details, three things stand out from the book itself. First, Sarah's family came from New England stock. The progenitor of the American Blachlys was Thomas Blachley (also spelled Blacksley), who emigrated from England and arrived in Boston in 1635. Second, Sarah's line of ancestors, from that time on, showed a real wanderlust, moving time and again south and west, always towards the open frontier. Blachlys lived in Connecticut, on Long Island, in New Jersey, and in Pennsylvania before members of the family finally reached Ohio at the turn of the nineteenth century. The chapters in this book, one for each generation, are headed "The First Migration," "The Second Migration," and so on. Sarah's father, Miller II, was part of the fifth migration, making Sarah herself a sixth generation member of the wandering Blachly clan. Third, as the title of the book suggests, many of the Blachlys were doctors, including Sarah's father and two of her brothers.

News & Notes

New Items on *herbswanson.com*

I would like to call readers' attention to three new items that have been recently added to the Stack Section of this website. The first is a research paper entitled, "Northern Thai Protestant Attitudes Towards Other Faiths: Analysis of a Questionnaire," which reports in considerable detail on the results of a questionnaire on northern Thai Protestant attitudes towards Buddhism and Buddhists, which I originally intended to be an article for this *HeRB*. As it turned out, the paper is far too long for that purpose, and I have placed it in the stacks as being a more appropriate location for it.

The second new item is the "History of the Laurel Presbyterian Church." While in grad school at the University of Maryland in the 1980s, my family and I attended the Laurel Presbyterian Church, Laurel, MD. In the course of things, I ended up writing a substantial history of that congregation, which the church published itself in 1986. I was surprised and gratified to learn

that the Laurel Church has placed the whole volume on its website, and I have taken the opportunity to copy it onto this website as well. Although this history has nothing to do with Thai church history as such, it represents an important personal experience in local church research that had a definite influence on the way in which I have since conducted my work in Thailand.

The third addition to *herbswanson.com* is a Bibliography of Materials Related to Orientalism. During my last two summers at the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, I have collected a good deal of material on the work of Dr. Edward Said. This bibliography is based on that collection plus citations of other important works. Unlike the history of the Laurel Church, this bibliography is directly related to the study of Christianity in Thailand, at least in my own thinking. Said's work and the debate that still swirls around his classic book, *Orientalism* (1978) is useful for understanding especially the nature of missionary discourse in Thailand.

Don Swearer Takes Up a New Position at Harvard

HeRB takes great pleasure in announcing that Dr. Don Swearer has recently been appointed as the new Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University. This appointment follows his official retirement from Swarthmore College. Don took up his new duties as of September 1st, and we wish him Godspeed in his new position.

Resources for the Study of C&MA Missions

One. For those interested in the Christian & Missionary Alliance missions in general and in Thailand in particular, a helpful source is Ayer's bibliography on the CMA (full citation below), which contains 2,352 annotated entries for books, essays, articles, and theses plus another 179 entries for periodical sources. It is a part of the American Theological Library Association's bibliography series. The subject index entry for "Thailand" shows ten items, all of which may (now) be found in this website's Bibliography. While that is not a large number, the items shown under "Missions" and other nations, notably Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos is substantial. It is also gratifying to note that this bibliography gives attention to the thought and theology of the CMA. All in all, the bibliography is well organized and easy to use.

Citation: Ayer, H. D. *The Christian and Missionary Alliance: An Annotated Bibliography of Textual Sources*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2001.

Two. Just as this issue of HeRB was going "to press," I received an email from Dale Sahlberg concerning a website his parents have created. The Sahlbergs were long-time C&MA missionaries in Thailand, and their new website contains film and audio clips on a wide variety of topics of interest regarding both missionary work and life in Thailand generally. The website's address is: www.ecsahlberg.com.

An Article on Edward Said in the IBMR

The July 2004 issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (vol. 28, No. 3, pages 107-112) contains an article I wrote entitled, "Said's Orientalism and the Study of Christian Missions." Since the article is not about Thailand Christianity, it does not appear in the website Bibliography of materials related to the study of Thai Christianity. It does, however, appear in the Bibliography related to the debate over orientalism, described above.

Wyatt's Thailand: A Short History, 2nd edition

Although dated 2003, the second edition of David K. Wyatt's, *Thailand: A Short History* did not hit bookstores here in Thailand until mid-year 2004. The first edition of this book has been for twenty years the standard textbook on Thai history to the point that if a library were to have only one English-language book on Thailand, it should be Wyatt's Short History. The publication of this second edition, thus, is an important and welcome event for students and scholars of Thailand. The book includes revisions in the text, a new chapter on recent events, a new set of maps, and the addition of some recent works of scholarship to the bibliographical essay on further readings. The book is handsomely published by Silkworm Books.

The citation is: David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*. 2nd ed. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003.

Ed Zehner's Editing & Consulting Service

Dr. Ed Zehner has recently mailed out an email circular announcing the start-up of a new editing and consulting service that he will offer to those working on books, theses, articles, and any other written work. Ed has considerable experience as a professional editor. I asked him to be an informal reader for sections of my own dissertation and found his comments very helpful, esp. in terms of organizing arguments and maintaining their consistency. He also picks up on nitty-gritty details that help give a work a more professional tone. Readers who would like further information may be in touch with Ed at zehner1234@aol.com. A further recent email from Ed says that those interested in his services may also consult his website, which is up and running but still under construction; the address is: www.expressitwell.com.

Book Reviews

Lord, Donald C. *Mo Bradley and Thailand*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1969.



The professional study of Thai Protestantism began with the work of Donald Lord and his doctoral thesis, which was published in 1964. Subsequent to his dissertation, Lord published two related articles in 1966 and 1967 and then published *Mo Bradley and Thailand* in

1969 (see the Bibliography). His work preceded, thus, the pioneering flurry of professional work done on Thai church history in the late 1970s and early 1980s by a decade and more. For that reason alone, this book deserves attention, but it also deserves that attention because of the quality of the work itself in spite of some weakness and problems. Bradley wrote as a professional historian, and all of his work has the marks of the professional. It is a carefully researched, well written, and credible piece of research that places its subject, Dr. Dan Beach Bradley (Mo Bradley), in his historical setting both in the United States and in Thailand. Lord's study of Bradley and his relationship to Thailand is important to the study of Thai church history, furthermore, because of the importance of Bradley himself and the era in which he lived and worked. Bradley stands at the head of the short list of key figures in the history of Protestant missions, and he stood at the heart of the pioneer period in Protestant missions. Lord has thus done the study of the church in Thailand an invaluable service by his research into Bradley's life.

It should be understood from the start, however, that Lord's *Mo Bradley and Thailand* is not a biography of Dan Beach Bradley as such. It is, rather, a study of Bradley's relationship to the people and rulers of Thailand. The book started out as a dissertation, and normally dissertations have to have a line of argument, a thesis, or, at least, a patently academic theme. Straight biographies for the sake of writing a biography are verboten, as it were. Lord pursues a dual academic purpose in *Mo Bradley and Thailand*, namely: first, to understand Bradley and the missionary movement in Thailand; and, second, to describe "the impact both had upon Thailand and three of its kings, Nang Klao, Mongkut, and Chulalongkorn." (page 12) His thesis is that Bradley in particular and the Protestant missionaries more generally had an important modernizing impact on Thailand. He, I think, overstates the matter, but he does go far in documenting the role the pioneer generation of missionaries played in Thai society.

In picking up *Mo Bradley and Thailand* to do this review, I was pleasantly reminded that it is a surprisingly up to date work in a couple of important ways. As is more and more the case with historical work generally these days, Lord is conscious of the role of women and makes some effort to include their stories in his work. He also anticipates the importance of intellectual history to the study of the past in his emphasis on Bradley's cultural and cognitive heritage to his work. It is especially helpful that he gives special attention to Bradley's motivation, as the nature of missionary motivation is crucial, historically, to understanding their work. It is to be particularly appreciated that Lord accepts the genuineness of Bradley's religious motivations. He does not share in the tendency found among many secular scholars to discount religious motivation as being merely a cover for deeper "real" motivations, usually pecuniary or having to do with status or power.

What we have in *Mo Bradley and Thailand*, then, is an introduction to the history of Protestant missions in Thailand from the 1830s to the 1870s, and it is not surprising that the book considers a number of important themes in nineteenth-century Protestant missionary and church history. Those themes include the role of Thailand as the gateway to missions in China, the importance of health and the impact of death on the pioneer generation of missionaries, the impact of the ideology of exclusivism on their work, and even more minor themes such as the importance of reading aloud in a semi-literate society such as Thailand. His description of Bradley's American

evangelical heritage is apt, and he presents a generally serviceable description of the Thai context of Protestant pioneer missions as well.

One theme in *Mo Bradley and Thailand* that deserves particular mention is Lord's repeated descriptions of how Bradley slowly adapted himself to Thai culture. Bradley arrived in Bangkok with a firm set of prejudices against Thai culture, which found even the most innocuous of cultural events or characteristics obnoxiously "heathen." Eventually, however, Bradley even attended Buddhist funeral ceremonies, which other missionaries refused to do and criticized him for attending. What is particularly interesting is Lord's description of Bradley's reasoning that funerals were not "really" religious; they were secular (pages 136-137). This is precisely the sort of redefining of what is and what is not "religious" that modern day Thai Protestants employ to justify participation in various traditional rites and rituals that Protestants have refused to attend in the past.

Lord devotes considerable attention to Bradley's relationship with other missionaries, both in the two missions he served under-the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and the American Missionary Association (AMA)-and with the members of the other two missions then working in Thailand, the Baptists and Presbyterians. Although those relationships were generally good, they erupted into divisions and tensions in two periods. While serving under the ABCFM, Bradley and his close friend, the Rev. Jesse Caswell., became embroiled in a theological dispute with their ABCFM colleagues over Finney's doctrine of perfection, which led to their dismissal from the mission. Later, when he worked for the AMA, Bradley had to deal with contentious colleagues who made his life miserable and brought an end to the AMA work in Bangkok in all but name.

Mo Bradley and Thailand also focuses on Bradley's and the Protestant missionaries' relationship to key figures in the Thai government of their day, and to a degree Lord documents something of what we might call the "politics of modernization" in the Thai state during the Third and Fourth Reigns. He pays, as would be expected, particular attention to Bradley's (and Caswell's) relationship to King Mongkut, and while he may give the Protestant missionaries more credit than they are due for the Westernization of nineteenth-century Thailand, Lord is also aware of Mongkut's unique role in the process of Westernization and modernization. Lord, in particular, goes out of his way to correct the misunderstandings of Mongkut and Thai history fostered in Britain and America by Anna Leonowens largely fictional books about her experiences in Bangkok, later made famous by Margaret Landon's unfortunate book, *Anna and the King of Siam*.

Lord's *Mo Bradley and Thailand* is thus a generally useful work, but we should also note that it is by no means perfect. *Mo Bradley and Thailand* is flawed in a number of ways, although its flaws do not detract from its value for the study of missionary and church history in Thailand. Most importantly, perhaps, Lord chose to use a thematic rather than chronological approach, arguing that Bradley was engaged in so many activities that it makes more sense to discuss each activity separately. Thus, he has separate chapters on Bradley's medical, printing, and evangelistic work. What is lost is a sense of the development of Bradley's life. People do not live their lives thematically but chronologically, and Lord has to engage in a fair amount of back-

and-forth explaining in order to make sense of events. In fact, Bradley's life divided itself into three clear periods-before Thailand, as a missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), and as a missionary under the American Missionary Association (AMA)-and using a chronological framework would have worked quite well and would have been easier to write, I suspect. Just as one example of the problems with this thematic approach, we learn on page 104 that in the course of his work in Thailand, Bradley's attitudes towards participating in purely social events mellowed; and Lord refers to an event in 1871, at the end of Bradley's life, to make his point. Yet, the point itself is made in the middle of the book and given no chronological context. We don't observe the logic of this very important change within the overall context of Bradley's life, and because it is not placed in that context Lord mentions it in only three sentences at the end of a paragraph describing Bradley's personality.

Lord is also now and again guilty of failing to keep sufficient critical distance from his subject. The task of the historian is to maintain what we might term "intimate distance" with respect to her or his subject, and Lord sometimes fails in this task. Thus, for example, on page 88 he favorably compares Bradley's medical skills with a supposed cure used by "local Catholic priests," which was to drink liquor and shut their patients off from the sun in a smoke filled room. In this passing reference, Lord manages to convey uncritically the early Protestant missionaries' disdain for Catholics, priests, and liquor without considering the somewhat doubtful wisdom of relying on an English source to describe the activities of French priests. Lord also has a propensity to highlight "quaint" Thai customs that have supposedly survived from Bradley's time down to the present, evidently as a way to emphasize the difficult conditions under which Bradley worked. Lord, unintentionally surely, seems to share some of the old-time missionaries' less than flattering attitudes about "the Thai."

Although Lord has written a book sensitive to intellectual and cultural themes, moreover, he completely overlooks the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophy of common sense realism on the thinking and behavior of Bradley in particular and the pioneer generation of American missionaries to Thailand in general. While this is not the place for a discussion of the role of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy in nineteenth-century American religious history (see "Prelude to Irony," Chapter Three), Lord's failure to mention it means that he has failed in one important regard to locate Bradley and the other missionaries in their own time. In his defense, it must be said that in the early 1960s, when Lord wrote his dissertation, historians of American religion were only just beginning to recover common sense realism's role in American Protestant history. One of the key works in that recovery, Henry F. May's, *The Enlightenment in America*, was not published until 1976, more than a full decade after Lord's thesis.

One is also bound to say that while *Mo Bradley and Thailand* is a study of Bradley's relationship to Thailand, Lord's grasp of Thai history is just adequate. Perhaps most troubling is his claim that Thai culture is largely a static one, which he argues means that historians can read from contemporary Thai society back to the nineteenth century (see page 22). This attitude may help to explain his tendency, mentioned above, to repeatedly argue that numerous "quaint" aspects of Thai society and culture in Bradley's time may be seen in contemporary Thailand today (well, in the 1960s, at any rate). Again, one of the problems facing Bradley was that the sources for the

study of Thai history in the 1960s were relatively meager. It is also likely that he was laboring under a static notion of "traditional" societies that has since been discredited.

A few final quibbles. Eerdmans clearly published this book "on the cheap." It is good they published it, but the book deserves at least a few illustrations and its readers deserve a map or two to help them orient everything geographically. Given the thematic arrangement of the book, it would be very useful to have a timeline of key dates and events.

In sum, the strengths of Lord's *Mo Bradley and Thailand* outweigh the weaknesses, and the book remains one of the key works in the study of Protestant missionary and church history in Thailand. It is not likely that any other author will take up the same story any time soon, and in the meantime Lord's study will remain useful. That is saying a good deal for a historian who had no scholarly body of knowledge to call upon for supplementing and interpreting most of the material in his study. Lord was very much on his own, and while his efforts did not lead directly to the development of the field of study of Thai church and missionary history, as it stands today, it does contribute substantially to that field of study.

Sarna, Jonathan D. *American Judaism: A History*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004.



One of the basic premises under which I work as a historian of Protestantism in Thailand is that we cannot understand the present condition of the Thai churches without giving careful consideration to their missionary heritage, which means that a knowledge of American church and religious history is crucial to the overall study of the church in Thailand. Hence this book review. Sarna's *American Judaism* has received good reviews in the United States and deserves our attention here for two reasons. First, the author provides us with an insightful look into American religious history seen through the lens of a minority faith. Second, he describes how the many disparate, foreign Judaisms that came from Europe and elsewhere to the United States gradually became American Judaism. We learn more, that is, both about the religious and culture milieu of the American missionaries to Thailand, and we are provided with a fascinating case study in religious and cultural accommodation.

Let me start by saying that this book is, in and of itself, a good read and good history. Those who read history for pleasure will enjoy it. Since I am not a specialist in American ethnic religious history, I am not qualified to judge the book's accuracy as a history of American Judaism, but it has all of the marks of a well-researched, professional, and credible piece of work; and Sarna has been writing about American Jewish history for a long time. He is a "name" in his field. Furthermore, his rendering of American religious history in the period I know best, the nineteenth century, is right on. What is different is the perspective.

Sarna's central theme in *American Judaism* is that the American religious environment, from colonial times to the present, has offered the Jewish people with both a grand opportunity to be relatively free of the persecution and social isolation they faced elsewhere and a threat to their very existence as a people. In other nations and eras, Jews were forced politically and socially to

be Jews. They could only melt into the general population if they converted to Christianity. In the United States, however, there was no political repression of any religion; it is a free religious market place, and in that pluralistic religious and social environment Jewish immigrants had to reinvent Judaism.

At the same time, however, from its inception the United States has been a Protestant nation in every sense of the word but officially. Sarna points out time and again how the Protestant religious context has influenced American Judaism for good and for ill, transforming immigrant Judaism from a "nation" into an indigenous "denomination." While the United States is a secular nation politically, thus, local and state governments still historically enforced laws protecting the Christian Sabbath, laws that worked real economic hardship on observant Jews whose Sabbath is Saturday rather than Sunday. Or, again, Jewish synagogues took on the structure of American Congregationalism in their polity and many of them borrowed various forms of Protestant worship, including the "promiscuous" seating of women with men in the congregation, the use of organs, and mixed male and female choirs.

At the heart of it all, as Sarna makes abundantly clear, was the issue of the very survival of Judaism as a distinct religious faith. Appreciative of their religious freedom, Jewish immigrants still agonized over how best to preserve their Jewishness in the American religious environment. They, at times, fought bitterly among themselves over the best strategies for preserving their faith, and as a consequence American Judaism fragmented into a number of different branches, particularly the Reformed, Conservative, and Orthodox branches. Here, too, Jews replicated the American marketplace religious pluralism that has given birth to hundreds of Protestant denominations and sects, large and small. Even those Jewish immigrants who struggled to preserve their European Jewish heritage unchanged had to contend with the vast difficulties of such things as a dearth of trained rabbis, difficulties in finding kosher meats that were really kosher, and the pressure to work on Saturdays just to make a living. It was far easier to maintain a sense of Jewish identity and piety in the face of European political and legal discrimination against Jews than it was where, as in the United States, there was no such discrimination.

Sarna has written a book that provides fascinating insights into the historical development of American Judaism. His book is sensitive to the American religious context of Judaism. He focuses not so much on dates as on developments, and he does an excellent job of describing the many permutations European Judaism underwent in America. Sarna does what is now generally expected of all historians in giving attention to the particular experience of women as a part of the larger story. And, he describes the ebb and flow of that story as Judaism in America sometimes flourished and at other times receded somewhat. His seems to be a balanced book without much in the way of overt editorializing.

If we read Sarna's *American Judaism* from within the context of church history in Thailand one of the most important insights to be gleaned from his text is that Jews in the United States have responded to the particularities of the American social and religious environment in many different ways. He makes it clear that Jewish immigrants had absolutely no choice concerning the accommodation of their faith with their new national context, and he makes it equally clear that Jews in American have fought tooth and nail over how best to respond. This, I think, is a

theme waiting to be further developed in the study of Protestantism in Thailand, namely the different ways in which Thai Protestants reinvent the Protestant faith in Thailand. My sense is that those of us who have studied Protestantism in Thailand, including myself, have been too monolithic in our studies-as if there has been one central model or response.

A second insight from Sarna is that the conflict of contending approaches, theologies, and ideologies is an important and "natural" part of the mechanism of accommodation. Sarna does not exactly celebrate the many, multi-variable battles that have taken place among American Jews concerning the best ways to accommodate faith and culture to each other, but he surely does not decry the process either. He takes the whole process out of the realm of "good guys" and "bad guys" and sees all of the contentiousness as a healthy sign of religious vitality. In the Protestant churches of Thailand, there has been less overt contentiousness, apart from that between foreign missionaries, but Thai Protestants do not agree on the key issues of their faith as both Thais and Protestants; and perhaps more attention should be given to the diversity of their responses to the relationship between their faith and their cultures.

While the American Jewish and Thai Protestant experiences are very different, there is some similarity as well. Judaism began as a small, incredibly alien religion when it first arrived in colonial America, and Jews in America long remained a small minority that most Americans considered to be, somehow, "un-American" in the sense that Americans must be Protestant Christians in order to be truly American. To a degree, Thai Protestantism continues to be not only the faith of a tiny minority of Thais but also a foreigner's religion. "Real" Thais are Buddhist. Yet, by the 1950s Judaism had become so much a part of the American religious scene that it was accepted as normal and "good Americans" could be Jewish or Catholic as well as Protestant. One sees some signs in recent decades that Thai Protestantism is being somewhat more accepted as a legitimate faith for Thais; and if the Jewish experience in America is any guide at all, it can be expected that Protestantism (and Catholicism) will be increasingly seen as a "normal" presence on the Thai religious landscape.

Studies like Sarna's *American Judaism* serve the useful purpose of helping us to stand back a bit and see how the process of religious accommodation impacts other people in other places. In the early twenty-first century, there is no more pressing issue facing peoples of all religions all across the planet than the question of accommodation. In a world in which the only constant seems to be change, people of faith have to accommodate time and again their world to their faith and their faith to the world. Sarna provides us with an important case study in religious and cultural accommodation that reveals something of the complexity of the process and that helps us to understand a little more clearly how that same process is at work among Thai Protestants and Catholics.