

Becoming a Christian in Thailand

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A while ago I did research on how Protestant churches in Thailand grow. I wrote about this in Conversion Growth of Protestant Churches in Thailand (printed version, online version). In the coming weeks I am going to give a summary of some of my findings.

1. Buddhists are less likely to become Christians than adherents of traditional religions. Everywhere in the world, adherents of traditional religions are becoming Christians in greater numbers than adherents of world religions. The same is seen in Thailand. Christianity grows very fast among the tribes (8% a year), and only moderately fast among the ethnic Thai (4% a year).

2. There is no difference in openness for the Gospel between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists. Because Theravada Buddhism is seen as a purer form of Buddhism, and Mahayana Buddhism as more impacted by traditional religions, it might be reasonable to expect that Theravada Buddhists (e.g. the ethnic Thai) are harder to reach than Mahayana Buddhists. However, this is not true. All over the Buddhist world Theravada Buddhists are becoming Christians at the same rate as Mahayana Buddhists. The cause might be that though theoretically Theravada Buddhism might be a purer form of Buddhism, animistic influenced folk religion is very much part of the everyday life of all Theravada Buddhist peoples.

3. There is no 'critical mass' effect on likelihood of becoming Christian. Some people thought that once Christianity has become more known and visible in society, it will start to grow faster. This is not true in Thailand. This shows that the evangelistic influence of Christians is always to the group of people they already know, never to society as a whole.

4. When there are social problems where Christians can show Christian compassion, the church will grow. This was seen in the aftermath of the tsunami, when many churches were planted in the stricken area. Even though many of them proved to be a flash in the pan, there was still significant growth.

5. Women are more likely to become Christians than men. 64% of all converts in Thailand are women. The same is even true for people born in Christian families. Of worshipers born in Christian families, 58% is female