

HeRD #6 - Pastoral Counseling

The Chiang Mai Station Annual Report for 1891 provides details in the life of the Chiang Mai Church, the "Mother Church of the North," and offers the following brief observation, "The pastoral work, visiting the sick, counseling the listless and straying, performing marriage and burial & ceremonies and giving attention to cases of discipline has become a large and taxing part of the work of this church."

This sentence provides us with one of the few clear descriptions of what the Presbyterian missionaries meant by pastoral care. It defines pastoral care as giving special attention to the ill, performing Christian rituals (marriages, funerals, other ceremonies), and protecting the purity of the church (counseling and discipline). One could devote a 20 page paper to "unpacking" the implications of this sentence.. What I find striking in it is the stated use of pastoral counseling. It was not simply "available" to those with life problems but actively directed towards members whose interest in their faith and the church was flagging. It was the first step in a process that could end with disciplining individuals when necessary. In the missionary mind, counseling and discipline were important for at least two reasons. They, first, had ultimate and eternal consequences for those who were straying from the only path of eternal salvation. They, second, protected the purity of the church as the community of the saved, and they insured the effectiveness of the church as a body of committed, active members. Pastoral counseling wasn't directed towards helping members solve immediate, personal problems so much as it was the means for keeping converts converted.

Recent research suggests that CCT pastors practice a similar form of counseling today. When parishioners come to them for solutions to life problems, the pastor frequently sees the problem as being a lack of faith on the part of the parishioner. If the parishioner "really" believed the problem wouldn't exist. I would, propose as a hypothesis for further study that the historical association of counseling with preserving conversion is one source of this present attitude. The CCT's historical experience since the missionary makes this hypothesis likely. Until very recently, the CCT has consistently sought church renewal through the use of revivalistic techniques imported largely from America and China. Revivalism began in the 1920s and has had as its goal the same as missionary counseling, namely the "re-conversion" of " the listless and straying." It is likely that revivalism reinforced the use of pastoral counseling it inherited from the missionary era of the church' history.

HeRD #15 - Pastoral Care & Self-Support

Let's pursue the theme of self-support for another day. I am more and more impressed with the unforeseen consequences the drive for self-support had for the North Laos Mission. Theological education provides another example. Beginning in 1894, the mission attempted to do two things at the same time. It tried to put an ordained pastoral care system in place and to get the churches to pay their pastors themselves. Up to this point, there had been no pastors and the mission evangelists had been paid by the mission. Both churches and pastors would have preferred the mission to pay pastors, esp. since most of the newly installed pastors had previously been salaried evangelists. At this same time, the mission stopped hiring evangelists. This meant that there was a sudden, drastic dropping off of the possibility of employment for Christian workers. It followed that the number of students at the mission's Training School for Christian Workers dropped off drastically. Where previously it had a dozen or more candidates for ordained work, there were only two or three left. The Rev. William C. Dodd, head of the school, put the best face on the matter when he wrote in 1896, "But in the present transition period, in view of the prominence of the subject of self-support, it is doubtful if this is a matter of regret. A rapidly increasing ministry beyond the ability of the churches to support them, would tend to defeat the whole plan, and might be a calamity to the Church of the future."

This change was one of the most important events in northern Thai church history. The drive for self-support virtually killed a full-time, professional pastoral care system. Such a system was just beginning. It had not existed before. Northern Thai church leaders had been doing paid and unpaid evangelism for two decades or more, and they continued to do evangelism even when there was no pay

involved. This was not possible for a full-time, professional pastoral care system. First, there was no tradition of pastoral care. Second, full-time pastoral ministry requires a salary. The mission's action stunted and delayed the growth of professional pastoral care for over 80 years (until the 1980s!).

HeRD #34 - Pastoral Care Struggles

As we go along in northern Thai church history, themes are starting to emerge. One of the themes we will return to is North Laos Mission's struggle to meet the challenge of pastoral care for its churches. While there were some strong churches, by the late 1890s many of the congregations seemed to be facing a number of problems and were not very strong. Among these was the Christian community at Nang Lae (in the following, called Yang Laa). Dodd wrote in the Chiang Rai Station bi-monthly letter for April 1899 that he had visited the Christians at Nan Lae, 10 miles north of C'Rai, for three days. He found the members discouraged. They had just one weak elder to lead them. After returning to C'Rai, Dodd reported, "Soon after our return, we had a called meeting of the men of the Church and Elder Chow Ph'ya Puck Dee, who is one of the members of the Court here, and was the life of the Yang Laa congregation while he lived there, was made the head of a movement to supply Yang Laa with some one from the city congregation to assist them in the Sabbath services every Sabbath until the rains make traveling impossible. so the Yang Laa people seem to feel very much encouraged and hopeful."

In the absence of a system of resident pastors, the missionaries joined with Christians in the urban centers to try to provide pastoral care for small rural groups that languished without such care. This quotation already points to one of the factors that limited the effectiveness of urban-centered rural pastoral care, namely, travel conditions during the rainy season (5+ months/year). Another thing to note in this quotation, however, is that in C'Rai Station the missionaries were beginning to involve northern Thai Christians in meeting pastoral concerns. It was a small station with limited missionary personnel (usually only two families). They couldn't do everything. They had, furthermore, a capable leader in Phya Phakdee. He was someone who knew the people and the problems. He was, in fact, the founder of the group at Nang Lae. Still, we will find as we go along that the issue of pastoral care was a major headache for the mission.

HeRD #39 - A Revived Church

The North Laos Mission at the turn of the century struggled to provide its churches and rural groups adequate pastoral care. In earlier HeRDs, I described a couple of situations where inadequate pastoral care was being given. Here's a success story. The Rev. William Harris in 1899 was the assistant principal of the C'Mai Boys' School and had numerous other mission duties to carry out. He was also in charge of the congregation at Mae Dok Daeng, 20 kms out in the country. The C'Mai Station's bi-monthly report for June 1899 paints the following brief portrait: "Mr. Harris found time despite school work, for several visits to Maa Dawk Dang Church, his especial charge. He is encouraged by the growing congregation, and by the return of many who seemed hopelessly backslidden. The people have 'pointed' and white-washed afresh their brick chapel, put new matting on the floor, and provided a new communion table. Recently seven adults, most from heathen homes, came asking baptism. Three of these have already been received. Easter Sabbath marked a mile stone in their history. A congregation of 180 came together where a year ago forty was an unusual congregation. They had themselves decorated the church with palms and flowers, and all rejoiced together in a risen Christ, and in a revived church." Mission records leave the strong impression that when a specific missionary took a pastoral interest in a specific congregation, that congregation usually grew in faith and numbers.

HeRD #88 - Reviving Ordained Ministry

For reasons that require pages of explanation, the northern Thai church stopped ordaining ministers in 1895 and from then on until 1914 ordained only a small handful of men to the ministry. After 1900 northern Thais had little role in the pastoral care of churches, excepting only the C'Mai Church and one or two rural congregations. Most of the missionaries believed that northern Thais were not suited for ordination and/or pastoral ministry. The minutes of the North Laos Presbytery for 1914 mark an important turning point. First, the presbytery "Moved & carried that the old committee on the Examination of

Candidates for the Ministry be discharged and that the teachers in the Theological Training School be a permanent committee on Examination of Candidates for the Ministry." The TTS had been founded in 1912 and was now beginning to have an impact. Second, the presbytery took six individuals "under care" for preparation for ordained ministry. Third, it ordained two men to the Gospel Ministry. This was the most action taken toward establishing the ordained ministry in the North since 1893-94. It marks an important step towards the creation of a northern Thai pastoral ministry. To put things in perspective, however, we should remember that a viable, wide-spread pastoral system did not appear in the North until after 1980 - yes, 1980. Anyone who would understand the Protestant church's experience in the North needs to remember that it went for a century without consistent, viable, & indigenous pastoral care.

HeRD #91 - reply to [H]

[HK]'s responded to HeRD #88 with the concern that its conclusion about pastoral care in northern Thailand was too short and, therefore, misleading. I would add the following data for our consideration: The "century without consistent, viable, & indigenous pastoral care" that I had in mind was from the 1870s through to the 1970s. While it is true that the CCT, officially, presupposed from its beginning in 1934 that its churches would have pastors, the reality in the North was quite different. From the 1870s to about 1920, the missionaries oversaw the churches. Only the city churches had pastors and they were either missionaries or worked under missionary supervision. The missionary pastors had many other duties and could give only limited time to their churches. Pastoral oversight of the rural groups was haphazard at best. In the 1920s and 1930s, the urban churches began to have northern Thai pastors. Few of them were theologically trained. Almost no rural churches had pastors except in Chiang Rai province. There the pastors were poorly paid and seldom stayed in pastoral ministry for more than a year or two. This total situation did not improve after World II. In 1959, for example, the whole CCT had about 120 churches and only 12 pastors. In the North, the typical pattern was for each of the districts to have "district workers" who sometimes resided in local churches, sometimes did not. These workers had many duties including pastoral oversight of churches. One worker usually had to care for several congregations. Few of these workers had any pastoral training and most were evangelists.

A significant number of northern churches began to have their own pastors only after the inception of the Church Self-Support Project '79 in 1980. That project provides funds for paying pastors on a sliding scale that increases the local church's portion of the salary each year--until the church pays the pastor's full salary. Now, many northern churches do have pastors. Relatively few rural churches, however, have completed Project '79 successfully.

The century-long absence of viable, consistent, and effective pastoral care remains, in sum, a central fact of northern Thai church history.