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Lead Essay

Listening to Worship & Serve



There is a very real sense in which church-based or Christian research is no different from the research conducted in any other field, especially in terms of methodology. Even the fact that church researchers have a particular viewpoint grounded in religious concerns and motivation does not distinguish them from other, so-called "secular" researchers. Perspective, ideological orientation, and bias are elements found in research of every stripe and kind. Research, in any event, is the primary way by which contemporary institutions and agencies expand their knowledge, power, and capabilities-be they governmental, political, medical, academic, military, business, entertainment, or social service agencies. While the church has generally lagged behind in the use of research for its life and ministry, it is no different from any other social institution in its need for research and in the value research can have for its life.

Research, at its best, is a process of listening to learn. Researchers, at their best, put themselves aside for the time being and focus on persons, problems, or concerns outside of themselves. However pecuniary or self-serving their ultimate goals for research might be, during the research process itself researchers necessarily have to suspend self-concerns long enough to listen to what others have to teach them. This is no less true for church-based researchers; whatever their long-term agenda for research, they must be able to put themselves aside and listen to what others have to teach them. The fundamental methodology and value of research, then, is that is listening to the other and learning from the other in a disciplined, intentional, and structured manner. A marketing researcher puts aside her personal tastes and focuses on the tastes of the market. A biochemist concentrates with selfless intensity on the contents of the testtube or the meaning of the printouts. Pollsters, if they're doing their job properly, forget their own political orientation long enough to discover what Nai Daeng and Nang Noi think about the economy or the latest government scandal.

Looked at in this way, there is something quite religious about research. Religious faith, like research, directs one's attention to that which is Beyond self and encourages (or, at least, tries to encourage) humility and self-forgetfulness as being the avenue to discovering meaning, peace, and joy. Research should thus come "naturally" to religious researchers, who should have an advantage over the so-called secular researcher. By the same token, churches should have an "instinct" for research that grows out of their concern to "hear" and understand God, the divine Other-and to serve the human others who are its neighbors. Using the techniques of contemporary search, in fact, could prove useful to the church in its tasks of listening & serving the Other and others.

As Christians, we are called to worship and service ([Luke 10.25-28](#); [Romans 13.8-10](#))-that is, to listening in a responsive, self-suspending way to God and to our neighbors. The Christian is called to live a listening life, and one of the ways to live such a life in the contemporary world is by engaging in research. There is an elder in a church in Uttaradit Province, as one example, who became the lay moderator of his congregation in 2001. One of the problems facing his church

was that worship attendance was low. So, he made a worship attendance chart on which he listed the names of every member, and each week he put an "x" (for being present) or an "o" (for being absent) in the row by that name. At the end of several months, he took the results of this chart to the church council, and the council decided that it should send out visitation teams to all those people who had more "o's" than "x's" to discover what was keeping them from worship. At the end of six months, there was a marked increase in both attendance and giving. This very simple research exercise, in other words, inspired a listening process, which in turn strengthened the life of the church.

The life of faith is exercised through disciplines: of prayer, of meditation, of worship, of study, and of service. To that list should be added the modern discipline of research. It is a discipline that leads away from self, if only for a moment, and to the other. It teaches one to listen to others and learn from them. Used wisely and as a part of the family of faith-disciplines, it can even help us to listen worshipfully to God.

Herb Swanson
Ban Dok Daeng
June 2002

Articles

Spirituality as an Individual Project: How Churches Might Respond

Philip Hughes

Change & the Nature of Religion



There is substantial evidence that a huge change has occurred in Anglo-Celtic societies and, perhaps globally, in the very nature of religion since the 1960s. This paper seeks to define the nature of this change, summarise the evidence for it and to indicate how churches might respond to it.

From the churches point of view a change has been evident in the major down-turn in attendance. This is particularly true of those denominations which have been established, if not by government decree, then by the culture in which they have been embedded. It is less true of the rigorous churches, those which have been identified by the rigour with which they have kept the faith. The rigorous churches, such as the Baptists, the Brethren, the Salvation Army, the Seventh-day Adventists, to name just a few, have tended to maintain their numbers, although in Australia, most are experiencing a decline in the percentage of the population relating to them. It has been tempting to describe the change as a process of secularisation. The material world is taking over peoples attention. There is less interest in spiritual things. Peoples minds are dominated by science, economics and secular politics.

However, the picture has not been as uniform as the theory of secularisation would suggest. While attendance at many churches has been dropping, the Pentecostal churches have experienced an explosion. From tiny beginnings early in the 20th century, and without roots in any particular culture or political system, the Pentecostal churches have grown. For fifty years, their growth was fitful at best, strong enough to form some denominational structures, but not sufficient to be noticed by the majority of people. But from the 1960s on, they exploded. In Australia, they grew from 16,000 people identifying as Pentecostals to 176,000 in just 25 years. This is not a picture which corresponds with a process of secularisation.

While the Pentecostal churches have experienced a great influx of people, they have also found that many only stay a short while. They come, but many also go again. The National Church Life Survey found in 1996, that of all the people attending a Pentecostal church in Australia, 38% had either transferred in from another denomination or had come in without a recent history in church involvement. But in that same period of five years, 15% moved out of the Pentecostal churches into churches of other denominations, and another 17% moved out of the churches into no attendance at all (Kaldor et al, 1999, p. 55).

Other denominational groups have experienced some movement from time to time. When people have moved home and there has not been a church of their denomination in their new locality, they may have changed denomination. When people have married, they have sometimes moved. Occasionally, there have been conflicts in churches which have led to movement from one denomination to another. But what the Pentecostal churches are experiencing is something quantitatively and probably qualitatively different. People are trying the Pentecostal church out for a little while, and then moving on, perhaps to try out something else. Individuals make the decision to join, and the decision to move on. In the past, religion was a community affair. Religious beliefs were owned by a community. Religious rituals were celebrated by a community. The individual made the decision how active they wanted to be in the community. But it was primarily the community which determined the nature and expression of faith. Experts in the community set out the beliefs in propositional form. The liturgists determined how the community should worship.

Most people saw themselves as born into a religious community. Gradually they learnt the ways of the community, the beliefs, the practices, the expectations and the consequences of disobedience. The communities established a range of mechanisms through which the traditions of the community could be taught to the children: through schools or Sunday schools, through processes of catechesis, of baptisms and confirmations.

Pentecostal churches have never made much of such processes. When people have responded positively to what they had to say, to their ethos, they have been baptised and welcomed in, often on the very same day. They have bothered little with doctrine and ritual in any formal way. There has been little to teach and much more to experience.

In some ways, Pentecostal churches have had a stronger place for the individual. Harvey Cox describes speaking in tongues, at the heart of Pentecostal worship, as being "radically democratizing" (Cox, 1995, p.95). The fact that all contribute equally when speaking in tongues,

and the fact that no one can judge the quality of that contribution to worship, gives every individual a similar place.

This individualism, however, is now being seen in a different form: in the movement of people in and out of the Pentecostal churches. Underlying this is a real sense among many attenders that they, as individuals, rather than the community, retain the ability to say what they will believe and how they will relate to God. The individual measures and evaluates how helpful a church is, the sense of community, its worship, and even its beliefs.

This individualism has many other expressions in contemporary Western societies. It is seen, for example, in the number of people who fail to identify with any religious community at all. Since 1960, there has been a huge rise in Australia of the numbers of people who have described themselves as having no religion. In 1971, the Census first stipulated that if you have no religion, then you should write "no religion". In that year, a little less than 7% of the population responded to that invitation. Every year, there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of the population describing themselves as having no religion. In 1996, it reached 16.8% of the population, a total of almost 3 million people (Hughes, 1997, p.72). The Census does not require an answer to the religion question and another 10% of the population prefer not to answer. However, in sample surveys, the proportion say they have no religion is much higher than in the Census: as much as a quarter of the population.

Does the fact people tick the no religion box on the Census mean they are secular or that they are atheists or agnostics? Not necessarily. Some are, but others tell us in the sample surveys that they believe in God. Indeed, about half of all who say they have no religion say they believe in God. And about the same proportion, although not necessarily the same people, say that a spiritual life is important to them. So no religion is not necessarily a denial of spirituality. Primarily, no religion means that people do not identify with any particular religious community or organisation. In that regard, no religion is an expression of religious or spiritual individualism. It means, again, that the individual has made herself or himself the measure of what is good and true in religion.

A third expression of this individualism in religion is seen in the growth of the neo-pagan movement and New Age religiosity in general. The New Age groups vary somewhat. However, most them appeal very largely to the individual. They focus on dealing with the needs and interests of the individual. The group is secondary. One can be a witch within the Wiccan movement without contact with any other witches. It is fine if one practises by oneself. If one finds a coven helpful, then by all means become part of one, or form one. But covens are not essential to the Wiccans (Adam Possamai, Neopagan Organisation).

Those who advocate New Age religion spread their ideas through festivals and exhibitions, in market places and through bookshops. They work not primarily by inviting people to become part of communities, but bidding people to taste their resources, read their books, partake their, mostly individualistic, practices.

In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah noted the existence of profound religious individualism adopting the label Sheilatism. He named it after the person who called her religion after herself.

This said Bellah, suggests the logical possibility of over 220 million American religions, one for each of us (1985, p.221).

Sheilaism has now become rampant in the Western world. Most people would not maintain they had their own personal religion, but many would describe themselves as being on a personal spiritual journey. Among most younger people, throughout the Western world, the individual has become the measure of faith. Individuals are very aware that they have choices. They exercise that right of choice. They do not see themselves primarily as part of religious communities. If they choose to be part of a religious community it is because they want to be, rather than because they are.

Another significant piece of evidence about the individualism of religious practice was provided by the Australian Community Survey. The Australian Community Survey was conducted in 1997 and 1998 by NCLS Research and Edith Cowan University among a random sample of adult Australians. A total of 8500 completed the posted survey, 50% of those who had received a copy.

Among the questions were a variety on attendance at church services. While 20% of the sample said they attended a church service at least once a month, just over 40% had attended a service of one kind or another in the preceding year. The survey also asked whether people had tried Eastern Meditation within the preceding 12 months. About 12% of the sample responded positively. Then people were asked whether they had used psychic healing and crystals within the preceding 12 months. Around 9% of the population responded positively. The significant finding was that around 10% of the population responded positively to more than one of these three options. And more than 2% responded positively to all three. In other words, a significant part of the population had actually used resources drawn from quite different religious origins within the previous 12 months.

Of those who said that they often practised Eastern Meditation, only 9% identified themselves as Buddhists or Hindus. Many more of them said they were Anglican, Catholic, or had no religion. People are not necessarily converting to Buddhism or Hinduism, but are using Buddhist or Hindu practices and resources.

The importance of being loyal to a particular denomination has faded. Of those aged 60 years and over, 26% said agreed it was important to be loyal to ones own denomination. Among those 40 to 59, 14% said it was important. Among Australians under 40 years of age, only 9% saw it as important.

Traditional to Post-Traditional Society

One of the most helpful frameworks for understanding this change is that of Anthony Giddens. Giddens argues that Western societies have moved from being traditional to post-traditional in the last 30 years. He says that a traditional society is one in which the culture is largely handed on from one generation to the next. In a post-traditional society, however, culture is developed reflexively by individuals drawing on a range of resources (Giddens, 1994, p.5).

We have seen this change in a great variety of forms. It is evident in peoples eating habits. Eating habits had been handed down from one generation to the next. They changed a little. Cultures are always in flux, and there is a certain open-weave within them which means that individuals make some choices within a limited range. However, within the last 30 years, eating habits have changed greatly in the Western world. Individuals have begun drawing on cuisines from around the globe. They have absorbed into their regular eating habits Chinese and Indian food, Lebanese and Italian food, Greek and Thai dishes, and food from many other cuisines.

The patterns of relationships has also changed although perhaps not so consciously drawing on different cultures. For centuries, the patterns of marriage and the general expectations that the women would prepare food and look after the children and the home while the men would conduct the business and bring home the finance has been the dominant hope, if not always the reality. In poor families, women have long had to help make financial ends meet.

However, within the last 30 years, the patterns of relationship have been blown wide open. Marriage cannot be assumed at all. Relationships take a great variety of forms, some more and some less permanent. Some involve ceremonies of commitment, while others do not. Most still involve a couple, but not necessarily one male and one female. Some couples live in one house, while others chose to get together from time to time. I know of a married couple who decided to get married while living in different countries without any intention to live in the same country. Over several years they have maintained that arrangement, meeting only for holidays.

The roles within those relationships have also been blown wide open. There can be no assumptions about who will get the meal, or look after the children. Indeed, in many relationships, such arrangements change from day to day, and are constantly being re-negotiated.

In terms of eating habits, the patterns of relationships and the roles which people adopt in relation to each other, people are writing their own scripts, forming their own cultures. Traditional patterns provide little more than one of the options they may take into consideration. The individual, not the community, determines the patterns of life.

While religious practice has often been a matter of choice within the open weave of culture, religious identity has become part of life which the individual chooses from a great range of options. In many instances, no particular religious identity is chosen at all, any more than a person settles on the food of one particular nation to constitute the total diet. In post-traditional societies, people draw on the range of religious resources which they consider might be useful, just as they draw on the food of many cuisines.

Responses in Church Life

How then should the churches respond? Most of their patterns have been oriented to passing the faith on from one generation to the next. They have been aware that these have not been working well. Most children who go to Sunday School in contemporary Australia go with their parents, and thus experience reinforcement for their religious practice at home. Yet, the drop-out rate from Sunday School is just as high as it ever was. More than 50% of all who attend Sunday School in Australia fail to go on to adult attendance of church services.

The situation is little better in relation to schools. Of those who have been raised as Catholics and attended Catholic secondary schools, about half attend once a month or more often, according to data gathered in 1993 (National Social Science Survey, 1993).

Most patterns of church life assume that people begin by attending the community first. After that, they may begin drawing on the range of resources which the church offers. For example, churches advertise their Bible study groups primarily to people who attend the church. While they may welcome a few friends of members who join a craft group, the focus and the core of the group is often members who attend church services.

There are other activities run by the churches for people outside, but many of these are not well integrated with the life of the church. Thus, in many churches the sporting clubs have become increasingly independent from the church. Counselling services may offer counselling to people with no connections with the church, but neither do they necessarily draw people into the life of the church.

If churches are to respond to post-traditionalism, they must be willing to offer resources to people before requiring attendance. In particular, they must allow people to begin to explore faith without necessarily become a member of the community. The most prominent example of this has been the Alpha Groups. These have been deliberately established so that people can explore faith without making any prior commitments. Their success has been, in part, due to the fact that they have been marketed to people outside the churches and that they have not required any prior involvement or commitment.

There are many other resources which churches could offer. As the numbers exploring Eastern Meditation indicate, many are interested in meditation. Adult education classes in religion are often well attended. Other people are more oriented to action groups: to exploring the implications of faith through a social justice or an environmental group. The counselling environment is well suited to developing support groups, through which dimensions of faith may be explored.

Part of the underlying change for Australian churches is that most people do not have much to do with the localities within which they live. They neither work nor shop there. Their children may well not be educated there, and their sporting and leisure interests may be pursued in other places. Thus, for a church to depend on local networks make the task of serving a local area very difficult. It is unlikely that local communities will remain the major unit for building church in the future. There will be large and small regional churches, churches serving a great variety of networks, and churches serving highly specialised groups. There will be increasing numbers of little networks of people, often oriented around a particular task or interest.

The church does not have to exist at local community level. It may also exist in small and less permanent networks, such as a support network, or an adult education class. It may exist in a group of parents meeting in a home, or in a computer club which organises classes for people with few computer skills. It may exist in the large festival, the city-wide celebration, as well as groups or three or four meeting in a home.

The task for religious organisations is to begin to build the church in a variety of new ways: in festivals and networks, as well as local communities. Churches must find ways of advertising their resources and activities where local communities do not exist and people do not share stories with their neighbours over the back fence. They must find ways of drawing people together who do not know each other, through providing opportunities for sharing common interests and addressing common concerns. They must learn to create community, not only to serve it.

Such new forms of church life beg the question of what is the essence of the church. It is certainly not found in buildings, nor professional clergypersons. Rather, I would argue, on theological grounds, the essence of the church is found where people are: [1] honouring God; [2] learning together about how to live in the context of the traditions of faith; and [3] seeking to serve each other and others beyond the group. Where there is honour, learning and service in the context of God, there the church can be found.

In every new situation, the theological principles must be re-worked and re-expressed. So it is here, that the theology of the church must be re-worked. At the heart of this re-working will be the notion that the expressions of the church will always be on a journey. The pathway to faith cannot be measured by the extent to which the individual has identified with the community. The pathway is found in the journey of every network in its grappling with how it might honour God, learn and serve.

Conversion has become less evident in the post-traditional world. For people are constantly building and changing their alliances and allegiances. In relation to these journeys of faith, the critical concerns is the direction in which people are travelling. The church describes the end of the journey rather than the entry point. For commitment to the whole of faith and identification with the community of Gods people lie at the end of the road rather than being the entry point.

It will be hard to keep track of individuals in the post-traditional world. Membership and the transfer of membership will mean little. People will come and go. Flexible means of communication will be important. While the Internet is forming new types of communities, it is also providing new facilities for building community, global in nature, of which church organisations might make fuller use.

A major challenge for church organisations to recognise the existence of church life in the multitude of networks and groups to which people already belong. They may need to spend more time and effort keeping track of these networks, rather than keeping track of individuals. They need to put resources into building networks of networks, so that these networks themselves can draw on a range of resources and find stimulation in links and cooperative ventures with other networks.

Financially, there must be some major changes too. The current systems are creaking. The strains are increasing, and some denominational organisations are close to breaking point. They cannot keep up the maintenance of high cost systems which are no longer relevant to this mobile, fluid, post-traditional world. It will not be as easy to draw finances from these networks as it was from the stable, weekly congregations. Part of the solution is to move more into user-pays systems

whereby people pay for the use of resources. The churches failure to do that, for example in relation to weddings, often means that elderly church attenders subsidise the use of church resources by young people with lots of money, something that seems to me quite immoral.

Church organisations need to move more into the contract for service mode so that networks, large and small, may buy in the services that they need. At the same time, there may be a great variety of projects which churches undertake and to which they invite people to contribute. People will give to support particular projects, either long-term or short-term, rather than support organisational structures.

The changes required of the churches are substantial and require imagination, creativity and initiative. This may seem daunting. However, such changes can be made in the faith that God will not abandon the work of creation, redemption and sanctification which has been occurring over the millennia. God will continue changing people and bringing people into the community of Gods people. The communal and organisational forms through which we participate in this divine work is the challenge we face.

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Note: The 1997-8 Australian Community Survey, conducted by researchers from Edith Cowan University and NCLS Research, was made possible by a grant from the Australian Research Council, the support of ANGLICARE (NSW) and the Board of Mission of the Uniting Church (NSW). The research was jointly supervised by Alan Black and Peter Kaldor. The research team included John Bellamy, Keith Castle, and Philip Hughes

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Dodd's Narrative: The State of the Northern Thai Church in 1887

Herb Swanson

Introduction



The American Presbyterian "Laos Mission" established its first congregation in Siam's northern dependencies in 1868; three more congregations followed in 1880. Five years' later, in 1885, the mission felt that both it and the churches had grown sufficiently in membership and in numbers of missionary clergy that the time had come to establish the "Laos Presbytery." On Wednesday, 17 June 1885, four missionary clergymen and two northern Thai elders met at the home of the Rev. Jonathan Wilson in Chiang Mai "to organize themselves into a Presbytery to be known as the Presbytery of North Laos." The Rev. Daniel McGilvary preached the opening sermon, taking as his text Acts 2.33. The presbytery elected the Rev. S. C. Peoples as its first Moderator and the Rev. Chalmers Martin as its temporary Stated Clerk. By this act, the Laos Mission created the first formal regional church structure in northern Siam, what one might almost consider an embryonic northern Thai denomination; the Laos Presbytery, even so, was formally a part of the Synod of New York of the Presbyterian Church U. S. A. The Payap University Archives holds a microfilm copy of the "Records of the Laos Presbytery, 1885-1920," which microfilm represents an invaluable addition to the records of the northern Thai church.

In February 1887, just two months shy of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Laos Mission and less than two years after the founding of the presbytery, the Rev. William Clifton Dodd, a recently appointed missionary to the Laos Mission took pen in hand to write the Laos Presbytery's "Narrative for the Year ending Oct 1886." Such narratives, frequently entitled, "Narrative on the State of Religion in the Presbytery," were considered by many presbyteries in the United States to be annual reports of the condition of their churches. This particular narrative provides us with a unique look at the state of the northern Thai church after twenty years of missionary evangelism and church work. What follows in this essay is an informal commentary on the narrative, using it as a starting point for reflecting on the early history of the northern Thai church.

According to the statistics that accompanied the minutes of the presbytery for 1886, the Laos Presbytery still had only the original four churches with which it began in 1885. Chiang Mai First Church, the oldest and largest of the four, had 325 communicant members, followed by the Mae Dok Daeng Church with 78, Bethlehem Church with 20, and the Lampang Church with 10 members. In the course of the year from October 1885 to October 1886, the presbytery had added 109 communicant members while recording a loss of 17 (4 members died, 10 were suspended, and 3 were excommunicated). The churches had a total of 12 northern Thai elders, 4 deacons, and 450 "scholars" attending its Sunday schools.

The Narrative

Dodd began his narrative by observing that the work of the Chiang Mai Church had been "enlarged" over the course of the year beginning in October 1885; it now had separate prayer meetings for both men and women on Sunday afternoons and a joint meeting on Friday afternoons. The church's worship services were better attended than ever before, and the congregation's chapel was becoming too small for the congregation. Dodd noted that roughly 400 people attended the communion service that was held during the presbytery meeting in October, most of them being Christians. Although he does not state as much, this was surely the largest gathering of northern Thai Christians to date.

His narrative then lingers over the fact the church added 72 new communicant members during the year. Dodd writes of these new members,

The character of the applicants is cause for gratitude because of the prestige it gives our work among the people. During the year there have been four Government officers received and a large number of men of good families and in good circumstances-men who are not presumably prompted by such low motives as hope of pecuniary help from the missionaries or of social advancement. The character of the converts has been such that a Government official was heard to say that the missionaries, being shrewd men, picked the best material out of which to make Christians.

This statement belies the impression contained in some other missionary records and in some of the more recent scholarship on northern Thai church history (including my own work), which argues that the early northern Thai church was composed largely of social marginals. If Dodd is right, quite the opposite was the case, at least in 1885-1886. The comment made by the unnamed government official, if reported correctly, suggests that the mission had been gaining converts of good character and social standing for some time.

Assuming Dodd's perception of the social standing of many of the converts was accurate, that perception raises a number of important questions. We know that converting to Christianity in the mid-1880s was not a particularly popular act. The Chiang Mai government was still actively persecuting converts as late as the previous decade, and that persecution had not come to an end even after the proclamation of the so-called "Edict of Toleration" by the Bangkok government's viceroy in Chiang Mai in 1878. As Dodd notes, better educated, reasonably well-off converts could not be accused of converting as a matter of financial or social self-interest. So, why did they convert? Dodd does not explain, and there is little indication from the larger missionary record that does, although a careful examination of those records with this question in mind may turn up evidence that has not been noticed to date. We may surmise, at the least, that the missionaries' religious message was in and of itself important. Something in that message caused a not inconsequential number of northern Thais to take the bold, unusual step of changing their religion-this in spite of the fact that the missionaries also demanded that they make a clean break with Buddhism, animism, and much of their former lives in northern Thai society.

Dodd next reports that between October 1885 and October 1886 the presbytery handled eight disciplinary cases that ended with the presbytery exercising "severe" discipline. He reported that four of the eight cases successfully accomplished "the reformation and restoration of the offenders." By "severe" discipline, Dodd evidently means that these eight were suspended from communion or, possibly, excommunicated, with the result that four of the eight repented of whatever wrong they had committed and were reinstated into the church. The most frequent causes for such discipline included taking part in Buddhist rituals or in spirit propitiation rites, often having to do with traditional medical care. They also included sexual improprieties and other moral infractions.

Although Dodd provides no details, the Presbyterian missionaries normally insisted on this type of discipline in order to protect the "purity" of the church as well as to serve as warnings to other members. Again, these acts of discipline were in keeping with a similar pattern in the United States. What is interesting in this case is that half of those who suffered the loss of face of having been suspended or excommunicated were willing publicly (as was usually the case) to confess their faults and humbly ask for readmittance into the church. While the numbers involved are not large, that willingness reinforces the sense that there was something significant in the Christian message and in belonging to the church. For some, at least, even public shame could not defeat their resolve to be Christians.

Dodd moves on to discuss the state of Chiang Mai Church's Sunday school. He admits that a lack of missionary personnel to oversee and staff the Sunday school had resulted in its classes meeting somewhat irregularly. He highlighted, in any event, one important feature of the Sunday school, namely the large women's class of 50 or 60 women taught by Sophia McGilvary with the assistance of Isabella Griffin and Elizabeth ("Lizzie") Westervelt. Dodd's narrative reflects thus the importance of the Laos Mission as an agent for social change in northern Siam, most particularly regarding the status of women. The mission pioneered women's education and provided northern Siam's first salaried positions for women, hiring them as servants, teachers, and Bible women. The narrative also underscores the important role of Sophia McGilvary in women's education. She held literacy classes for young girls in the mid-1870s, which classes eventually led to the founding of the Chiang Mai Girls' School (Dara Academy, today) in 1879, and she started the first women's literacy class soon after the Laos Mission was founded in 1867. Sophia, unfortunately, left the chore of communicating with the Board of Foreign Missions to her husband and otherwise seems to have done as little as possible to call attention to herself. The consequence is a decided lack of historical information about her work, her person, and the earliest movements towards the missionary education of women.

Dodd's narrative reflects the fact that First Church's Sunday school was an important agent for social change during the first decades of the Laos Mission's history. The mission founded this Sunday school, the first in northern Siam, well before it started its first schools, and it became an important agency for providing adult literacy education as well as biblical knowledge and religious training. By the time of this narrative, dozens of northern Thai Christian women had learned to read in Sunday school, and they comprised the first body of literate women in, at least, recent northern Thai history. In this less formal educational context, the Laos Mission took an important step towards changing the status and role of women in northern Thai society.

Important as the Sunday school was, however, Dodd's primary educational concern had to do with theological education. He writes,

There is only one candidate for the Ministry under instruction nor is there any provision for such instruction or any looking in that direction. It is the great need of the Presbytery, and one which only the smallness of the mission force has prevented them from meeting. For many reasons a boy's school which shall provide theological instruction, as it seems warranted and demanded, is imperatively needed and it is hoped will soon be provided.

At this relatively early stage, the Laos Mission still intended to develop theologically trained leadership for its local churches. What is of particular interest here is that Dodd thought that the best way to establish theological education would be to start a boy's school. It is not clear exactly what he had in mind, but it does seem a curious way to proceed, as it would take some years for boy's school students to work their way up to theological studies. There was no guarantee that they would be interested in such studies or that they would want to become pastors. In any event, the mission did start a boys' school the following year, 1888, followed in 1889 by a training school for evangelists.

Dodd felt that there was a pressing need for theological training because of the growing success of the mission's evangelistic work, especially in what is now Chiang Rai Province, north of Chiang Mai. Nan Ta, the northern Thai church's leading elder and the person under theological instruction, had recently made a tour to that area and returned with an enthusiastic report. He was especially impressed by the fact that so many conversions had taken place in one village that the local temple had fallen into disuse. There had been at least two missionary trips to the north during 1886, and a delegation of Chiang Rai converts had also come down to Chiang Mai asking for missionary assistance. Dodd noted that, "As a result of these visits, there are now six or eight villages between Cheung Mai and Cheung San which include from one to a dozen or more members each."

The mission's evangelistic success, however, was clearly straining its ability to minister to and train the growing number of converts, which meant that the local converts had to take increased responsibility for themselves. On the one hand, as we have seen, the mission felt the need for a program of theological training that would provide leaders for the northern Thai churches. On the other hand, Dodd also explained that in a number of the mission's "outstations" the converts were holding something of a cross between a prayer meeting and a Sunday school class. They studied the northern Thai catechism (based on the Westminster Shorter Catechism), the central Thai language Bible, and sang hymns and prayed together. The narrative takes an optimistic view of these developments, and of these groups, it adds, "In some cases there has been a daily prayer meeting. This fact and the love everywhere manifested toward the Shorter Catechism give hopeful evidence of piety among these scattered disciples." The only immediate cloud on the horizon was the scarcity of hymnbooks.

The enthusiasm for their faith that many recent converts were still showing in the 1880s is particularly notable. In latter days, we have seen this same kind of initial enthusiasm generated

by the first generation of converts gained by the various evangelical missions in Thailand. There has been a strong tendency by those missions, in former years, to castigate the churches of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) for its failure to inspire such holy enthusiasm. To a degree, the criticism is well taken, but it should also be remembered that the old Laos Mission went through its own "golden age" when the faith was new and the converts felt a zeal that over the years dwindled to a more modest, less intense level. Mission records indicate that even in the mid-1890s new churches, such as the one in Nan, experienced that initial fire. When considered from the vantage point of well over one hundred years later, it is clear that "good news" sooner or later became "old news" among the Laos Mission's churches. By the 1920s and 1930s, the issues of church renewal and how to pass the faith on from generation to generation became burning questions and continue to be so down to the present. In February 1887, however, such questions remained hidden on the horizons of the future; optimism was the tone of the day.

When Dodd turned his attention to the state of the three other churches besides Chiang Mai Church, however, it appears that perhaps the future stood somewhat closer to his present than he and the Laos Mission realized. He was plainly concerned about the situation of the Bethlehem Church, located near Sarapee. Although the congregation had a Sunday school and enjoyed the capable leadership of a "faithful elder," the church had dwindled in numbers from 27 in 1880, when it was founded, to just 17 members by 1886. Dodd comments that, "Experience here has led to a policy of conservatism in organizing small independent churches." The contrast with the Mae Dok Daeng Church, situated some 20 kilometers east of Chiang Mai, may have reinforced the mission's reluctance to form small, one-village churches. The Mae Dok Daeng congregation extended across several villages and continued to be the "gem" of the Laos churches, as Daniel McGilvary had called it in 1884 (McGilvary to Irving, 19 January 1884, Records of the Board of Foreign Missions). Dodd states of Mae Dok Daeng, "Although the church has to depend almost wholly on its own members for leadership it has made steady growth."

Although Dodd did not draw the contrast between the Bethlehem Church and the Mae Dok Daeng Church, it seems likely that the Laos Mission learned from experience that larger congregations extending over several villages worked better than small churches limited to one community. Dodd's comment about the Bethlehem Church all but says as much. In any event, the gradual shift to establishing only "regional" churches that covered extensive swatches of territory has had a pronounced influence on the development of the northern Thai church. On the one hand, it drew the focus of congregational worship and life away from local communities and reoriented that focus to a central worship site, thus reinforcing the mission's centralization of authority and ministry in a hierarchy based on its own urban stations. "Church" was frequently located several hours walk away from home, and it involved considerable effort to attend worship regularly, especially in the rainy season. It is possible that this way of structuring local churches left the members in the "outer" villages with the impression that they were less responsible for congregational life and that the church had more to do with a formal structure and organization than it did with being a community of faith. On the other hand, the regional church configuration cemented relationships between local groups of Christians that have persisted down to the present. It is also possible that worshipping in larger congregations mitigated to one degree or another the feeling of being a tiny religious minority lost in a vast Buddhist sea. In later years,

many of the new churches founded by the mission and the northern church comprised village groups that had originally belonged to another church.

Having dealt with the three churches in Chiang Mai State, Dodd turned to the sole congregation located beyond Chiang Mai, the Lampang Church. This church had been founded in 1880 (as had Mae Dok Daeng and Bethlehem) and subsequently suffered through a period of repression during which its chief elder had been imprisoned. The result was a feeble church, but Dodd saw hope for the congregation in the fact that Dr. S. C. and Mrs. Sarah Peoples had recently moved to Lampang. The Peoples were holding worship in their own home and that of an elder, and Sarah Peoples had started a Bible training class that met Sunday mornings. Dodd writes, "The character of the work has been largely preparatory. The people were at first distrustful of the motives of the Missionaries and their confidence had first to be won. This has been done so far as possible in the time." The primary way the Peoples had gone about gaining the trust of the people was through Dr. Peoples' medical work, which Dodd claims had been very successful.

The success of the medical side of the Peoples' efforts in Lampang highlights one of the most important themes in the history of the northern Thai church, the role of medicine as a tool for evangelism. The pioneer in the use of Western medicine for gaining the good will of the northern people as well as converts was Daniel McGilvary. As a lay physician, McGilvary showed considerable skill at doctoring. He particularly used quinine to good effect, and the cures resulting from even a quarter of a tablet seemed miraculous to the general populace. In 1869, he wrote a series of articles for the North Carolina Presbyterian promoting the general use of missionary medicine. In those articles, he drew parallels with Jesus' use of healing and also urged that successful medical helped to "tear down" the great edifice of northern Thai religious "superstition" by showing the people that disease was caused by natural forces rather than the spirits. While it is not clear that the northern Thai interpreted the healing given them by missionary medicine in quite this way, there is no question that medical care played a key role in missionary evangelism.

Comments & Conclusion

Dodd summed up his narrative description of the state of the northern Thai churches by observing that there had been "advance all along the line." He drove that conclusion home by pointing out that during the last year the Laos Presbytery's four congregations had shown a 38% increase in membership, compared with a mere 2.75% rate of growth for the Presbyterian Church USA as a whole. The year, he also noted, had seen missionary work extended into several new villages and more were "urgently waiting" for missionary visits. In light of this growth and these opportunities, he again stated that, "A native ministry is emphatically demanded and steps must be taken as soon as possible for their education and training." He concluded his narrative with the statement that, "Meanwhile we can not neglect the appeals of the starving multitude. God's blessing has given success in answer to prayer and to consecrated service; but that success means expanding fields and growing needs."

These closing words indicate that Dodd saw in the statistical growth of the Laos Presbytery's churches something of the true measure of their success during the year as well as a clear indication of the pressing needs created by that growth. From what we have already seen,

however, it is also clear that he did not see statistical growth as the only source of optimism regarding the present state of the churches. He also put great store in the quality of many of the converts and their commitment to their new faith. Still, the fact that he closed with statistics indicates something of the importance he gave to numerical growth. His closing comment also shows his personal commitment (and that of the whole Laos Mission) to geographical expansion as another important measure of success. This enthusiasm for growth and expansion is hardly surprising, of course; indeed, that enthusiasm lay at the very heart of the reason for the Laos Mission in the first place. The McGilvarys, Wilsons, and their colleagues came to northern Siam because they firmly believed that the eternal fate and temporal happiness of the northern Thai people lay in their conversion to Christianity. They were committed to the salvation of the people as a nation, not just to individual northern Thais. They could, thus, not help but feel enthusiastic about the growth in the membership of their churches by nearly one-third in one year.

From our vantage point in 2002, it is also clear that numerical growth and geographical expansion posed a serious challenge to the Laos Mission. Dodd's concluding sentence, as well as his concern for developing a program of theological training, suggests that the missionaries were well aware of that challenge. Being aware of the challenge and meeting it, however, were two quite different things, and it can be argued that the mission did not respond as well as it might have to the challenges posed by its evangelistic successes in the 1880s. It made three extremely important decisions in the 1890s, in particular, that contributed to a slowdown in growth and a failure to nurture the Christian communities under its care. First, it made a hasty, poorly conceived attempt to develop a pastoral care system, which it then quickly abandoned as a failure when the inevitable problems arose because of its own poor planning. Second, it decided on ideological grounds that its churches had to be self-supporting without considering the impact of that decision on church life, which was that the rural churches could not afford pastoral leadership at that early stage of their lives without financial assistance from the mission. Third, and without any conscious decision or formal resolution being made, the mission increasingly invested its personnel and financial resources in urban schools and hospitals. The Laos Mission apparently felt that in order to support local church life in the hinterlands it had to develop a strong institutional base in each of its urban stations. The consequences of these decisions were that the Laos Mission eschewed the development of pastoral leadership, conducted its leadership development in an institutional setting, and generally arranged matters so that those institutions retained many of the leaders they trained rather than returning them to the local churches. This strategy, in sum, pulled the mission's attention and resources away from its churches and served to weaken them rather than build them up. The churches of northern Thailand did not begin to recover from the mission's decision to suspend the development of pastoral leadership until the 1980s, and twenty years later they are still struggling to put in place a church-wide system of pastoral care.

When Dodd wrote his narrative in February 1887, the Laos Mission's failure to address the question of pastoral care still lay in the future. His narrative helps us to look across the problems and issues that developed after 1890 to see that in the 1880s the Laos Mission had actually begun to build a strong base for potential growth and strong church life beyond that decade. In Chiang Mai First Church, it had a strong urban congregation, and in the Mae Dok Daeng Church, it had a

model for strong rural congregations. His narrative also serves to remind us of another fundamentally important fact, one that requires more investigation and reflection. Something in the Christian message itself (beyond any thought of personal social or financial gain) as presented by the Laos Mission attracted the attention of an important, if still small number of northern Thais. Hundreds of northern Thais felt compelled to change their religion, and the small worshipping communities they established displayed enthusiasm for and commitment to their new faith.

Short Items

A Non-factual Definition of "Fact"

My wife, Warunee, recently shared with me a writers' manual for children entitled *Write on Track*. In leafing through the book, I was particularly struck by the comments on how to use "facts" contained in a section entitled, "Thinking Clearly" (pp. 268ff). In that section, the authors tell a little story that explains the difference between "facts" and "opinions". A friend, so the story goes, calls the reader and says, "It snowed last night. We shouldn't have to go to school today." The first statement-that it snowed-is factual; the second concerning going to school is an opinion (page 271). The book then states that it is important to "stick to the facts" and "listen for facts" when trying to convince other people about something. It teaches children, "Here are four points to remember about stating facts: A Statement is not a fact just because most people agree with it. A Statement is not a fact if it is based only on feelings. A Statement is not a fact if it is a half-truth. A Statement is not a fact if it makes things seem worse (or better) than they really are." (pages 272-273) In conclusion, "It can be hard to stick to the facts when you really want someone to agree with you. But don't get your feelings mixed up with the facts." (pages 273).

It is interesting that the authors never offer a positive definition of "fact." They describe only what a fact is not. It is also interesting that they define feelings as being at least somewhat antithetical to facts. Opinions, furthermore, are taken as not being factual. The authors imply that there is a clear line between facts and opinions.

Compare the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of "fact". A fact is, "4. Something that has really occurred or is actually the case; something certainly to be known of this character; hence a particular truth known by actual observation or authentic testimony, as opposed to what is merely inferred, or to a conjecture or fiction; a datum of experience, as distinguished from the conclusions that may be based upon it." According to the OED, the word "fact" only appeared in the English language in the 16th century, and the earliest usage it gives for the above meaning is from the 17th century. The concept of fact, apparently, is part of our Enlightenment heritage, that heritage which assures us that humans have the power to know things as they really are.

The more one pushes and prods both the children's' manual and the OED conceptions of "fact," the more difficult to grab hold of they become. The OED definition suggests that facts are things that we know are certainly true, based on reliable evidence. So, the measure of a fact is the

certainty with which we hold it and the amount of trust we place in the evidence for it. Judging whether something is factual or not, then, depends on faith and trust, which puts the whole matter of "factuality" into an almost religious realm. The concept of "fact" is not nearly as objective and neutral as the above definitions imply. There is, for example, an impressively large Western Christian literature based on the "fact" that Siam is a heathen nation. The producers of that literature state this fact with absolute certainty. They point to a massive amount of supposedly reliable "data" to prove their point. Those of us who do not agree with (believe in) the statement consider it "merely" an opinion based on unreliable data.

Any historian worth her salt will tell you that discerning what is and is not factual is seldom as easy as these two sources make it out to be. And it is the historian in me that wants to say, "Gather round, kiddies, while your 'ole Uncle Herb tells you why it isn't that simple. I've lived in Minnesota, seen snow, and in your uncle's opinion the opinion that children should not have to go to school after it snows isn't an opinion at all, it's a fact. These folks who claim it's an opinion are obviously from California or Florida or someplace where it doesn't snow. So, trust me, kids. My opinions are factual."

Citation: Dave Kemper, Ruth Nathan, and Patrick Sebrank, *Write on Track: A Handbook for Young Writers, Thinkers, and Learners* (Wilmington, Massachusetts: Great Source Education Group, 1996).

Bacterial Humanity

"The pattern of human population growth in the 20th century was more bacterial than primate. When *Homo sapiens* passed the six-billion mark [in October 1999] we had already exceeded by perhaps as much as 100 times the biomass of any large animal species that ever existed on the land. We and the rest of life cannot afford another 100 years like that."

From *The Future of Life*, by Edward O. Wilson, excerpted on the Scientific American website, February 2002.

The Secret of (Lahu) Church Growth

Last March, I had the opportunity to join in interviewing a young Lahu pastor, a woman in her mid-30s. She told me that she was born into a non-Christian family then engaged in swiddening (slash & burn agriculture) in Mae Hong Son Province. When she was six or seven years' old, her family moved into an entirely Christian Lahu community in Chiang Mai Province, and her family soon began to attend the local church. Within about three years the whole family converted. When asked why, she explained that her family found life in a Christian community to be very different from what it had previously known. The Christians took care of each other, and there were no drugs or drunkenness in the village. Christian behavior was of a much higher standard than what they had known in Mae Hong Son. These observations led them to convert.

Two of the most important factors in early church growth were the person of Jesus and the quality of life of the Christian community. Paul's international missionary organization and strategy was atypical and does not account for the rapid, sustained growth of the church in large parts of the Roman Empire over many decades. It would seem that the quality of church life can still be a factor in attracting new members today as well. If this pastor's story is at all indicative, perhaps a (the?) key to sustaining church growth is not mega-revivalism and big bucks evangelism but working to maintain and improve the quality of Christian community.

Truly Christian, Truly Thai

From time to time, I have asked seminary students in classrooms or participants in church seminars to describe a church that is both "truly Christian and truly Thai." So far, there has been no one with a clear answer. This past March, however, the members of the Suwandangrit Church, Ban Dok Daeng, participated in a Christian "bone gathering ceremony" that embodied in ritual & worship an image of the church that is truly (northern) Thai and truly Christian.

The little cemetery where we bury our dead at Ban Dok Daeng has recently run out of room for more burials, and the church has been forced to begin to cremate its deceased members. The church leadership has had to work out thus a Christian approach to cremation, and the results so far have not been particularly satisfying. It is somehow awkward to have to stand away from the casket & not have a hole to stand around. Unlooked for, however, is the importance of the final "act" of a northern Thai cremation, the bone gathering (or collecting) ceremony that usually takes place two days after the cremation. At that time, relatives and friends return to the cemetery to reclaim the charred remnants of bones. I have not participated in such a ceremony for a Buddhist cremation and am not sure of all that goes on, but the ritual one of our elders at Ban Dok Daeng has devised is partly based on how our neighbors go about the process.

Briefly, our Christian bone gathering ceremony is divided into three parts. First, the relatives and friends use large bamboo "tweezers" to comb the ashes for bones, which are placed on a tray. Once the bones are collected, they are washed. Second, all participants in turn, beginning with the clergyman, place the bones one piece at a time in an earthen pot. Each person raises their hands in an attitude of respect (wai) both before and after they have put bones in the pot and then sprinkles scented water (nam som broi) on the bones. During this part of the ceremony, there is small talk and even joking going on in the background; this is not a distraction nor does it detract from the proceedings but seems almost to symbolize a sense of acceptance of the death of the person and integrating that acceptance into daily life. When everyone has put bones into the pot, the mouth of the pot is then covered with a white cloth and tied shut with thick white twine. Third, the participants then carry the pot to a freshly prepared grave, which has a cement cross above it that is the same size as all the other crosses in the cemetery. The hole, obviously, is very small. There, we engage in a Christian committal service. The pot is respectfully placed in the grave, the clergyman reads Scripture and prays, and then each participant in turn takes a small bag of dirt wrapped in mulberry paper, bends down, raises her or his hands in respect, drops the bag in the hole, and sprinkles more scented water on the mouth of the pot. A benediction is given and the process is complete. The whole ritual, from beginning to end, has a

definite air of informality about it. It is done in the late afternoon so that people who work in the city can get back to take part. Some people wear black, others do not. The event also has a feeling of intimacy about it, involving just family and neighbors-roughly 30 some people both times we have done it at Ban Dok Daeng.

The first and second elements of this ceremony are unlike anything one normally encounters in northern Thai Christian funeral practices and, evidently, are very similar to the process used by our Buddhist neighbors. The third "movement" in the ceremony is distinctively Christian and recalls the way we bury caskets, but with important differences. Where caskets suspended above graves are difficult to approach in an attitude of personal respect, the tiny grave for the pot and the smaller number of people involved allows each person an opportunity to approach the remains of the deceased in an intimate attitude of respect. The whole committal ritual, that is, is clearly northern Thai in some of its elements and entirely northern Thai in the manner in which the remains are given the deference the living person once received. The lack of formality is in keeping with a northern Thai approach to such ritual. Yet, it recalls Christian images (dust to dust, ashes to ashes) and practices the northern Thai church inherited from the West so that the total ceremony is different from that of other northern Thais. The ceremony, that is, retains a Christian focus while reclaiming for the church a northern Thai sense of ritual and ceremony.

This form of committal service is more humane and pastoral than the somewhat cold, formal, and distant manner in which we usually lower caskets into holes. There is no trooping and tromping of the masses. The ceremony involves just those who were closest to the deceased. It is deeply respectful yet informal, a combination that allows those involved to take final leave while further integrating the fact of death into the reality of ongoing life. I must confess that I first greeted the prospect of combing through ashes for bones as being somewhat grizzly, but in actual practice, it is not at all. It is, perhaps, the most important part of the whole process. In a typical Western burial scenario, we last see the deceased as a body not unlike the body of the living person. The fact of death is further glossed over by the rich trappings of funeral home, lavish coffin, and the fine dress of the deceased. When you stoop over a large pile of ashes and search the pile for bones ("there's a piece there." "no, no, that's just ash." "see, here's a piece of her jaw.") the fact of death is real. A final leave-taking has to be made.

Over the last five years, the Suwanduangrit Church has been making a conscious effort to repair its relations with its neighbors, to live with them peacefully, lovingly, and without animosity or judgment. We have been criticized by some other Christians for "being soft on Buddhism" and warned by a few that we are in peril of losing our faith. In fact, our little church has reaped unlooked for blessings instead of danger. The elder who devised our Christian committal ceremony repeatedly consulted our Buddhist neighbors (in itself an exercise in peace-making), who also sat with us during the actual ceremony and at various points told us how they do things. Yet, what he finally came up with is by no stretch of the imagination Buddhist, whatever the similarity in form at some points. No chanting. No monks. The bone gathering ceremony as practiced by the Suwanduangrit Church, rather, blends certain Buddhist forms, northern Thai attitudes, and a Western Christian heritage into something that approaches being truly Christian and truly Thai.

Elephants, Magic, & Karen Theology

This past April, the Office of History sponsored a one-day seminar on church and culture as part of its hot season student-training project with the Zion Association of the Karen Baptist Convention (or, if you like, the Zion Larger Parish of the Nineteenth District, CCT). Lunchtime provided me with a fascinating opportunity to struggle with the challenges inherent in reflecting on Karen theology in Karen contexts. An elder shared a theological concern that he has concerning his work of raising and training elephants. An important part of the process is weaning young elephants from their mothers. If it is not done properly, a mother elephant may either kill herself or turn rogue while the young elephant may become impossible to train for work. As the elder explained it, the "proper" process is to give the mother and young elephant over to a Karen practitioner of northern Thai magical rites for a month. This "magician" (for want of a better term) uses rites and formulas repeatedly as he slowly weans the young elephant from his mother. The elder said that this process works every time. He also said that he has a Christian friend who tried to replace the magical rites and formulas with Christian prayer and only managed to ruin a perfectly good young elephant. He himself is not willing to take a similar risk and so has to tolerate the non-Christian rites in order to protect his investment in his elephants. It turns out that the "magician" is also an active Karen Christian.

A Karen pastor, trained in a conservative, evangelical Thai-language seminary, sat in on the discussion and helped me with translation. His own view was that the elder was in the wrong and should not allow himself to be party to the use of magic. The pastor insisted that the whole practice was satanic. Another pastor, self-trained and a convert to Christianity as an adult, insisted with equal intensity that the rites were not satanic and not even magical. They were simply Pali-language formulas and were relatively harmless. He tried to drive his argument home by telling how he performed an almost miraculous healing using traditional Karen medicines and rites before his conversion and, after conversion, used Christian prayer to effect another nearly miraculous healing. He avowed that the only difference was the greater power of God. The theologically trained pastor simply shook his head and repeated his rejection of all of this as being of the Devil.

I raised the question of whether or not the elder could use the "magical" forms but fill them with a Christian content. He said he would think about it but was clearly hesitant to try. The theologically trained pastor said that doing something like that was wrong and bound to fail. The converted pastor also did not think much of the idea, evidently for the more practical reason that it probably would not work.

The whole exchange lasted for nearly an hour. Voices were never raised. Confrontation was avoided. But, these three Karen Christians managed to represent three distinct theological positions concerning the church's relationship to non-Christian religious practices. The elder took a "practical" approach that accepted the necessity of using such practices because they worked. The self-trained pastor accepted the elder's willingness to use "magic" in raising his

elephants and had no trouble accepting the fact that magical rites and formulas do work. His focus was on the greater power of God. The second pastor rigidly and repeatedly rejected any utilization of religious rites that are not identifiably Christian. He never dealt with the "fact" that the rites work and only repeatedly called on the elder to cease and desist. The self-trained pastor, interestingly enough, did not give the elder any advice as to whether or not he should use a "magician" to wean a young elephant from its mother. He did not seem scandalized by the prospect, however.

Human Origins

There is a theory regarding the origins of the human species that claims that primates were not able to appear until after the disappearance of the dinosaurs because they could not compete with the many species of dinosaurs. That would mean that primates did not show up on the face of the Earth until sometime after 65 million years ago, when the dinosaurs are supposed to have died off. Now, scientists in Britain and the USA have conducted a computerized statistical analysis of all of the known primate species (235 living and 396 fossil species) and decided that primates probably appeared around 85 million years ago while the dinosaurs were still dominant. That analysis indicates that scientists have uncovered only about 7% of all the primate species that have existed, and when the computer seeks to fill in some of the gaps, the date for our origins is pushed back by an extra 20 million years. These findings support molecular biologists' arguments that primates go back roughly 90 million years, and if correct means that the human race evolved under very different conditions than previously thought. According to this still controversial theory, we started out as a small, nocturnal primate living in the treetops, eating fruit, and patiently waiting for all those humungous, bug-eyed reptile thingies to die off so we could take over.

(from Guy Gugliotta, "Suddenly, Humans Age 3 Million Years," Washington Post Website, 18 April 2002; and, "Primate ancestor lived with dinos," BBC website, 17 April 2002)

Origins of the Word Heathen

The word "heathen" was a key concept in 19th century thinking among English-speaking missionaries. If the Presbyterian missionary records for Thailand are any measure, missionaries applied the term frequently to people of other faiths, often in tandem with other terms such as "idolatrous," "benighted," and "superstitious." Where did we come up with such an apparently useful term?

The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary describes the lineage of "heathen" as coming down to us from Old Norse by way of, first, Old High German, then Old Saxon, Old Frisian, and, last of all, Old English. The earliest example of its usage in the OED is dated 826, when the word meant anything pertaining to those persons or races that are neither Christian nor Jewish. The OED provides a fascinating brief description of the origins of the word, which states in part,

"As this word is used in all Germanic lang. in the sense 'non-Christian, pagan', which could only have arisen after the introduction of Christianity, it is thought probable that, like some other terms of Christian origin (e.g. church), it was first used in Gothic and thence passed to the other tribes..The word has generally been assumed to be a direct derivative of Gothic *hipi*, HEATH, as if 'dweller on the heath', taken as a kind of loose rendering of L. *paganus* (orig. 'villager, rustic', later, after Christianity became the religion of the towns, while the ancient deities were still retained in rural districts, 'pagan, heathen')."

By roughly the year 1000, "heathen" referred to any person or race that is not Christian, Jewish, or a Muslim.

The OED lists 15 related words besides heathen. They are: heathendom, heatheness; heathenesse; heathenhede (meaning heathendom); heathenhood, -hode; heathenish; heathenishly; heathenishness; heathenism; heathenist; heathenize; heathenly; heathenry; heathenship; and, heatheny.

An important hint at the development in the concept of "heathen" is found under "heathendom," where the OED notes that heathendom originally referred to the beliefs and practices of the heathen and takes its earliest example of this usage from ca. 1000. The term fell out of use sometime before 1400 and did not re-appear again until the 19th century, when it was used as the antithesis of Christendom. In the 19th century, it also came to mean the "domain or realm of the heathen."

The reappearance of "heathendom" in the 19th century after an absence of more than 400 years raises a fascinating question. What did native-language speakers of English of those two eras have in common that both needed the word? Why did a word that was in vogue in the 9th century prove to be popular in the 19th century?

The answer to these questions seems to be that in both periods native-language speakers of English were heavily involved in major overseas missionary movements. International missions was an influential part of life in England twelve hundred years ago, and the word "heathen," with all of its many brother and sister terms, provided an important word for speaking about missions. Cantor explains that in the last decades of the 7th century and the whole of the 8th century, the English church conducted an active missionary movement on the Continent, esp. among the Frisians of the Low Countries. The greatest missionary of the age was an Englishman, St. Boniface. (p. 186). Mayr-Harting claims that English Christianity was "from the start strongly missionary in character." (p. 103)

Cantor quotes a letter sent by Boniface to the English church asking it to send assistants for his missionary work and also asking for their prayers so that God "may turn the hearts of the *heathen* Saxons to the Catholic Faith." (p. 187, emphasis added). This pushes the word back to the beginning of the 8th century and the time of the Venerable Bede, who finished his classic *Ecclesiastical History of the English Peoples* in 731. According to Dohan, English was just emerging as a separate language in that period. (p. 35ff) The word "heathen," that is, has been with us for virtually the whole history of the English language.

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News & Notes

JTCA

Just a few weeks ago, the first issue of a new journal, The Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia landed on the desk. This new journal is published by the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia and succeeds the PTCA Bulletin. It is handsomely printed and professionally presented, and it represents an important addition to Asian theological resources. This first issue is made up entirely of papers presented at the PTCA-sponsored seminar entitled Retrospect and Prospect of Doing Theology in Asia, held in Bangkok in July 2001.

Citation for the first issue: *Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia* 1 (February 2002).

Hot Season Student Research Projects

Over the last four years, the Office of History has run a series of hot season research projects involving seminarians from several of Thailand's seminaries. The first two projects, in 1998 and 1999, took place in the churches of the Musikee Association of the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC, comprising Districts 10 & 19 of the CCT). The 2000 project was done with (or, to) churches of District 4 (Phrae-Uttaradit) located in Uttaradit Province. Last year, 2001, we worked with the Pai Association churches of the KBC. The purpose of each project was to train students in basic historical research methods, especially oral history interviewing techniques, and then to turn them loose to discover the history of selected local churches for themselves. A total of 24 students participated in these projects.

This year, the Office ran three concurrent projects. The first began in mid-February and involved six Karen students from the Center for the Uplift of the Hill tribes (CUHT) studying the histories of churches in the Zion Association, KBC. The second project started in mid-March, involving eleven Lahu students from the Lahu Bible Institute (LBI) studying five selected churches of District 18 (a.k.a. the Lahu Baptist Convention). The third project began a week later with six

students from the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, Payap University, doing a preliminary church life survey of District 4 churches in Phrae Province.

The Karen Project (Feb-Apr), conducted by Thra'mu (Teacher) Esther Danpongpee, relied on what has become our standard model for these hot season student research projects. She trained the students in oral history techniques and then sent them to ten churches. What was experimental this time was that in the past we have always done these projects with bachelors' level students and never with Bible school students. The six CUHT students, however, did a fine job, all but comparable to seminary students, and they came away with the same sense of appreciation for the importance of historical research for understanding local church life. The project ended with a one-day seminar attended by representatives of 16 of the 17 churches in the Zion Association, just over 40 participants in all. The highlight of that event (for me, at least) was the opportunity to listen in (through translation) as church leaders discussed the historical and current relationship of Karen culture to the Karen church.

The Lahu Project (Mar-Apr), conducted by me, ran into some administrative difficulties and, unfortunately, had to be terminated early. This project also experimented with using Bible school students, but with two important differences from the Karen project. First, it involved all 11 second year students (where the Karen project took only selected students), and, second, I had taught the students a class in history research methods during the semester before hot season. Of the 11 students, six or seven did just as well as the Karen students. The others did not do very well, a lack of motivation being the basic problem. The students studied six churches scattered across the 18th District, their purpose being to collect data for a planned text on Lahu church history in northern Thailand. This project also experimented with trying to use an educational institution as its base, rather than a group of churches as we have always done in the past. It was at this point that the project ran into difficulties; it developed that LBI does not have the close relationship to the churches necessary to facilitate communication with them. We also failed to prepare sufficient churches for study, which is why the project had to end early. The lesson we learned was that our basic model-involving a smaller number of selected students studying a cluster of churches under the direct field supervision of our own staff-is the best. Trying to do scattered churches also proved to be very expensive in transportation costs. One other difference between the Karen and Lahu projects is that the Karen churches now have more experience with this historical research, while the Lahu churches do not and did not understand at all what the students were doing. Still, all of the students felt they had gained a better knowledge of local church life and a deeper commitment to using research for the benefit of the churches, and the project can be considered a limited success.

The Office of History, as always, is grateful for the support it receives from the Baptist Union of Sweden, which provided the funding for both of these projects.

The Fourth District Project (Mar-May) was also an experiment. Instead of studying the histories of selected churches, the project conducted a preliminary "church life survey" of all of the CCT's churches and a few organized groups (muad) in Phrae Province. The three student teams studied 14 congregations. They spent an average of 5 days with each congregation asking members to help them define what they think is a healthy church. The students led small group sessions,

conducted individual interviews, and distributed a questionnaire, all directed at formulating a shared description of what a healthy church would look like in Phrae Province. The Office of History hopes to conduct an experimental church life survey in the Fourth District, and the purpose of this project was to gather data from the people in the churches themselves on what we should survey. Credit for this approach goes to Dr. Philip Hughes.

This project, jointly run by Ach. Sukonrak Punnya and myself, was one of the most successful hot season projects we have run. It identified a set of factors that church members believe contribute to church health, and the project questionnaire garnered a number of important insights. The six McGilvary Faculty of Theology students involved proved to be, collectively, the most dedicated and hard-working group of students we have had to date. We ended the project with a one-day seminar attended by some twenty district and local church leaders. HeRB will eventually provide a full report on the results of the questionnaire, and the news item that follows contains a preliminary overview of the projects' findings.

Preliminary Findings from Phrae

As mentioned in the above news item, the Office of History sponsored a hot season research project among District Four churches located in Phrae Province. The project included a questionnaire distributed in all 14 churches involved. The students collected some 400 responses, representing roughly 1/5th or more of all of the members of those churches. The questionnaire was prepared with the students and had the purpose of learning what church members believe to be the key elements to church health in their churches. Some interesting results are:

When asked if a healthy church must have a pastor, 50% responded "absolutely necessary," 33.8% responded "necessary," and 8.7% responded "somewhat necessary." Responses to other questions, however, cast some doubt on the reliability of this data. We will see, below, that when asked to rate the importance comparatively of pastoral care and pastoral visitation along with six other local church ministries, both came out low. When asked, in another list, to rate individual church activities separately, the figures for pastoral care ranked sixth when then compared with the responses for the other items. It could be argued that the members see the need for a pastor but are less sure about the need of pastoral care, but the data from this questionnaire is too sketchy to decide if that is the case or not.

When asked if a healthy church must have enthusiastic worship (*karn namusakarn baab raochai*), 10.8% responded "absolutely must," 51.7% responded "must," and 26.5% responded "probably must." It should be noted that the Thai word implies worship somewhat akin to Pentecostal worship, esp. the use of drums and electric guitars, singing inspirational hymns, and a more free form in worship.

When asked if a healthy church should incorporate Thai traditions in its life, 10.7% responded "absolutely should," 35.8% responded "should," and 31.2% responded "probably should."

When asked if a healthy church should have close relations with its community, 37.2% responded "absolutely should," 49.5% responded "should," and 9.7% responded "probably should."

When asked if a healthy church must include well-to-do members, 49.4% responded negatively while 47.6 % responded positively; 3% responded, "not sure." When asked if a healthy church must be situated in well-to-do community, 48.7% responded negatively and 47% answered in the affirmative; 4.3% were not sure. It appeared that poorer, rural churches tended to answer that a healthy church does not have to have well-to-do members or be located in a well-to-do community.

When asked to weigh the relative importance of 8 local church ministries, the respondents collectively gave the following response: 1. worship (52.9% selected it as first), 2. Bible study, 3. evangelism, 4. stewardship, 5. family life ministry, 6. visitation of members, 7. pastoral care, 8. community service (51.3% rated it last). These results are in some doubt because, first, the order of responses is very close to the order in the questionnaire itself. It is also doubtful, second, that the respondents understood the distinction between visitation and pastoral care. From personal experience, however, I would say that results are not entirely skewed. It is interesting, for example, that the positions of Bible study and evangelism were reversed in the questionnaire, where evangelism is listed first but Bible study was ranked higher. Community service, also, was not listed last.

In our summary of our findings that we presented to Fourth District leaders, we concluded that: First, church members value worship highly and want lively worship. It appears that they see worship as a key, perhaps the key component of a healthy church. Second, church members consistently gave high ratings to questions involving putting God first, church unity, and community relations. It appears that they believe that good relationships (with God, other members, and community) are another extremely important element in church health. Finally, we noted that 63.7% of the respondents are women. (When I asked our students why such a heavy proportion, they responded that it is mostly women who go to church in the Fourth District). It would seem that one important way to achieve healthy church life is to equip and empower women for ministry and leadership.

IF these findings are at all correct, they suggest that attention has to be given to the role of worship in church renewal. Developing spiritual and communal relations deserve nearly equal emphasis. Economic development, on the other hand, does not seem to be an issue for the members of District Four churches and particularly not an issue for poorer churches themselves.

Training Pastors to Use Research Methods for Ministry

On May 7-8, Herb Swanson with Ach. Prasit Pongudom, staff researcher with the Office of History, led a two day workshop on research methods for pastors. This workshop was the third in a series, which have involved roughly 20 pastors and CCT agency staff members in learning how to use questionnaires as tools for decision-making. At the last workshop, the participants agreed to carry out modest research projects in their churches and agencies, using questionnaires as the

main tool of study. From previous experience, we expected a heavy drop out rate. That's what happened. There were only eight participants in the May workshop, including two new participants. A last minute schedule conflict prevented four other participants from attending. Only four individuals, all pastors, had made some progress on their projects; only one had satisfactorily completed her project. The other three seemed determined to finish their research as well, and we had a fruitful time going over draft questionnaires, discussing research tactics, and practicing the interpretation of data.

The topics of these four projects may be of interest to HeRB readers. The completed project looked at the attitudes of members of one small, rural First District church towards the hymns they were singing in worship. It specifically wanted to learn if using the CCT's denominational hymnal was an obstacle to the members. The pastor learned that it is and that the members want much more training and practice in its use. She stated that she felt the use of a questionnaire had been very helpful to her in improving her church's worship life. The three projects still in process are: (1) the study of member's attitudes in another rural First District church concerning tearing down their old church building and building a new one. The subject is controversial. (2) The pastor of an urban First District church with close ties to a Korean mission establishment intends to use a questionnaire to find out how the members of the church he serves feel about those ties. (3) The pastor of a Sixth District (Bangkok-Pitsanuloke) church wants to know how people of other faiths in the church's community feel about Christianity. All three of these pastors are highly motivated and the issues they are researching are pressing ones for their congregations. I expect that they will complete their research.

Two New Projects

The Office of History is currently working with Evangelism Unit of the CCT, which unit also is responsible for Christian Education to initiate two new projects.

The first project will assemble a major bibliography of Thai-language materials concerning the churches in Thailand. There will be an emphasis on CCT-related materials. For the most part translated items will not be included. The Rev. Don Persons, who is on the staff of Lamp of Thailand, will be primarily responsible for the project. This project has just begun.

The second project intends to study two closely related subjects, namely evangelistic attitudes and practices in CCT churches and the attitudes CCT church members have towards people of other faiths. The project will proceed in two phases. Next February it will sponsor a two-day consultation on evangelism with northern Thais, discussing both northern Thai Christian attitudes towards people of other faiths and successful evangelistic strategies with them. This consultation will be funded by the Christian Identity in a Buddhist Context Project headed up by Dr. Don Swearer, which is being conducted with Herb's assistance. At the conclusion of that consultation, the Office of History and the Evangelism Unit will lay plans for a major CCT-wide survey on evangelism and attitudes towards people of other faiths, which is slated to be completed by the end of 2004.

Book Reviews

Hartzell, Jessie MacKinnon. *Mission to Siam: the Memoirs of Jessie MacKinnon Hartzell*. . Edited by Joan Acocella. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001.



As historical fields go, the study of northern Thai church history up to 1941 is an exceedingly modest field documented by a relatively limited number of sources. While those sources still run to many, many thousands of pages of documents, books, and articles, the amount is not overwhelming. That may be good in the sense that it is a field one can "master" to an extent. The problem with a limited historical record is, of course, that we are left with many holes in the story. This is especially true for the period between the Wars when missionary records are much less helpful than is the case for before World War I but Thai-language sources are still almost non-existent.

One greets this book, thus, with a sense of gratitude. Here, miracle of miracles, is a missionary biography published by a major university press that provides new historical data from precisely that inter-War period. Of equal importance, the book is about and the data is from a missionary wife. Missionary wives, as a group, have left far fewer records than their husbands or unmarried missionary women, who had to write their own reports and conduct their own correspondence. Without opening so much as a page, these facts commend Jessie Hartzell's now published memoirs to those who are interested in missionary history, the history of missions in Thailand, and northern Thai history generally.

Hartzell's memoirs are presented as a contribution to feminist historiography, a primary document for feminist historiographical reflection if you will. The editor, however, does not overplay this approach to the memoirs, an approach that is useful so long as it is understood that Hartzell herself was not a feminist. She was simply a woman who happened to become a missionary and go to northern Siam. The importance of her memoirs is not that they are fodder for a particular ideological estimation of the past but rather that they give voice, as stated above, to a woman who has otherwise remained largely voiceless-ignored by and unknown to even students of northern Thai church and missions history. She was a woman whose voice deserves being heard, which may be the point of the whole book.

The contents of the memoirs themselves confirm their importance to the study of northern Thai missionary and general history. They provide a much fuller picture of the work and ministry of the Hartzells, Presbyterian missionaries, in comparison with anything previously available. Since they worked at Lampang, Nan, and Phrae in the course of their career (for her, from 1912 to 1928), we receive improved insights into the workings of those three smaller stations. These memoirs also contain many details of missionary life that add further texture to our understanding of daily life as a missionary in the North. These include the long, yet interesting trip out to northern Siam, the challenges of learning northern Thai, shopping in Bangkok, working with servants, and the various aspects of daily life and work. Hartzell became deeply involved in the medical work of the mission, and her memoirs contain descriptions of the diseases she had to treat and the conditions in which she worked. One of the few drawbacks to

Hartzell's memoirs is that in the published text it is often difficult to tell in what year events take place. Sometimes the reader has to work back ten or fifteen pages to find a date that might be relevant to an event or description.

Joan Acocella, the editor, is Jessie Hartzell's granddaughter, and it is clear that the editing and publication of this volume was a labor of love of and respect for her grandmother. Her portrait of her grandmother (pages xxvi-xliii) is an important addition to the book and a helpful contribution to the study of Presbyterian missionary history in Siam. It explains the provenance of Hartzell's memoirs and provides important insights into her life before and after Siam, areas that historians frequently do not have access to in the study of missionary history. The portrait she gives is that of an essentially sad woman, who met with many trials in her life and made important sacrifices to remain on the mission field. If Acocella is correct, Jessie Hartzell was a considerably stronger person than her husband and seems to have made a more substantial contribution to missionary work than he did. Acocella also highlights Hartzell's increasing love for the northern Thai and her commitment to them, without patching over the sometimes patronizing (matronizing?) attitudes Jessie had towards them.

One of Acocella's most important insights into her grandmother from a missionary history point of view is her claim, based on information gleaned from Hartzell's daughters, that Jessie Hartzell was not an especially religious woman although she did believe in God. (page xxxix); she almost seems to have fallen into missionary work inadvertently. This family insight seems confirmed by the general lack of the religious rhetoric that graces so many pages of the general missionary record in northern Siam. Acocella, ever seeking a balanced portrait of Hartzell, however, also makes the important observation that, "Religion is often accused of keeping women down; here is a case of the church's enabling a woman to go forward." (page xxix). The history of women on the mission field in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries repeatedly confirms this insight.

One wishes that the academic introduction (pages xi-xxiv) was as well managed as the familial portrait of Jessie Hartzell. The general descriptions of the historical backdrop to Hartzell's ministry in northern Siam are fine, but Morris' grasp of the finer points of northern Thai missions history is constantly, almost consistently plagued by bloopers, large and small. She has, for example, the Revs. Daniel McGilvary and Jonathan Wilson, important figures in the founding of northern Thai missions, arriving in Bangkok 1858 with their "families" to "start another new mission" which became, she states, "the Siam Presbytery." In fact, McGilvary was single. They arrived to join the Siam Mission, which was founded in 1847, and the Siam Presbytery was an organization composed of Thai churches, which in no way could be classified as a mission (page xii). It should be noted that Morris herself later states correctly in a footnote that McGilvary and Wilson came to join the Siam Mission, thus contradicting her earlier statement. (page 42 note) In that same footnote, however, she again makes several misstatements. She claims, first, that McGilvary and Wilson graduated from Princeton University instead of Princeton Theological Seminary (Class of 1856), the correct institution. She states they shared plans for "an evangelical mission" from the time they were classmates. There is nothing in any extant records that indicates that this is true or even that they were particularly close while in seminary. She states that after their arrival in Bangkok in 1858, they established the Siam Presbytery; that is almost correct. They did participate in its founding, but did not take the lead as she implies. Finally,

Morris claims that Wilson and McGilvary founded "the Northern mission in 1866." The truth is that the McGilvarys, Daniel and Sophia, along with their two children arrived in Chiang Mai in April 1867, and that date is usually taken as the foundation of the "Laos Mission." Wilson was not involved. He and his wife, Kate, did not reach Chiang Mai until February 1868. The rest of Morris' Introduction is riddled with wrong facts and misleading interpretations (on pages xvi, xviii, xx, xxi, xxii, xxiv), although at times she does get her interpretation straight, such as her insight that the missionaries of Hartzell's generation were still reluctant to turn over work and authority to the northern Thai (page xvi).

The Introduction notwithstanding, this is an important and invaluable book in terms of the study of Presbyterian missionary history in northern Siam. It takes its place on a shelf of missionary biographies and books that is altogether too bare of comparable studies. Those who are going to study northern Thai church history in the missionary era up to the late 1920s will need to use this book.

Thongchai Winichakul. "Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Post-National Histories in Southeast Asia." A Paper presented to the 8th International Conference on Thai Studies, 9-12 January 2002. Published in *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History*, ed. Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee. Ohio University Press, 3-29 (2003).



On first glance, the subject of this patently academic paper appears irrelevant to the life and history of the churches of Thailand. Thongchai's call for new historiographical theories in the writing of Southeast Asian history, however, offers important insights for that life and history. I begin here with a review of the paper itself and then offer a few thoughts on how it can help us reflect on Thai church history and on our understanding of Thai theologies.

Thongchai, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, has become an important figure in the study of Thai history. In this paper, he steps back to reflect on the theories widely assumed in writing Thai history and history in Southeast Asia generally, and he explores the possibility of new theories and a changed focus. Avoiding trendy references to "post-modernism," Tongchai devotes his attention to the influence of the concept of "nation" on the study of Southeast Asian history. He begins the paper by observing that historians have been debating for some time the impact of focusing on the nation as the primary category for studying the past. National history has until recently amounted to "official" history, but historians now argue that looking at the past through the lens of the nation state distorts or ignores many important aspects of that past. National history in Southeast Asia fails to honor local identities and the unique stories (histories) of local communities and sub-national regions. It also fails to give due place to those histories that straddle national boundaries or that involve the whole of Southeast Asia. Given the limitations of national history, Thongchai notes that many historians are moving beyond it; they are seeking new ways of imaging the past and of writing history. He challenges other historians to get on the bandwagon and to begin to contribute to the development of new historiographical theories and topics of study. This paper is his personal contribution to meeting that challenge.

Thongchai places his theoretical considerations in the context of globalization, taking a surprisingly upbeat, positive attitude about it that rejects the bad press it receives in many quarters. He argues that globalization is inevitably accompanied by "localization," a process that he apparently feels is increasingly destroying the very foundations of nation-state legitimacy. Throughout the paper, Thongchai displays a somewhat subtle but clearly articulated antipathy to the nation state and national histories. He celebrates, therefore, the opportunities presented to historians by the globalization-localization process. The paper argues that globalization is not a grave danger to local culture because of the fact that local conditions always reshape and transform global forces. Globalization fosters and encourages local "translations" of global themes, a process that Thongchai also calls, "hybridization." He observes that Southeast Asia has experienced two prior waves of globalization, namely "Indianization" in more ancient times and colonialism more recently. Neither of these movements, he contends, resulted in a loss of Southeast Asian identity.

(A comment. Thongchai lives in the United States, and in that context, this happy interpretation of globalization as a largely benign process makes a good deal of sense. I would argue that marginalized peoples in Thailand, such as the Karen and Lahu, however, do not experience globalization in this rosy fashion. It is killing their cultures, destroying their environments, and causing serious dislocation in their lives. Globalization is not just a cultural process. It has economic and political aspects that are frequently demonic, and local people are hard-pressed to resist the exploitive aspects that accompany globalization.)

The author offers an alternative to national historiography, which he calls, "history at the interstices" (my computer dictionary defines "interstices" as being "A space, especially a small or narrow one, between things or parts."). He sees two advantages to this new type of history. First, it directs the historian's attention to the boundaries of a nation and to those places and peoples considered marginal to national history. Second, "history at the interstices" encourages the study of local histories. Subjects this type of history might study include not only local histories, but also histories of border regions and border communities, sub-national regional histories, tribal histories, the history of travel and communications, and studies covering the whole or parts of Southeast Asia.

Finally, Thongchai raises the question of who is qualified to undertake "interstitial history" (my term, not his). This seems to be a very personal question for him, as he reflects on his being both Thai-Chinese and an expatriate scholar living in the United States. He rejects the notion that only indigenous scholars are qualified to write history at the interstices and proposes a new category, "home" historians, in its place. "Home" historians are historians who are writing about the place where they live; they may be foreigners living in Southeast Asia as well as indigenous scholars. They need not be native speakers of the "home" language. While not denying the obvious advantages of native language speakers in the study of home histories, Thongchai insists that sometimes non-native language speakers are as or more sensitive to the meaning of home words and the home language than are native language speakers. He concludes that interstitial history is a collective process, one that will be engaged in by many scholars of many stripes.

Thongchai's paper on history at the interstices illuminates issues relevant to the study of Thai church history in at least three ways. First, it puts questions of indigenization, contextualization, and inculturation in a new light. It can be argued that a great deal of the concern expressed by Western church scholars and missionaries concerning these issues has more to do with their needs to adapt themselves to Thai situations than it does with the needs of the Thai churches themselves. I am convinced that the Christianities of Thailand are already far more "Thai" (or Karen, or Lahu, or Isan) than most Westerners associated with Thailand's churches understand or are willing to admit. Just as Thongchai claims, translation and hybridization has taken place and continues to take place. We are still waiting for the churches of Thailand to reflect on that process in a more self-aware way and in print than it has so far, but the relative lack of (published, formal) reflection on the process does not mean the process is not taking place. Thongchai also helps us to see that the localization of the Christian faith is an inevitable consequence of the foreign missionary movement's work in Thailand. The missionary movement may be viewed as one aspect of colonialism (formerly) and globalization (currently), which means that once people in Thailand accepted the Christian faith they immediately began to go to work on it with the cognitive and religious tools of their own cultures.

A happy, minor instance of the translation of American Presbyterian forms by the Church of Christ in Thailand is the recent decision that ordained clergy should be members of both a local church and a district ("presbytery"). In the United States, this dual membership would be seen as a confusion of clergy roles and of the powers of the local church as over against the presbytery. Clergy can be members only of presbytery because only presbytery can oversee their work and exercise judicial discipline over them. Local churches, on the other hand, exercise disciplinary authority over their members. If a cleric belongs to both a church and a presbytery, who is finally responsible for her discipline? Which membership takes precedence? The CCT happily ignores all of these legalities. In its context(s), the issue is one of belonging, and the CCT wants its clergy to belong to a local Christian community. "Membership" is not a legal or organizational category so much as a communal one. That which violates ecclesiastical sensibilities in the United States makes perfect ecclesiastical sense in Thailand. Translation has taken place. The result is a global-local hybrid.

Second, the reconceptualization of history as being done at the interstices sheds light on the concept of the "Thai Church." On the basis of Thongchai's paper, it can be argued that either there is no such thing at all as the "Thai Church" or that, if there is, there shouldn't be. We need to discard the concept. Where, one wonders, is the *Thai* church? It certainly is not found in Chiang Mai or the other northern provinces. Properly speaking, the people of the North are not even ethnically Thai; they are Thai Yuan or, again, *khon muang*, the People of the Muang. Are the Thai-Chinese churches of Bangkok "Thai" churches? Karen. Hmong. Ahka. Lahu. Isan. Are the churches in the southern province of Trang "Thai" churches? Is Second Church, Bangkok, a "Thai" church, when a significant portion of its members are transplanted Northerners? If one adheres to a strict ethnographical definition of Thai-ness, it turns out that a mere handful of CCT churches are "really Thai." The huge majority is something else-either entirely or in part. It is all but impossible, in any event, to even arrive at "a strict ethnographical definition of Thai-ness." In this light, a standard history of the churches in Thailand should be entitled just that, "A History of the Churches in Thailand," rather than "A History of the Thai Church." Could one

include a chapter on Karen church histories in Thailand, for example, in a book on the history of the "Thai" church?

Third, interstitial history encourages church historians to look to the margins of the church in Thailand for their subjects. It encourages the writing of tribal church histories. It encourages an emphasis on local church history. That history also directs our attention to rethinking the boundaries of church history. It would be an exciting enterprise, for example, to write a history of the culturally related ethnic Tai churches of Laos and Isan, largely ignoring the national boundary that runs between them.

Thongchai Winichakul's presentation to the 8th International Conference on Thai Studies, in sum, offers a stimulating, potentially productive re-thinking of how we conceptualize the writing of church history in Thailand. It offers new subjects for study and new avenues for reflection. That presentation, in particular, puts the relationship between Western missions and the churches of Thailand in a new light. One could wish that the author would write in somewhat less dense academic-ese, but even so this is an important paper; no word fits it better than "stimulating."