

## **HeRD #79 - Student Papers: Church Split**

One of the best papers from the course wrestles with the causes and consequences of a church split. The Christian Thai Namphai Church is located in Uttaradit Province and is part of District Four, Phrae, of the CCT. It was established in 1958, and from its inception it had a strong congregational life and a number of capable elders. In the early 1980s, however, a substantial minority of the church became interested in Pentecostalism through exposure to the Romklao Church, a Bangkok Pentecostal church with daughter churches in several places in Thailand. They formed a prayer group which began to conduct lively, informal Pentecostal worship services. Other members found the emotional, loud, hand-clapping, prayer-shouting worship unacceptable. Things came to a head in June 1985 when the Pentecostal group asked permission to worship in the church building on Sunday afternoons. The congregational meeting held to "discuss" the matter revealed a deep split that existed in the church. Those in opposition stated, loudly, that Pentecostal worship demeaned God and that it was not the worship of their forebearers or of the CCT. It must not be held in the church building. Supporters of the request believed that their worship was Spirit-filled and offered the church the possibility of reform. The pastor sided openly with the Pentecostal group.

Hot tempers prevailed. Ugly words were exchanged. The Pentecostals' opponents made threats and one elder actually struck a Pentecostal on the head with his Bible. Several anti-Pentecostals walked out in rage. In the face of this, the Pentecostal group decided to withdraw from the church. Of 156 members, 68 left and 88 remained. The Namphai Church all but died as a result. It could no longer pay a pastor. It couldn't maintain its women's or youth groups. Worship attendance declined drastically and several of the remaining members stopped going to church. Some left Christianity entirely. The community mocked the Christians for their lack of unity and love for each other. As I read this paper, I was struck by the profound lack of humility on BOTH sides. For both, particular forms of worship were more precious than Paul's injunctions to preserve the unity of the church.