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CHURCH -

**PLANTING**

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A WORD OF EXPLANATION TO THE READER.

We got interested in Churchgrowth after realizing that something was hindering the growth of the churches in the fields in which we worked - i.e. Northeast Thailand and South Laos. In studying for my Dip.Th. we decided to take Church Planting and Church Growth as the subject for the major thesis. ("We" refers to Louise and I, as she was my greatest help.)

This paper is the outcome of our effort. We are the first to acknowledge that our own plan and proposition for planting a Church in Nakhon Phanom town (see Ch.4) has not worked out yet. But we believe that you will profit by reading through these pages. Do feel free to comment or criticize, as we would appreciate hearing your reactions, if you have time.

Our paper is not a one-man effort. We do appreciate time given to us by fellow missionaries, filling out questionnaires and discussing problems with us.

Many thanks to all those who made their various papers and surveys available. (See Bibliography).

Most of all our thanks go to Miss Ellie Hoffmeister, our faithful and best critic, who typed the original copy.

Alan Harwood.

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METHODS OF CHURCH PLANTING AND MEANS OF  
PROMOTING CHURCH GROWTH IN A  
BUDDHIST SOCIETY

A **Comparative** Study of the Mission Work in  
South Laos and Northeast Thailand

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by

ALAN JOHN HARWOOD

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the Baptist Theological  
College of Southern Africa in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the DIPLOMA OF THEOLOGY

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

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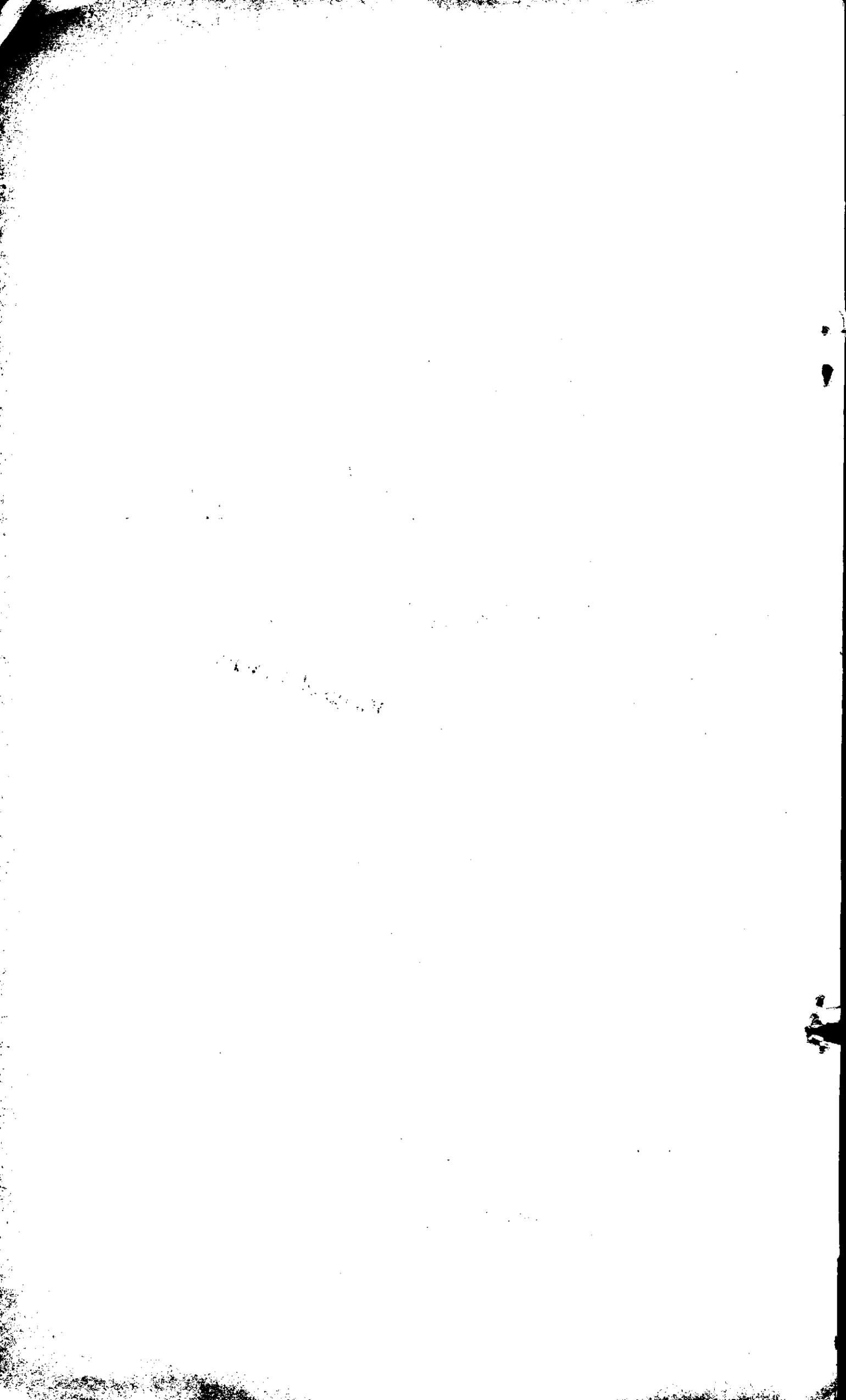


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## INTRODUCTION

### Scope of the Thesis

Buddhism is the **official religion** of **Laos** and Thailand. Christian missionary work has been carried on in Laos for more than seventy years, and in **Thailand** for over a century. Yet today we find that the churches are **basically** weak and not reaching out to the lost men and women around them. The purpose of this thesis is to discover how to plant new **churches** which **will** grow and how to encourage growth in the churches **which** already exist in this Buddhist society.

The mission work to be examined **will** be limited to that of the Swiss Brethren Mission **Evangelique** in South Laos and the Christian and **Missionary Alliance** in the seventeen provinces of Northeast Thailand. There are two reasons for limiting the thesis to this area. **Firstly**, the weak state of **the** churches demands a reason for their **lack** of growth and **outreach**. Secondly, the writer's own missionary experience has been in Laos where he worked under the Overseas Missionary **Fellowship**<sup>1</sup> from **1961-1970**. His wife began missionary service with the Swiss Brethren.<sup>2</sup> Since **1971** they have worked in **North-east** Thailand as members of the **O.M.F.** in cooperation with the **C.&M.A.** Hence, the topic of this thesis is of great personal interest to the writer and to his **fellow-workers** in the two areas **it** covers.

The thesis **will** begin with an analysis of the religious life of the countries involved. This, together with a chapter covering the work done by the two missions so far, **will** form the **foundation**. Chapter III grows out of this **analysis**, being a critical evaluation of the reasons evident to the writer for the overall failure to plant virile, growing churches. The final chapter presents four plans of action to meet the needs of existing weak city and **village** churches, and the **unevangelized** cities and **village** areas.

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<sup>1</sup>The O.M.F. entered the work in South Laos in 1957 at the invitation of the Mission **Evangelique** and later Northeast **Thailand** at the invitation of the Christian and Missionary **Alliance**.

<sup>2</sup>Louise Skrotzky was with the Brethren from 1960 until **1963** when she married the writer.

### Geographical and Historical Survey

Some facts and figures of the geography and history of this region are given for a clearer understanding of the mission work described later.

The Kingdom of Laos is about six times as large as Switzerland, but has only three million people.<sup>1</sup> The greater part of the country is mountainous, with no railways and with few passable roads. The ethnic Lao make up 47 per cent of the population,<sup>2</sup> the remainder belonging to the tribal groups and sizable Chinese and Vietnamese communities. The Kingdom of Lan Xang, first established by a Lao monarch in the mid-14th Century, encompassed all present-day Laos and much of Eastern and Northern Thailand. In the year 1697 Lan Xang split into three rival kingdoms which, for nearly two centuries, wrangled among themselves while fighting off outside invaders. In 1893 the region became a French protectorate.<sup>3</sup> Sixty years later Laos was independent, ruled by the northern royal family and governed by a National Assembly elected by popular vote. Most of the people live from rice farming. All the administration of government is in the hands of the ruling Lao. The backward economy has received a boost through large foreign aid programmes,<sup>4</sup> but the ravages of war have destroyed much of the country, together with the new roads, many of the new schools, and the new medical centers. Today only a narrow belt along the Mekong River remains under the control of the Royal Laotian government; four-fifths is in the hands of the Pathet Lao, the North Vietnamese and the Chinese communists.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Density per square mile is 20.6.

<sup>2</sup> The ethnic Lao are part of the Siamese race.

<sup>3</sup> According to "The Peoples of Southeast Asia", a map by the National Geographic Society, March 1971.

<sup>4</sup> From 30-40 million U.S. dollars annually. Almanac, 1965 (New York: Schuster, 1965), p. 719.

<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing an uneasy peace prevails while three warring factions attempt to set up a coalition government.

The Kingdom of Thailand, meaning "land of the free", is the only country in Southeast Asia never to have been colonized by the West.<sup>1</sup> Its land area is less than half the size of South Africa, but with 38 million people has

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a greater density. Most scholars believe that the Siamese race moved down from Central China, being driven out by the Mongols. They dispersed into Burma, Laos and Thailand. By the 13th Century the Thai started to drive the Khmer population south.

The present ruler of Thailand is King Bhumibol Adulyadej who, as King Rama IX, is the successor to three royal dynasties. A coup d'etat in 1932 changed the absolute monarchy into a representative government, run today by Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn. He declared military rule in June 1971 to combat insurgents in the north and northeast. Infiltrating "reds" are on the increase, attacking police posts and terrorizing the villagers.

Since the writer's arrival in Southeast Asia in 1960, new highways and a modernized railway system facilitate travel in Thailand. Economic progress is evident, as seen through the numerous factories mushrooming around Bangkok. Government officials are well-housed and seem to be loyal to the king.

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<sup>1</sup> Thailand changed its name from Siam to Thailand in 1939, back to Siam in 1945, and to Thailand again in 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Density per square mile is 145.3.

<sup>3</sup> See Fig. 1 on page 4.

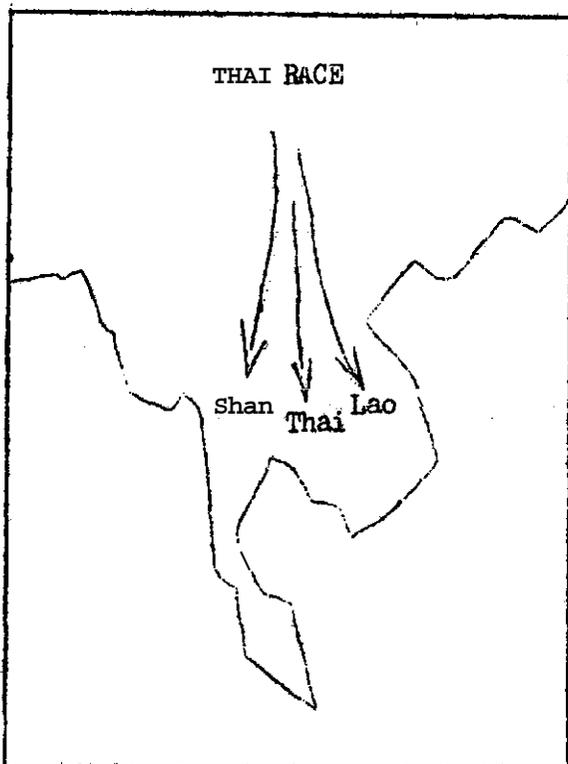


Fig. 1--Migration of the Thai Race (circa. 1200 A.D.)

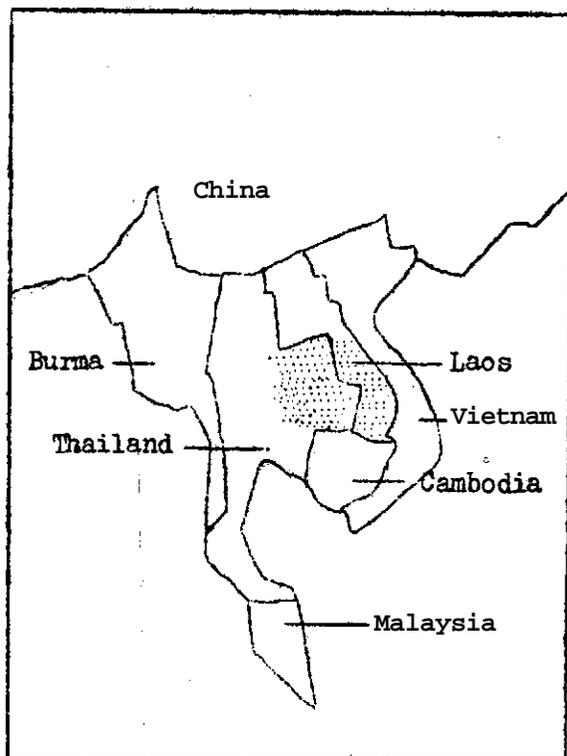


Fig. 2--South Laos and Northeast Thailand in Southeast Asian Peninsula

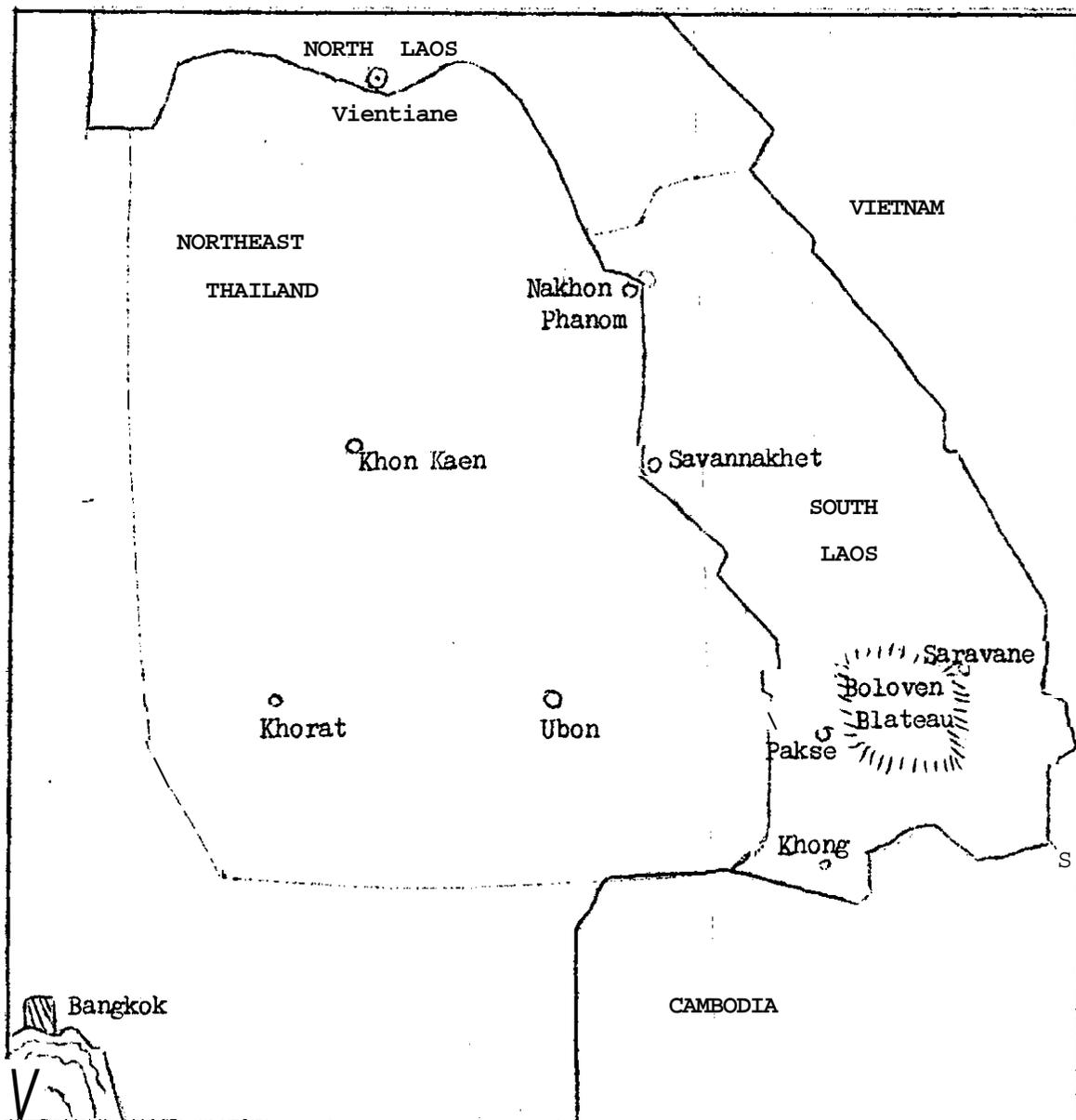


Fig. 3--South Laos and Northeast Thailand and Bordering Area

## MODERN THAI RELIGION

Buddhism, although driven out of the country of its origin, is very much alive in Thailand and Laos today. For many centuries it has ruled individual actions and formed the society. Strictly speaking, Buddhism is not a religion. "It does not begin with God and leads men to a place where God is no longer necessary."<sup>1</sup> With its denial of a soul, this elaborate system of ethical teachings is more like a materialistic philosophy than a religion. It has a strong inherent syncretism<sup>2</sup> (through which other religious practices are continually being absorbed), which accounts for its present day survival.

As the state religion of Thailand and Laos, Buddhist doctrine is propagated daily over the radio and television networks, taught in public schools, practiced by the majority of the citizens and protected by the kings.

In most religions there is a gap between the creed and the practice. In modern Thai Buddhism this gap is wider than usual.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the doctrinal section, "The Teaching of the Monks", will be treated separately from the practical aspect under "Religious Behaviour."

### The Teachings of the Monks

The central thought of Buddhist doctrine is the fact of universal suffering. This is expressed in the Four Noble Truths. (1) All life involves suffering. (2) Suffering is the product of desire and ignorance.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald H. Anderson, ed., Christ, and Crisis in South-east Asia, p.47.

<sup>2</sup> Webster's Dictionary on 'syncretism': "The combination or reconciliation of differing beliefs or practices in religion, philosophy, etc., or an attempt to effect such compromise."

<sup>3</sup> James W. Gustafson, "Syncretistic Thai Religion and Church Growth", a paper, 1971, p. 73.

(3) Elimination of desire will end suffering. (4) Following the Eightfold Path will lead to this end.

The Eightfold Path<sup>1</sup> is called "the middle way" between austere asceticism and sensuous desire. It orders a set of right behaviour (right belief, right feeling, right speech, right actions, right livelihood, right effort, right memory, and right meditation) without providing the means to do it. These truths, which Gautama claimed to have received through illumination, are based on his observations and are empirical.

It is clear from the 'Four Noble Truths' that the supreme concern of the Buddha was not truth but salvation. The Buddha began with a definite existential world view which subordinated the concern for discovering truth (italics mine) to the metaphysics of experiencing a priori truth, the achieving of freedom in Nirvana.<sup>2</sup>

The Buddha never claimed to be a god or a prophet. He merely observed through his own powers of intellect that life is made intolerable not only because of all the suffering attached to birth, separation, sickness and death, but also because of the impermanence of all existing things. All existence is illusion, he said, and even underneath all continual change there is no substantial reality.

In the face of total flux, the Buddha had to account for his premise that all life involves suffering.... Causality in human life works in a circle. The chain begins in ignorance and continues through the phenomena and epiphenomina of life, birth, old age, and death. The latter are once again the causes of ignorance.<sup>3</sup>

This chain of returning events, through all the incarnations, can be broken at the weakest link, i.e., desire. It is sufficient to suppress all desire in order to get free from the causality of suffering and attain salvation.

A significant feature of Oriental religions is their cyclical interpretation of life. The constant succession of morning, noonday, evening, and night, -- the endless repetition of spring, summer, fall, and winter -- ...all this has given rise to the concept of the cycle of existence and the wheel of destiny<sup>4</sup> (italics mine) where all objects and states of being are transitory

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<sup>1</sup> Paul A. Eakin, Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand, p.20.

<sup>2</sup>

James R. Moore, "Some Weaknesses in Fundamental Buddhism," Evangelical Missions Quarterly, Vol. VII (Fall 1970), pp. 26-27.

<sup>3</sup> ibid., p.27.

<sup>4</sup> See Fig. 5, p. 11.

and where there is no such thing as actual progress, for soon the cycle will move on around and all will be the same again.<sup>1</sup>

### Teaching on the Human Personality

"Hinduism and Buddhism teach a pantheistic identity of the human soul with the world soul or primeval oneness."<sup>2</sup> The human personality is conceived of as being conditioned by the three following principles: (1) Every individual is impermanent. (2) Sorrow is inherent in individuality. (3) The separate being, or ego, is non-real. Furthermore, the visible or phenomenal world is thought of as unreal and illusionary, while the unphenomenal world is true reality for the Buddhist. The monks live closer to such a world than the layman. The human personality is explained as being made up of a bundle of aggregates or different agents (khandas) which are<sup>3</sup> loosely connected and fall away at death, leaving no ego. "After thousands of such reincarnations, a person may at last be allowed to escape from the limitations of human existence and to be absorbed into Brahman, the world soul."<sup>4</sup>

For the Buddhist, rest from reincarnations occurs through entrance into Nirvana. But his ultimate deliverance is remote to Thai thinking. Nirvana is taught as being the absence of all desire and of all consciousness, just as "the blowing out of a candle." There is no positive affirmation available from Gautama as to what it really is; certainly it is not the equivalent of the

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Christian concept of heaven as a place of final bliss. This lack of positive teaching on Nirvana is the reason that people mention only three worlds in which they can live--heaven, hell, and this present world.<sup>6</sup> "The insignificance of the individual" is as much a fundamental axiom for the Buddhist as "the infinite value of the human soul" is for the Christian.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene A. Nida, Customs, Culture and Christianity, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> Eakin, Christian Approach, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Nida, Customs, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> Eakin, Christian Approach, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> See Fig. 4. p. 10.

## Teaching on Sin and Salvation

Every Buddhist knows the five basic precepts for the layman, to which are added five more for the monks.<sup>1</sup> The basic five commandments are:

- Do not kill or injure any living being.
- Do not take anything not belonging to you.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not lie, deceive or slander.
- Do not partake of intoxicating drinks.<sup>2</sup>

The first of these precepts is the most frequently quoted to missionaries as a reproach to Christians who do not refrain from killing animals, or each other in warfare.

The three most frequently used religious words in the Thai and Lao languages are (1) kam or the kharmā, (2) boun, meaning merits or good deeds, and (3) baab, meaning demerits, sin, evil actions. Kam is the total sum of all boun and baab accumulated in all the previous lives of a person. It is both the link between this life

<sup>3</sup>

and the next one and also the implacable ruler over the modus of rebirth; with a good kam the new life will be happier than the present one. In the triangle of the phenomenal world it is the kam which causes the upward or downward movement in the successive incarnations of the same human "non-being". Here is a great paradox in the Buddha's teaching, who will actually receive the rewards for accumulated boun or the punishments for an excess of baab If the individual ego is non-existent and is always destroyed at each death? How can kam affect a present life and its condition if the personality of an individual does not contain at least some specific remnants from previous lives?

The law of kam is based on the principle of sowing and reaping. Every man gets exactly what he has sown. As far as the immediate future is concerned, this premise is questionable. Many criminals remain unpunished; many wicked deeds bring riches; concerning the "wheel of rebirths," there is no way at all of testing the truth of this central law. Yet the most popular Thai saying is,

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<sup>1</sup> The monk's life is regulated by an additional 227 precepts.

<sup>2</sup> Eakin, Christian Approach, p.22.

<sup>3</sup>

The human ego does not continue through incarnation.

<sup>4</sup> See Fig.4. p.10.

"Do good and get good; do evil and get evil." It is the widespread belief that all misfortune befalling a person in this life (e.g., sickness, robberies, poverty, etc.) is the direct result of former evil deeds done by the same person in a previous existence. Baob cannot be transferred and always affects the doer alone. But, surprisingly, boun can be shared, both amongst the living or towards the dead. Little is known regarding who decides about the transfer.

Salvation, then, is essentially the escape from the evil of living and from the ever-turning "wheel of life." It is achieved by the layman through self-effort by making merits and through meditation and self-discipline by the monks. Thai people do not believe, however, that anyone will enter Nirvana before the next Buddha comes.<sup>1</sup>

Because salvation is dependent upon self-effort, it is highly individualistic. The Buddha's last words are said to have been, "Work out your own salvation with diligence." But while the methods of accumulating it are numerous,<sup>2</sup> the monks teach the main virtues as being gentleness, generosity, hospitality, and wholeheartedness in following the path of religion. The head abbot of a Lao pagoda told the writer that it is equally good to be a Christian as long as one obeys religious duty wholeheartedly. That was in 1962. There are signs that this tolerant attitude is no longer widespread amongst Buddhists.<sup>3</sup>

#### Teaching on Heaven and Hell

"To go up to heaven" and "to fall into hell" are current expressions. Yet heaven and hell are transitory places and both serve as a kind of purgatory.

If a man has a large balance of merit over demerit, his soul will go to heaven and when his merit is exhausted he will be reborn on this earth; if he has committed both boun and baob, he will first go to hell and stay there until his demerit is expired; then he will go to heaven and enjoy his merit before being reborn; if his whole life was sinful, he will be committed to hell or will wander on earth as a dis-embodied spirit (phi) before he can be reborn.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eakin, Christian Approach, p.26 on "Buddha Maitreya".

<sup>2</sup> See section on "Religious Behaviour", p.12.

<sup>3</sup>

See section on "Militant Buddhism", p.20.

<sup>4</sup> S.J. Tambiah, Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand, p.53.

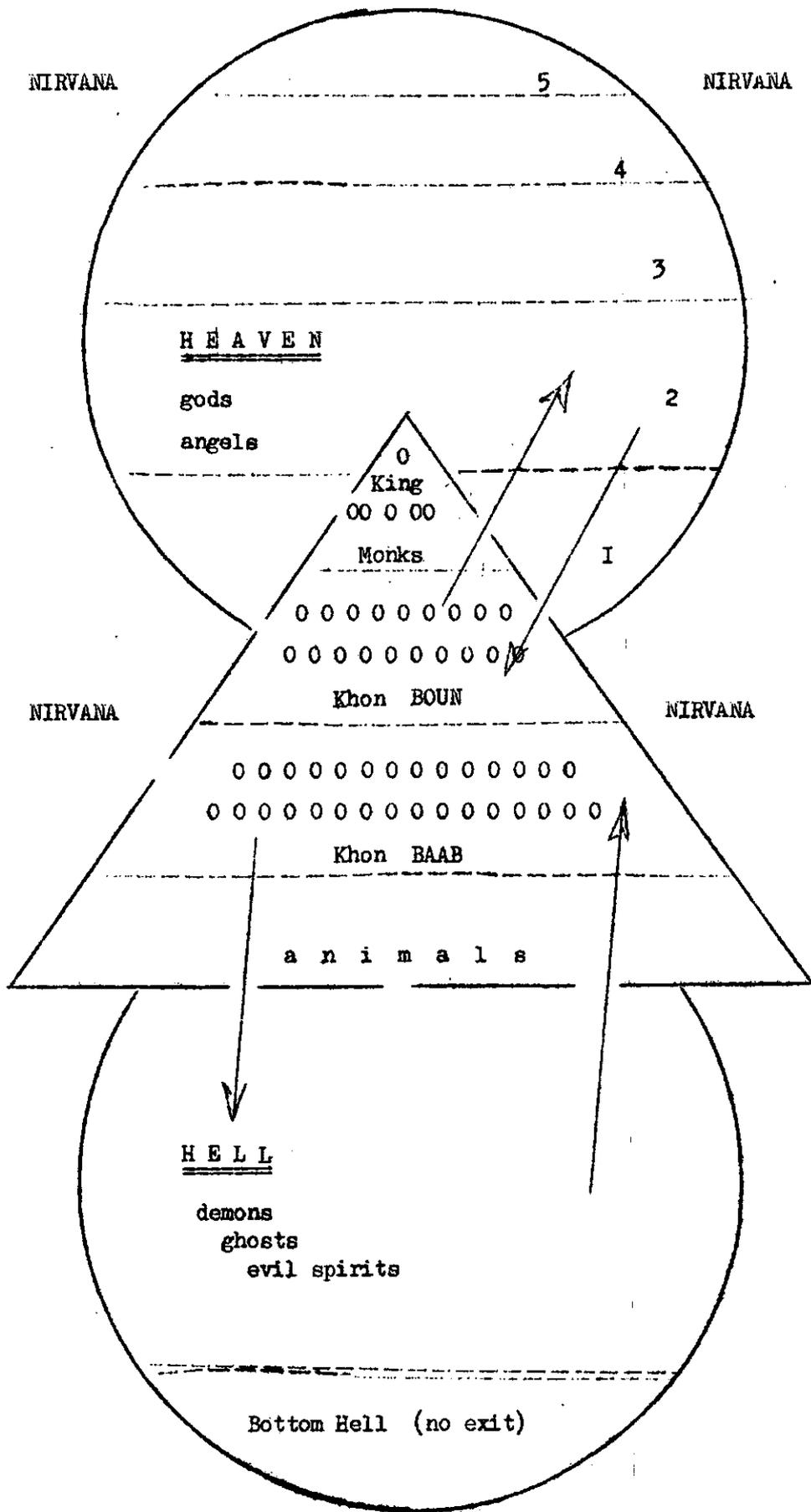


Fig. IV. DIAGRAM OF 'THE THREE WORLDS.'<sup>1</sup>

Khon BOUN are people with merit, seen through riches, prestige, health and beauty.

Khon BAAB are 'sinners,' people unconcerned with merit-making or those living in poverty etc.

<sup>1</sup> Eugene A. Nida, Religion across Cultures, p. 37. adapted.

Heaven has five stratas which decrease in size in ascending order. The first strata can be enjoyed already on earth by khon boun, the good people with lots of merit. The higher stratas are more difficult to reach, hence the smaller space provided! The gods and angels (thevadas) living there came across from Brahmanism as did the whole concept of heaven and hell.<sup>1</sup> Heaven is further visualized as

...a place where handsome men and women embrace and walk around in a garden studded with diamonds and other gems. Hell, on the other hand, is where one burns in raging fire and one's sides are pierced with weapons of demons.<sup>2</sup>

Hell does not have the same deterring influence from evil deeds that it used to have in Christian countries. Rather, it is a transitory place and people talk about it with a shrug and a laugh. They well know that they must all fall into hell sooner or later, but that it will not be permanent. Interestingly enough, the wish of a certain devout Buddhist lady, very zealous in merit making, was not to enter heaven through all the boun collected, but rather to have a long life!

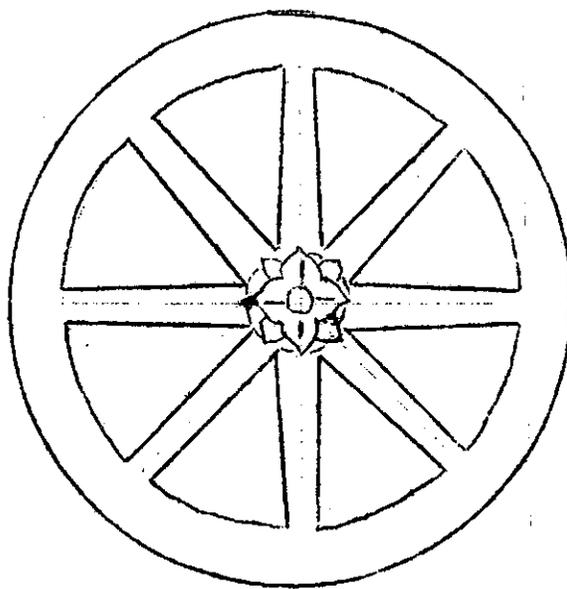


Fig. 5.--The Wheel of Life, ever turning, the central symbol of Buddhism--found on temples, ornaments, royal decorations, jewelry. The eight spokes of the wheel represent the Noble Eight-fold Path.

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<sup>1</sup> A good example of syncretised non-buddhist doctrine!

<sup>2</sup> Tambiah, Buddhism, p.14.

The Religious Behaviour of the People

When the Thai-Lao race was driven south from Central China, the beliefs and rituals of peoples encountered were assimilated. Today, we are confronted with Thai religious behaviour that is basically a synthesis of an adapted Theravada Buddhism together with remnant Brahmanistic rituals and a strong under-pinning of animistic practices.

By 'animistic' we mean believing in spirits, not only in the spirits of dead persons, but also in spirits which dwell in natural objects, such as trees, streams, mountains, a gnarled root, a perforated stone, or a meteorite.... Animistic beliefs are usually travelling companions with many other religious concepts and practices.<sup>2</sup>

Modern Thai people desire to be looked upon as devout Buddhists. They practice the doctrine as a preparation for the next life, but in dealing with daily hardships they are likely to turn to the world of spirits.

Behind the outward forms of refined religious concepts one often encounters the realities of animism in some of its crudest forms. It might be said that all men at heart are 'animists' in the sense that they are fearful of the supernatural and would like to master the techniques for controlling it.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, while Buddhism provides the moral system of society, animism equips people to confront sickness, disaster, accidents and death. Brahmanism furnishes the rituals of passage (i.e., birth, adulthood, wedding, and funeral).<sup>4</sup>

In all human relationships and social interaction the merit making practices constitute the major ethical motive by which Thai explain behaviour.<sup>5</sup> This explains the lack of open thankfulness in Thai culture; the benefactor is doing such good deeds with his own merit and salvation in mind so why thank him for that?

Monkhood

Thailand and Laos are called the countries of the saffron-robed priests because their presence is so prominent. The majority of young men enter monkhood, although most of them for a short period of only three months. Every monk is both an agent of the merit-making process

<sup>1</sup> Gustafson, Syncretistic Thai Religion, p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Nida, Customs, p.136.      <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.144.

<sup>4</sup> See Fig.6--diagram on Syncretism, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Tambiah, Buddhism, p.53.

and a creator of merit himself. Indeed the "field of merit" surrounding a monk is considerable. His parents share the boun the monk acquires through entering the priesthood. Every devout Buddhist, however, can accumulate his own boun in relationship with monks in the following ways: (1) Offering rice to the begging monks. (2) Taking gifts to the monks on sacred days. (3) Participating in a monk's initiation ceremony. (4) Contributing financially or in labour to the building of a temple project. (5) Listening attentively to the monk's teaching.

Feeding the monks is the most common merit-making act. Men rarely offer food to the monks; this is the function of women. The observance of the five basic precepts is expected of all Buddhists. Yet a polling of opinion in an average rural community in Northeast Thailand revealed the surprising picture that the preferred ways of acquiring boun are ranked as follows:

1. Completely financing the building of a pagoda.
2. Becoming a monk oneself or having a son become one.
3. Giving food daily to the monks.
4. Observing every sacred day.
5. Strictly observing the five precepts.

The remarkable aspect is that the specific "Buddhist way of life" is ranked lowest. We must conclude that merit-making through gift giving is more valued than merit-making through observance of Buddhist precepts. <sup>2</sup>

This points to a discrepancy between Christianity and Buddhism. Whereas the former teaches a hidden "religion of the heart" with private prayer and unobtrusive charity (Matthew 6), the latter excels in public "sacrifices", processions, and open worship in front of images. <sup>3</sup>

Although 227 precepts regulate the life of a monk, he can take an active part in the community through his offices at religious festivals. The eight major annual festivals follow the agricultural calendar and are important to every farmer. No good Buddhist will marry without the blessing being chanted by monks, and their presence is conditional to Buddhist cremation. Often they are called upon in cases of sickness and may take on the function of an exorcist. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tambiah, Buddhism, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

Eakin, Christian Approach, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Normally a layman acts as a spirit-doctor.

Monks are regarded as being no longer humans. They are addressed with a special pronoun depicting their god-like status, which they share with the royal family alone. Honorific language must be used when talking with them. Buddhist nuns, dressed all in white, are rarely seen. Their main function is ministering to the monks. They do not take part in any public rituals.

#### Relics and Pilgrimages

The most important monument in the capital of Laos contains one of Buddha's hairs, although there is a rumour that it may not actually still be there. There are many tower-like structures, called "stupas", which are supposed to contain relics of Gautama Buddha, e.g., a tooth, a bone, or a footprint. Buddhists like to take part in pilgrimages to such places as they are merit-making opportunities of great value. Nida aptly describes such an occasion which every tourist and missionary can easily witness:

The average devout Buddhist who climbs to the lofty gleaming pagoda overlooking the city of Chiangmai in northern Thailand, worships in a manner quite foreign to the teaching of Buddha. In one of the most sacred shrines sits a glittering statue of Buddha looking out upon the courtyard with a blank, meditative stare. Those who wish healing from dysentery or malaria come specially to this Buddha. In order to know whether their prayers will be heard and they will recover, it is necessary before worshipping to measure the distance from fingertip to fingertip on a stick handily placed near the shrine and to put a small piece of wax on the stick so as to mark the distance. The worshipper then pours over the head of the Buddha the water which he has carried up several hundred dragon-lined steps.... After the ritual is completed, the worshipper again stretches out his arms along the stick, and if the wax appears to have moved down the stick, that is to say, if he cannot reach it, the prayer will be answered.<sup>1</sup>

#### Images and Prayer

Gautama Buddha refused all attempts to be idolized during his life, and frequently admonished his disciples

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"to worship the doctrine and the order alone". But he could not prevent idolatry dominating all "pure doctrine" after his entrance into Nirvana. Images of Buddha are legion. The various representations, although stylized and influenced by Greek art, have become idols. Gautama's followers have made out of him a kind of multi-god.

<sup>1</sup> Nida, Customs, pp.174-175.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Arvon, Le Bouddhisme, p.57.

Most Thai wear an image of Buddha on their body, either hung from a necklace or around the waist. These are imbued with special powers for bringing happiness, success in love, fertility, protection, and even for making the bearer invulnerable to bullets. The price varies according to the range of magical power attributed to the figures.

Statues of Buddha dominate temples and landmarks throughout the country. They are sacred and are not to be touched by laymen. Two Mormon missionaries suffered imprisonment for their impudence and flagrant disrespect in sitting on the head of a stone Buddha; they were deported for this outrageous act.<sup>1</sup>

Prayer as such is inconsistent with true Buddhist behaviour. "The true Buddhist prayer is meditation on what he feels he should become." Salvation as a personal quest needs no intervention from a transcendental source. Furthermore, as Buddha had dissolved his own ego on entering Nirvana, he is completely unable to hear prayer or to answer it, even if he would have ever claimed such god-like functions. The monks say that the act of praying creates a good disposition inside the believer which enables him to make more boun. Prayer used in this way is more like mental therapy, although the layman uttering it may be crying out for help.

### Spirits

The average Buddhist in a small town in Thailand is only vaguely aware of the importance of self-mastery by the denial of the ultimate reality of human existence. It is much more important for him to show respect for the spirit-house which stands in the yard, to buy a little patch of gold leaf to decorate his favorite Buddha.<sup>4</sup>

Spirit-houses, modeled after the style of Buddhist temples, are another dominant feature of Thai religion. They are placed in a certain position near the house which is to be protected so that no shadow will fall on them. Their gilded roofs shine in front of post-offices, banks, railway stations, hotels and almost all private homes..

<sup>1</sup> In June 1972 in the town of Nakhorn Suvan, Thailand.

<sup>2</sup> Eakin, Christian Approach, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Tambiah, Buddhism, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Nida, Customs, pp. 168 - 169.

Flowers and burning joss sticks are sacrificed to the guardian spirit.

Most Thai villages have two guardian spirits which are benevolent and connected to the temple; in fact, they sometimes reside on the temple grounds. A devout woman, after having fed the monks with rice, invariably turns round and places a lump of the same rice on a pole nearby to feed the spirits.

The belief in spirits, as spiritual beings with power over humans, is the motivating force in most religious behaviour. Spirits can both reward (through granting good harvests, many children, protection while travelling, etc.) or punish (through causing sickness, fainting, misfortune, nightmares, or death). But the most common element in the relationship with the spirits (phi i) is fear. The animistic practices can be broken down into three basic areas of focus: (1) MAGIC, dealing with those supernatural objects which are manipulated for the power they possess. (2) PHII (meaning ghost or spirit), where both punishment and rewards are derived. (3) DIVINATION, dealing with the practice of determining the future.<sup>1</sup>

Few households are without fetishes, which include such things as buffalo skulls, idol shelves, small bamboo objects, and prayers written by a priest and wrapped into a metal container. Most children receive an amulet soon after birth as protection against the phi i around them.

The word phi i can mean several things to a Thai. It can refer to a deceased person's soul-like after-essence; it can refer to the corpse itself; it can refer to the corpse oil or material used in black magic. The most predominant use, however, is that referring to the spirit or ghost of a deceased person.<sup>2</sup>

The malevolent or benevolent spirits can be grouped under: (1) The guardian spirits, benevolent; they watch over rice fields, houses, and communal life, yet are able to punish trespassers. (2) The nature spirits, malevolent; they reside in rivers, trees, etc., and must not be disturbed. They can demand pacifying sacrifices from the community. (3) The demon spirits, malevolent; they cause sickness, scare people, and possess them.

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<sup>1</sup> Gustafson, Syncretistic, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

The **ability** of the phi i to possess people is the most frightening aspect of animism. Not **only** mental disturbances, but sickness and death are attributed to such demon possession. Such a demon is **called phi i phob,**<sup>1</sup> and is able to "eat up **people**" (i.e., eat the spirit of the person so that he dies). Possession may take place with the accord of the male or female host who wants demon power **in** order to take revenge.

In much of the so-called **animist** world the souls of people are believed to **live** on in a kind of shadowy existence, terrifying people by appearing as ghosts, sending plagues if they are not properly conciliated, showering blessings of abundant rains and good crops if they are **appeased,** and always standing there in the shadows of the spirit world to speak in dreams and send omens of **coming events.**<sup>2</sup>

Scenes of exorcism are frequent. The spirit doctor **will** take up the case of the patient against the invading demon and try to find out its name and its host. The latter can be a living or dead person. After the name has been revealed, the **demon's** power **is** broken. Purification of the patient takes place through **different** rituals. The **host, sometimes** a stranger to the village and often an outsider, **will** be exposed to the wrath of **the family** and forfeits **all** protection of the community. In Laos he is declared persona non grata.

Buddhist rituals are generally kept apart from the spirit worship and festivals. The monks are not allowed to participate in the offerings to the phi i. Yet there is one festival where Buddhism and animism are interwoven -- the rocket festival, addressed to **the** spirits of the swamps and rivers, is aimed at **invoking rain.** While the rockets are made by the monks themselves and stored in the temple grounds, the monks are not permitted to walk in the procession in which the rockets are paraded through the streets accompanied by **groups** playing musical instruments. The monks, however, chant blessings on the returning crowd as the rockets are brought back to the temple for **launching.**

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<sup>1</sup> Tambiah, Buddhism, p. 271.

<sup>2</sup> Nida, Customs, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Tambiah, Buddhism, p. 285.

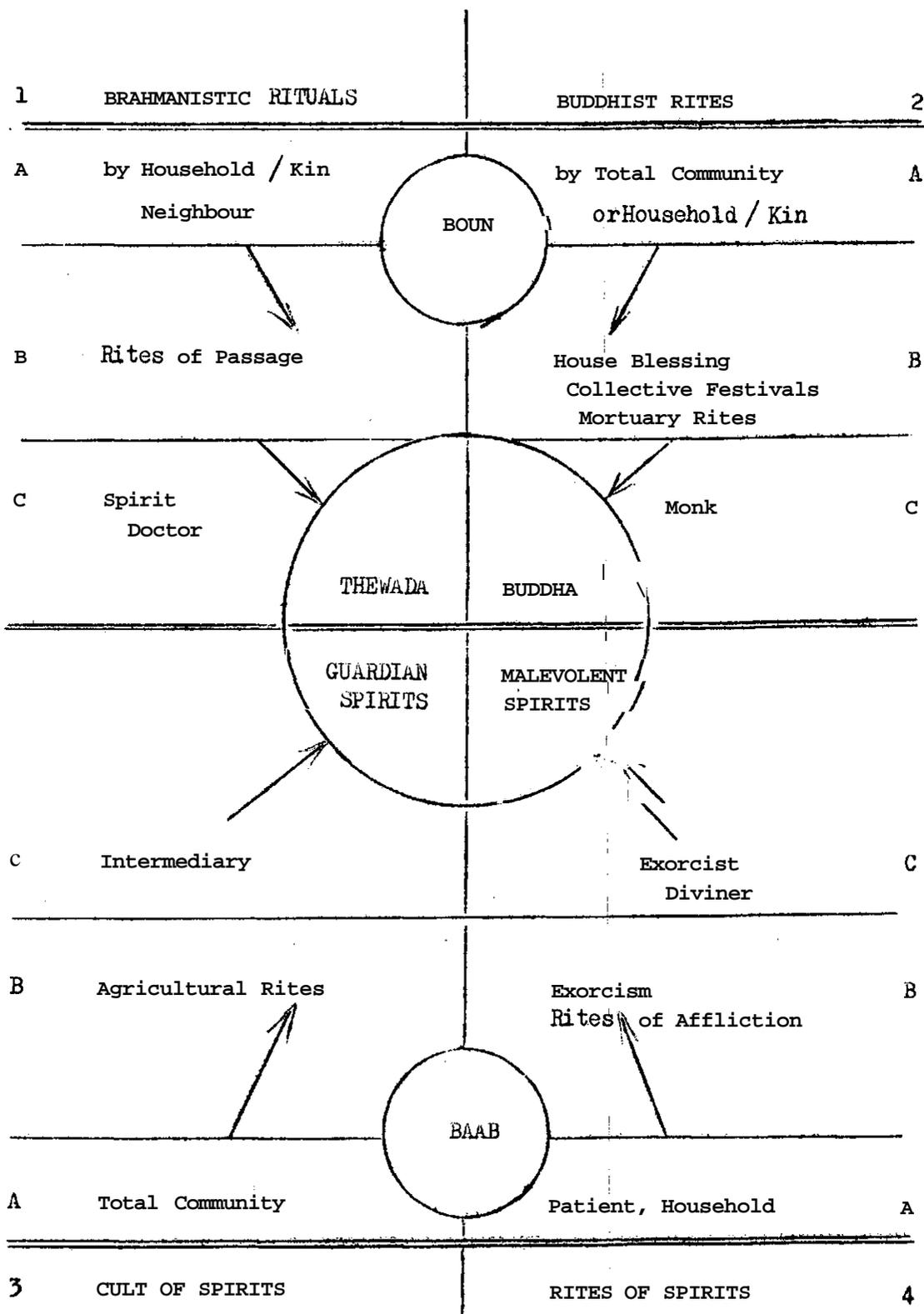


Fig. 6--Diagram of Syncretistic Religious Behaviour<sup>1</sup>

- A - Social participation in B
- B - Rites conducted by C
- C - Ritual specialists

- 1 - For prosperity and orderly progression in life
- 2 - For good death and good rebirth
- 3 - For protection and fertility
- 4 - Bad death and bad or delayed rebirth

<sup>1</sup>Tambiah, Buddhism, p. 338 (Adapted).

Evaluation of the Place of Religion  
in Thai Society

On all accounts, Thai Buddhism is a vibrant and popular religion. Some use it as the handmaid of nationalism--every Thai a buddhist! Cease to be a Buddhist and you are no longer Thai! It is made to function as the unifying factor among the different races.<sup>1</sup> Others use it as a shield against the growing danger of communist domination or against the western power structures.

Religion and Social Life

The use of honorific language together with polite behaviour is drilled into children from a tender age. But the "high language" used towards superiors and the royal family is the religious language as well. Furthermore, the ecclesiastical hierachy (the Sangha)<sup>2</sup> is largely the creation of the political government and reflects the divisions of civil jurisdiction. The Thai social-political hierachy is clearly structured, and often so interwoven with the religious that there seems to be just one.

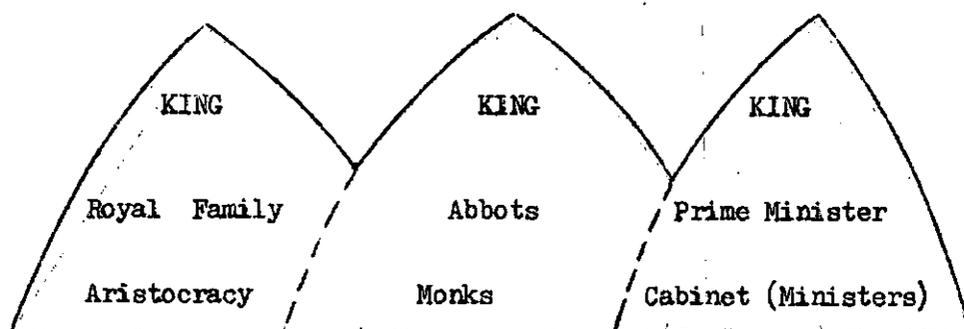


Fig.7--The King as the head of the social, religious and political hierarchies.

While a monk is considered to be above human level and the Patriarch of Thailand receives homage from the king himself, yet on leaving the monkhood a Thai can still ascend in position through entering government service.

<sup>1</sup> A large Muslim population in South Thailand, however, rejects Buddhism, as do many of the tribes in the North.

<sup>2</sup> Child to parent, servant to master, pupil to teacher, civilian to officials, laymen to monks, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Tambiah, Buddhism, p. 76.

### Militant Buddhism

The festivals are filled with the people's love for fun, rhythm and colour. They turn the very centers of Buddhist learning into temple fairs. Yet the priests are not inactive in their religious duty.<sup>1</sup>

Buddhist priests rally young people in... Sunday Schools and discussion groups. With hymns such as "Onward Buddhist Soldiers" and "Silent Night, Holy Night" (depicting the birth of Buddha), they diligently instruct the people in social responsibilities and new ways of earning merit.<sup>1</sup>

In a small town a teacher published a tract written against Christianity. He explained that since Christ was born after Buddha his religion is younger, and that Buddha must be superior to Christ because he came from a royal family, whereas Christ was the son of a carpenter. Radio programs explain that Jesus had a white skin and brings a white man's religion.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, a certain amount of tolerance to all other religions, Christianity included, but where the Gospel has begun to make inroads much intolerance is displayed in contemporary Buddhism.

In Thailand the Buddhists have published the "sayings of Buddha" in Thai (to compete with the New Testament) have organized flood relief (formerly unheard of), have attempted to introduce hymn singing, and in some instances have tried elaborate initiation ceremonies (to compete with Christian confirmation and baptism).<sup>3</sup>

Nida uses the above as an illustration of cultural borrowing and cultural change, but it is at the same time the expression of a reaction against Christian Competition. The writer knows of one instance of a Buddhist monk forbidding a missionary entrance to a village in North Thailand.

### Weaknesses in Buddhist Doctrine

The assertion that the law of kam is the exclusive principle by which to explain the universe, the absence of a creator and of the human spiritual personality are basic errors of doctrine.<sup>4</sup> In the field of human relationships, major weaknesses are in the low estimate of

<sup>1</sup>Nida, Customs, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup>Monks are usually the speakers on this particular type of program.

<sup>3</sup>Nida, Customs, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup>Eakin, Christian Approach, p. 63.

human life and body; of women and children<sup>1</sup>; of social thinking and responsibility.

The excessive emphasis on "self-salvation" fosters selfishness. The teaching on rebirth leads to fatalism and a dislike for making decisions. The lack of charity is evident: many hospitals have been founded by missionaries; lepers were first cared for by Christians; relief work for refugees is largely financed by Christian communities. The greatest weakness though is the lack of a sure answer in matters of salvation; sin and merits; the absence of help in confrontation with death, sickness and the powers of nature. All this contributes to the fact that Buddhism is only a veneer in the religious life in Thailand and Laos.

### Basic Animism

It is not Buddhist doctrine that touches the felt needs of the Thai people, but animism!

Thus while in form the Thai may be called Buddhists they are in fact animists; animists who have over the years assimilated both Buddhism and Brahmanism into their religious system, a system to become the formal expression of Thai religion while at the content level it has kept the old animistic tradition predominating and modifying the content of the assimilated religion. (Italics mine).<sup>3</sup>

This surprising fact is the reversal of the initial statement that "Buddhism has a strong syncretistic tendency" in its absorption of other religions. Observations bear out the above quotation. Indeed, fear of spirits is the most common religious feeling people have. While missionaries justly hold to the uniqueness of the Gospel" with its uncompromising character, they need to study more "the place where it itches." Christ must be set in relation to the actual needs of the people, i.e. animism, not to their supposed beliefs, i.e., Buddhism.

...The church needs to begin to acknowledge the dual fact of (1) the highly syncretistic nature of Thai religion and (2) its basically animistic orientation. ...It must take the form of an intensive search for a true knowledge of the religious behaviour of the Thai as practiced by them....<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Children are cherished, but easily parted with.

<sup>2</sup> USAID and other government sources.

<sup>3</sup> Gustafson, Syncretistic, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

## Chapter 1

### HISTORY OF CHURCH PLANTING METHODS USED IN SOUTH LAOS AND NORTHEAST THAILAND

How **did** the missionaries in Thailand and Laos use the weaknesses of the **Thai religion** as an open door through which to enter with the Gospel? This is the basic question to be **answered** in **this** chapter as we look at the past **work** of the Swiss Brethren Mission **Evangelique** in South Laos and the Christian and Missionary **Alliance** in Northeast Thailand.

#### Work of the Mission Evangelique in South Laos

In 1902 the first Protestant missionary to Laos left Switzerland. Mr. Gabriel Contesse had a strong **call** from God. He, his wife and their **little** son laid down their **lives** for the Lord in Laos.<sup>1</sup> All the early Brethren missionaries accepted the hardships of **living** in a primitive **land**, isolated from home church, **family** and friends. Among the pioneers **Charles** Audeta stands out as the Bible <sup>2</sup> translator. He did the major part of this work **alone**. The early Christians were grounded on the Word of God and had a good knowledge of the Old and New Testaments,

In order to compare the different stages of mission work more accurately, it **will** be presented in four sections--**Evangelism, Discipling, Teaching and Church Government**.

#### Evangelism

We understand evangelism **to** be witnessing to a non-Christian in order to bring him to Christ. Evangelism continues until the hearer understands enough to be able to make a **decision**, either to accept **or** to reject the **message**.

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<sup>1</sup> They died of cholera in 1908. Charles Corthay, *Le Laos*, p.47.

<sup>2</sup> The Lao New Testament was published in 1926, the Old Testament in 1934, printed in Marseille, France.

The small number of Brethren missionaries<sup>1</sup> majored in spreading the Gospel throughout the southern part of Laos, often together with Lao Christians. Preaching from the Bible, using posters and following up old contacts, they were able to establish twelve churches

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in the villages and three provincial towns.

The most responsive segment of society was among the people<sup>2</sup> accused of being phii phob, living hosts to demons. Declared persona non grata by their community, they had to flee for their lives and found refuge in the foreigner's house. Would Jesus turn them away? It was not difficult to lead such outcasts to him. The stigma of the phii phob remains with the church today, though many of their lives were genuinely transformed.

One method of evangelism used widely was medical work. In 1909 the four missionaries then on the field treated 533 sick people from 53 different villages.<sup>4</sup> Such was the need for medical services in Laos that most of the missionaries, with or without medical training, were expected to give diagnosis and treatment to those who came for help, some of them with remarkable success. Out of the work among lepers a well-established church grew. There are approximately 150 baptized members in that church today. In recent years a clinic run by an American Brethren missionary<sup>5</sup> has opened up many new villages to the Gospel and attracted people to this "religion of compassion".

In 1956 Gospel Recordings Incorporated began recording the tribal languages of Eastern Laos. The little records, carrying gospel messages and songs, were used widely, being played over and over again on sturdy hand-wound playbacks. Because of the very low literacy rate this means of leaving the Gospel with the people was very well adapted. It is still being used today by means of the cassettephone.

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<sup>1</sup>Seven missionaries by 1920; since then hardly ever more than 12.

<sup>2</sup>This was by 1946. Jeanne Decorvet and Georges Rochat, L'Appel du Laos, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Decorvet and Rochat, L'Appel du Laos, p. 50.

<sup>5</sup>Leslie Chopard of Christian Missions in Many Lands.

The Brethren missionaries built a recording studio in Savannakhet in 1964. The Laos Christian Radio Committee (formed by the Swiss Brethren and Overseas Missionary Fellowship in South Laos and the Christian and Missionary Alliance in North Laos) supplied messages to the Far East Broadcasting Company for broadcast twice daily over their shortwave radio transmitter in the Philippines. These fifteen minute messages are heard throughout Laos and Thailand. Lao church elders and Bible school students and teachers preach, sing and act on the programs.

There is a fair amount of Christian literature in the Lao language, produced in conjunction with the Overseas Missionary Fellowship and the Christian and Missionary Alliance. This literature program is handicapped by small sales due to the low standard of reading of those who are literate and the low literacy rate country-wide. With more government schools opening each year the literacy rate is increasing. Tracts and books are becoming increasingly more effective. Correspondence courses on Matthew and Mark have been available for many years, but partly due to the poor postal facilities they have not been effective as a tool for evangelism. Rather they have been used as study material for Christians and Bible school students.

Together, Overseas Missionary Fellowship and Brethren missionaries planned a three-year evangelistic thrust beginning in 1966. Teams of Lao Christians and missionaries would visit the rural and town churches in the first year to give in-depth teaching for revival and training for evangelism which would encourage Christians to reach out to neighbouring villages with the new life they had received. The following year a number of teams were to be formed from the different churches to evangelize areas where there is no Christian witness. The third year was designated for town evangelism when concentrated evangelistic efforts would be made in the important provincial towns. In the actual outworking of this plan the first stage took two years to accomplish. There was evidence of new life in many of the churches and many were responding to the challenge to evangelize the nearby villages.

USAID has financed many town and village school buildings and provided materials and equipment as well as encouraging a teacher training program.

It was at this time that the leading missionary in the venture went on furlough and there was nobody with the vision and know-how to take up the leadership. This was most unfortunate. The writer thinks that the plan would have led to a more effective work than other methods tried up to that time because of the long-range planning leading to the involvement of the whole Christian population in the evangelistic task and thus to continuous growth in the churches.

The method of evangelism closest to the Laotian culture and which has produced the best results is household evangelism through housemeetings. Visiting relatives, chatting with friends and neighbours, is a very important part of the social life of this country. Whenever a missionary takes the time to visit someone, the neighbours come and listen as well. The veranda of a house may be packed with people in a short time. The house-meeting includes the whole family, but is aimed at the parents. This presents a nucleus for the future church. A much stronger church is formed by Christian family units than by individual believers who still belong to heathen families.

### Discipling

Discipling is the follow-up of the new believers and training for discipleship. He must be ready to accept the authority and teaching of Jesus and to attach himself to His person as a follower.<sup>1</sup> This involves much more than just regular attendance at the Sunday service. The new convert must have a "pace-setter,"<sup>2</sup> an older brother in Christ who will lead him into the secrets of personal Bible reading, private, and common prayer, memorization of Scripture and witnessing to others. The first step on this road is baptism. The Brethren churches require baptism before the new convert is allowed to partake in the Holy Communion.

Because of repeated regressions and of serious deceptions the missionaries have become very careful in the administration of baptism. They do not baptize until a long period of time has proved that the convert walks as a Christian.

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<sup>1</sup> A Symposium, Facing Facts in Modern Missions, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur F. Glasser, "Follow-up", p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Corthay, Le Laos, p. 25.

Perhaps it is because of this that the meaning of baptism has been **misunderstood** in the sense that it is not regarded as the first step on the way of **discipleship**, but rather the last step leading to full admission into the church, and to heaven itself. This **misunderstanding** can be corrected by a vigorous effort to disciple the new Christians. There was very little **post-baptismal care** given on an individual level in the Swiss mission work due to the very few missionaries on the field at one time.

### Teaching

Whereas **discipling** must be on a **person-to-person** basis, the teaching ministry is for the church as a whole. Every effective work of God must have the two main activities of **kerigmo** and **didache**, proclamation and **instruction**.<sup>1</sup> The Swiss Brethren missionaries realized the need for **instruction** and teaching. **Mr. Audetat** started courses of Bible study for elders, organized a Sunday school for children, and **wrote** a book on **Christian** living and doctrine, all by **1911**.<sup>2</sup> Before the war a **Bible** school was run on the Boloven Plateau for adults. Those attending were encouraged to move into unreached areas with the purpose of **establishing** new **assemblies** of **believers**.

Since the second world war the average age of the students has been **17** years; the emphasis, therefore, has changed from training **evangelists** to teaching young people. **Although** many of those trained are fine young people with a burden to serve the Lord, they **normally** return to their own churches where, because of their youth, they are not given any **authority** nor asked to teach apart from running meetings for the children. Because of this lack of ministry, many have "**cooled off**" in their love for Christ and desire to serve Him. There are, however, the exceptions who, at this writing, are having fruitful teaching and evangelistic ministries. The **earlier** Bible schools were administered and taught solely by **missionaries**. Today the school is administered by a combined committee of nationals and **missionaries**.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Brow, Twenty Century Church, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Decorvet and Rochat, L'Appel du Laos, p. 51.

The Director and a good proportion of the teaching staff are Lao.

For training church leaders there is an annual week of studies and discussion to which **all** elders and leaders are invited. In one area leadership weekends have been **held** monthly during which simple messages are worked over **with** the missionary and then preached to their own groups during the **following** month. In another area a class to train preachers has been held **periodically**, and an evening Bible **school** class has **been** held for local men desiring this training. A start has been made at **int-**roducing extension courses on a simple level in some villages for training leaders and **potential** leaders in their home situations.

Perhaps the weakest point of the teaching program in the Lao churches has been the method by which the Bible is taught to the Christians as a whole. Because preachers are rotated Sunday by Sunday there is no continuity of teaching, Bible knowledge and Christian practice of by far the greater majority of Christians is of very **low** standard. Most Christians do not read and study the Bible for **themselves**. One cause for this may be the very **low** rate of literacy but there are few mid-week Bible study and prayer meetings for them either. Recently, however, a teaching program on cassettes has been developed by the O.M.F. In addition to entire books of Scripture there are **excellent** messages by Lao preachers and music tapes for teaching hymns.

An annual youth camp has been instrumental in teaching Christian young people and has been a means of evangelism among them. Many have dedicated their **lives** to serve the Lord at these camps.

#### Church Government

The relationship of the missionary to the young churches is important. How much decision making is done by the Lao elders? How much **responsibility** do they shoulder for **dealing** with finance and discipline? The Brethren missionaries **realised** that **time** is needed for the churches to understand their **responsibilities**. Yet, as the decision making process in Lao/Thai society is so much more involved, and therefore much slower than the Western one, the missionary often assumed the place of "**top man**" in deciding issues, taking the role of authority equivalent to pastor or leading elder. This role by the foreign missionary has tended to strangle any budding initiative

within the churches.<sup>1</sup>

The **leadership** of the local church or assembly is in the hands of a group of elders. In theory they are elected by the **congregation**. Yet the election process is **sometimes misunderstood**. Often it is a man's **popularity** or the power of his relatives rather than his **spiritual qualifications** that are considered important to the people. To correct this elders are sometimes **chosen** by the existing body of elders and the missionaries **and** then presented to the church. Questions **relating** to the election and replacement of elders have **not** been **clarified**.<sup>2</sup> The elders are all working men, mostly farmers; therefore, their free time **only** is given to the **pastoral ministry**.

In earlier years the finance of a local assembly was managed by the local elders. In **1962** a Central **Evangelistic Fund** was set up to support **evangelists** and each group was encouraged to send offerings to this fund. Most **assemblies** have two offerings, one **for** their local use and the other for the central **fund**. This fund administered by a Lao committee, has created a **greater** sense of **communion** among the different **groups**. It is common practice for any church that has some special need, such as putting up a new **building**, to **send** out an appeal for help to **all** sister churches. As tithing is rare, the sums handled by the church treasurer are **small**. Yet in more than one case the temptation to misuse church money was **too** great for the men involved. A major **congregation** split over how to discipline the elder in question after he had used church money **for** personal ventures and lost it. This split remains to the present **day**.

This leads to the question of church discipline. This is an extremely sensitive area where the Western missionary can do much damage. Our reaction to **what** is "**sinful**" is very different from a Lao/Thai reaction. To **cause** "loss of face" is **unforgivable**. The most common way of disciplining a church member **who** has fallen into sin is to exclude him from **the** weekly **ceremony** of Communion. This has not always proved successful. The writer

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<sup>1</sup> In Lao/Thai society there is always a "top man" who takes the decisions. He does not delegate his authority, even when going away for **weeks**.

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Christen, "Reflexions of the Spiritual Conditions of the Church in South Laos and **Suggestions**," p. 4.

does not know of any other method used by the Brethren to bring a Christian back to repentance. Measures of discipline are applied very rarely.

Work of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Northeast Thailand.

Protestant missionaries entered Thailand in 1828. The early years were difficult, not only because travel and living conditions exacted a heavy toll of time and energy, but also because the initial reaction to foreign missionaries was cautious and sometimes hostile. Three mission societies started work in Thailand; two of them withdrew after 36 years of fruitless preaching. The Presbyterian mission remaining baptized its first Thai convert after 19 years of work.<sup>1</sup>

Why was there such a difficult beginning? The official opposition to Christianity was led by the king. In 1832 a royal edict prohibited all distribution of Christian books. In 1851 four converts were jailed for being employed by foreigners. Then a fire destroyed the mission property, together with the entire second edition of the Thai New Testament. Only in 1878, with the pronouncement of religious freedom by King Chulalongkorn, did the opposition cease.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) moved into Northeast Thailand in 1929. This area covers one-third of the land mass of Thailand. By the outbreak of World War II there were six stations open, a Bible School at Khon Kaen, and 85 baptized believers.

Although it was the official policy of the C&MA since 1927 that national workers not be hired by the mission, yet in the beginning of the work this was quite a widespread practice. It was also done in Thailand as a temporary means to get the Gospel out until the churches would be able to support their own pastor-evangelist.<sup>4</sup>

This "temporary measure" continued for 28 years, that is, until 1955 when the church became an autonomous body. By 1952 there were 12 stations with a total of 53 missionaries. Since that time there have never been less than 40 on the field. The missionaries were well

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<sup>1</sup>Harvey Boese, "The C&MA Work in East Thailand"

<sup>2</sup>ib id.

<sup>3</sup>Then only five million people, now almost twelve million.

<sup>4</sup>Boese, "C&MA Work"

placed strategically in provincial capitals and the larger market towns. The initial vision was to establish strong town churches.

### Evangelism

Evangelism was carried out mainly through distribution of tracts and open air meetings. The attempt to place a Gospel of John in every home was never completed. In 1969 a large tent was purchased for evangelistic campaigns and Bible conferences.

Using the Far East Broadcasting Company's shortwave station in Manila, Philippines, radio evangelism was started in 1951. Many obstacles were encountered in attempting to use the local Thai medium wave stations; in recent years, however, the Good News has been sent out over several local stations. j

In 1955 the Light of Life Correspondence Course was launched and reached all seventy-one provinces of Thailand. This was a simple course in the Gospel of John with twenty-three lessons. By the end of 1961 nine courses were offered and in that year 632 decisions were recorded from all over Thailand. In seven years (from 1962 to 1969) of reaching all over Thailand, it had enrolled 27,861 students. l

Youth conferences have been instrumental in bringing some to the Lord. They were begun on an annual basis and originally covered the whole of Northeast Thailand; they were later reduced to local ones.

Leprosy work, started in 1951, proved to be a responsive field for the Gospel. In three years there were 504 Leprosy Christians and a Bible school was opened specifically for patients. The church among those with leprosy was kept on entirely indigenous lines. No nationals were supported with foreign funds. These churches were stronger than the "well" ones, but there was no steady growth unless they reached out to well people.

### Discipling

New converts need to be disciplined immediately. Due to the higher literacy rate and the excellent teaching tapes produced by the Voice of Peace studio in Chiangmai discipling is more easily done in Thailand than in Laos.

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l Boese, "C&MA Work"

With regard to **baptism,**

On this field the work "inquirer" designates a person who has **prayed** the penitent's prayer and is in the process of being prepared for baptism. The generally accepted **policy** on this field is not to press **people** to **pray** until the personal worker is satisfied that the seeking **soul** has an adequate knowledge of the rudiments of salvation. It has been our **policy** not to baptize too hastily nor prolong the interim unnecessarily. In all cases on **intelligent** effort is made to be satisfied that the **applicant** for baptism is spiritually prepared for this **significant step.**<sup>1</sup>

It is the normal practice to introduce new converts to a nearby church so that they have **Christian fellowship**<sup>2</sup> from the **beginning**. Many churches have their own **pastor**, trained at the **Khon Keen Bible school**. But the **missionary** still makes periodic visits to them, as **well** as to the more isolated Christians. With **several** good booklets for new Christians and cassettes on the Christian life, young Christians have many helps for Christian growth.

#### Teaching

Two Bible schools<sup>3</sup> **train** young men and women for **full-time** service. The C&MA has produced a wide range of literature, much of which is particularly aimed at teaching Christians. Their Sunday school material is excellent. Yet most Christians meet only for Sunday **service**. There are few **mid-week** Bible study or prayer **meetings**. Sunday school for **all** ages is unknown. Youth meetings seem to be geared to evangelism rather than to teaching Christian youth. "A Pastor's Institute" was initiated in **1963** at both Bible schools. This three day (*italics mine*) refresher course for the leadership of the church has continued every year **since.**<sup>4</sup> The Bible schools run short term courses for those unable to attend more than two months. A new **development** is Theological Education by Extension Bible teaching and short sermons given by Thai pastors. These lessons are recorded on cassettes and **supplied** with a set of notes and questions to help those **willing** to learn. They are in demand and response to them is good.

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<sup>1</sup>Boese, "C&MA Work" j

<sup>2</sup>A total of 59 churches in 1970.

<sup>3</sup>One only for lepers, the other for "well" people,

<sup>4</sup>Boese, "C&MA" Work.

## Church Government

In 1956 the Gospel Church of Thailand became independent from the mission. This is an association of the churches founded by the C&MA and registered with the government. The president and the committee members are Thai. They appoint the local pastors and do all the administrative work. Each church is financially autonomous, but a contribution is sent to the Central Fund for the support of new pastors and evangelists, etc. Church members do not yet tithe; indeed some give as little as one percent of their income.

Church discipline is exercised by the local group. This may consist of exclusion from the Communion Table for a period of time. The disciplining of a pastor is in the hands of the President. Leaders shy away from applying discipline in this society where "loss of face" counts for so much.

A Pentecostal sect, "Jesus Only", has split many churches. They have started their own meetings, often in the same village. This has caused a setback to the C&MA work and much heartache.

### Evaluation of These Church Planting Methods

It is evident that over the years many men and women have labored sacrificially for the sake of the Kingdom of God both in Thailand and Laos. Many have laid down their lives. Many have prayed and planned in order that the Thai race might hear the Gospel. Yet we have not yet seen a great turning to the Lord.

## Evangelism

Both missions have set up programs for evangelism. Through many means many have heard the Gospel, although the greater part of those activities could more accurately be termed "pre-evangelism". Many of the methods used come from the West, e.g., tracting, tent-meetings, film-evangelism, etc.

Of the early Christians it is recorded that they evangelized (Acts 8:4-11, 20) or spoke the Word (Acts 11:19), that is they were engaged in speaking to others about the good news of God in Christ Jesus with the intention of informing and persuading them. This was not their command, this was the outflow of their lives. Evangelism was not staged or programmed. It happened. It was a spontaneous sharing with others

of the Good News of the discovered salvation in Christ Jesus, the Lord. **Evangelizing** is more than speaking **about** personal **experience...It means...** to explain the Gospel to others **and** persuade them **to accept the precious gift** of God by believing in Jesus **Christ.**<sup>1</sup>

This was the normal thing for a **Christian** to do, and was expected of every person in the church as his **life-long** occupation,

**Evangelism** is the ever-increasing glow of an ever-maturing life in **Christ,--it becomes the full business** of a **full-grown man in Christ.**<sup>2</sup>

Evangelistic campaigns and special youth meetings are helpful to reach people, and have **their** place, but **if** they cause the national Christians to feel that one **cannot** evangelize unless there is a special meeting, they are defeating their object. Each new Convert must be taught how to **evangelize** and be **encouraged** to share Christ with others **in order to actually win souls** for the Lord! If they do not learn this, they **will** be barren and useless for the Lord and the church.

We often limit ourselves in our understanding of **evangelism...Primitive evangelism** was by no means mere proclamation and **exhortation:** it included able **intellectual** argument, **skillful** study of the Scriptures, **careful, closely** reasoned **teaching** and patient argument. "You have **filled Jerusalem** with your **teaching**" (Acts 5:28). The apostles looked for faith **which was self-commitment on evidence,** not a leap in the dark.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident, therefore, that a **different** approach should be made to the initial **spreading** of the Gospel and the **bringing** of men and women to **Christ.** Certainly the work to **convict** and convert is that of the Holy Spirit, but at the same time a method must be found that **will** utilize all the Christians in **continuous evangelism.** Missionaries and nationals **alike** need to walk so in step with their Saviour and Lord that it **is** the natural thing to witness and **lead others** to Him.

Basically, "evangelism" means to **tell** the Good News, but taken in its New Testament **context** we see that it was never a mere **proclamation;** it was preaching with the purpose of persuading men and women **to** repent and turn to the Lord. "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men,"<sup>4</sup> wrote Paul. Consequently, the distrib-

George W. Peters, Saturation Evangelism, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> ibid., p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church, p. 160.

<sup>4</sup> 11 Cor. 5:11.

ution of tracts and literature, radio preaching, large campaigns, etc., are not evangelism in the New Testament sense, Preaching **must** lead to personal **confrontation**, and personal **confrontation** must **bring** a person to the place of decision, either for or against Christ.

### Discipling

Discipling is the essential teaching and follow-up of the new convert until he is **rooted** and grounded in Christ and the Word. True **evangelism** leads men and women to Christ with a clear **understanding** of His Work on the Cross and in their **lives**, and of the standards required of a Christian. Discipling equips the new Christian for active service and commits him to dedicated **witnessing**.

Discipleship involves the readiness to accept the authority and teaching of Jesus, and to attach **one-self** to His person as a devout and honest follower...  
 .To commit oneself so **fully** to Christ that He becomes paramount in personal plans and life, is **discipleship**. Discipleship involves **evangelisation** because as each imparts knowledge to another and undertakes the responsibility of teaching him, the message is spread from person to **person**....One **consecrated follower** of Christ, soundly converted and thoroughly trained in Christian thinking and ethic, is worth a dozen committees... it is, therefore, **unsound policy** to treat **unbelievers** as if they were already **Christians**.<sup>1</sup>

It is **equally** dangerous to treat new **believers** as disciples; time must be taken to teach them. **Brow**, in Twenty Century Church, speaks of the **close** connection between evangelism and teaching in this way:

Kerigma and didache--**proclamation** and **instruction**--the evangelist helping men to choose Christ and teachers **discipling** them to think **straight**--these are the two basic activities in the Acts and of every **effective** (italics mine) work of God today. Evangelism and **teaching** are the **essential** gifts for building the church, since without them no church is possible.<sup>2</sup>

Baptism is the first outward act of obedience for the new believer to take. Both missions teach **adult** believers' baptism, but the practice varies. In Laos the converts wait for a period to prove **their** faith. This is an attempt to sort out genuine seekers from those who want to become Christians for other **motives**. Often interested persons **will** be brought to the church by Christian friends. After the service they **will** be questioned as to their understanding of the step they **are** taking and why they want to be a Christian. They **will** pray a prayer of

<sup>1</sup> Symposium, Facing Facts, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Brow, Twenty Century Church, p. 67.

penitence and will be accepted as "learners." They will not be baptized until they have shown the genuineness of their profession, e.g. through regular attendance at church, breaking with all merit making and animistic rituals, etc. This time of waiting varies from six months to as long as three years! Some never take the step.

In Laos full membership depends on baptism. Therefore, many who attend church are not members and have no power to vote. Other requirements for membership are (1)

Recommendation by the elders or a missionary. (2) Destruction of all fetishes. (3) Public prayer of repentance. (4) Confession of faith.

In Northeast Thailand the convert also has to wait before being baptized. Yet many times we have found that they are baptized on profession of faith. Young people attending youth camps are sometimes baptized right there at the camp. These then return to their home area, often as isolated Christians and not sufficiently followed up.

There is a wide divergence of opinion on the question as to when a new convert should be baptized.

The standards of admission into full membership must be carefully and prayerfully thought through....After public confession of faith, he is enrolled as "one who desires to enter" and places himself under instruction. After not less than six months, he comes before the session and is questioned as to his family, his faith, and his Christian experience...regularity of attendance at the service is also noted....When he shows evidence of real understanding, he is enrolled as "inquirer"...and takes at a public service a vow of obedience and loyalty to the Lord. Not less than six months after this is he eligible to be examined for baptism, provided that his conduct has been according to Christian standards....

This method has been practiced widely in the past, but its wisdom is questioned today. Alex Smith, Coordinator of Evangelism for the O.M.F. field in Central Thailand, suggests baptism on profession of faith, but states that by then it must have already been made clear to the convert what is involved in his becoming a Christian. In this case post-baptismal care is crucial, including a vigorous follow up program to teach the converts and weld them into a church. A recent happening in Korat emphasizes this need. Seventy people were converted at the city campaign three years ago; almost all have been lost to the church because of lack of follow up.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Soltau, Missions at the Crossroads, p.73.

Baptism signified entry into the Christian society. Baptism was understood and expressed in a variety of ways in apostolic days. It was the mark of incorporation within the body of Christ. It was the mark of purification--of justification, the bath of rebirth, regeneration. The mark of the New Covenant.... The important thing is that they all made it abundantly clear that baptism and conversion belong together: it is the sacrament of the once-for-allness of incorporation into Christ.<sup>1</sup>

It is evident that the Thai race is characterized by a certain amount of inertia. Therefore, whenever a Thai takes a public stand in baptism it involves a real decision to follow Christ completely. Yet even after such a public act he may turn back to his old ways of idolatry and spirit worship when in trouble, unless he is truly born again and carefully followed up so that he knows what to do when testings come.

The baptismal life not only involved holy living and Christian life, but also worship and fellowship, witness and instruction. Baptism set the seal on conversion in every way, individual, corporate, ethical, educational and theological. Conversion, baptism and the new life, at least as far as adults were concerned, were inseparable.<sup>2</sup>

#### Church Government

In Laos the power of decision is theoretically in the hands of the congregation, but as the Lao do not like to take decisions, they refer to someone "higher up". Consequently, the decisions are left to the missionary or elders.

The less power an ordinary member has, the lower the standard of membership tends to be. The act of admission to voting privileges in a local congregation is in any case distinct from adult baptism, which is usually regarded as the sign of admission into the universal church.<sup>3</sup>

It is true also that the less voice a member has in the use of his offering, the less he will give. This is one of the reasons for the very poor rate of giving of the Christians both in Thailand and Laos.

Offerings in Laos are used partly for the local Church's own building and repairs, partly for the Central Evangelistic Fund (which is used to pay for Bible school teachers and for the travel expenses of "evangelists" or teachers visiting the congregations. The percentage used for direct evangelism is very little. In Northeast Thai-

<sup>1</sup>Green, Evangelism, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>3</sup>Brow, Twenty Century Church, p. 33.

land most of the Central Fund is designated for travel expenses for national evangelists (who preach in different churches), and to the Bible school. In the Ubon area the pastors are partially supported by the local offerings and supplement this by making small ricefields.

Although the missionaries of both countries agree with the principle of indigenous churches, so far much of the finance comes from the West, either through gifts from overseas groups or through the missionaries themselves who use their tithe in the support of the Bible school or other projects. "Today the conception is that the nationals administer the funds sent them from abroad."<sup>1</sup> Very often the missionary remains the final decision maker and the instigator of new ideas and programs. Much of the preaching in the churches is done by him.

From a critical analysis of the situation in Laos, prepared in 1971 by one of the Brethren missionaries, several important points emerge.

If we can bless God for the church of Jesus Christ in South Laos with its faithful and dedicated members, elders of worth, a few evangelists in His service, and teachers in Bible school, we must, however, admit that generally the church is weak, lacks vigor, lacks Bible knowledge, and lacks zeal to gather together and to witness....<sup>2</sup>

He mentions the following factors as causes for a lack in church growth:<sup>3</sup>

1. Many professing believers come to Jesus Christ for medical or material reasons without first having a real conviction of sin followed by repentance.
2. Newly professing believers, not having been sufficiently taught when receiving Christ into their lives become nominal Christians.
3. Too much sin and compromise are tolerated in the local church. Some pagan customs and influences are not cast off.
4. There is an absence of a systematic teaching of the Bible, Christian doctrine and discipline.
5. There is an insufficiency of qualified and trained elders.

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<sup>1</sup> Comment to the author by George Heckendorf, C&MA missionary in Northeast Thailand.

<sup>2</sup> Christen, "Churches in Laos", p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> This is a summary of some of his points.

6. There are no pastors who are well-trained and totally devoted to a pastoral or teaching ministry.

In regard to a pastoral ministry, Mr. Christen writes:

In a context like in Laos, it is necessary to not only have men with spiritual gifts, but also to have men well-trained academically for the well-being of the church. . . . I think that a purely "brethren" system does not seem to be too well adapted to a tribal (and Lao) context. This does not seem favourable to a rapid growth of the churches. A pastoral ministry. . . seems to be necessary and vital. In fact, this is usually the work of a missionary who is involved in this kind of ministry. If this is the case, should we not aim to train brothers who would be able in some way to do the same kind of work? |

This is written by one who is himself a Brethren! He courageously points to the fact that the type of church government used in a developed country where the congregation can read and knows the Bible, may not work out in an undeveloped country.

Commenting on the work in Northeast Thailand in a personal interview in June 1972, the Rev. Harvey Boese summarized some of the reasons for the lack of church growth:

1. The "Jesus Only" sect split several of the churches in 1965-66.
2. Church buildings and property were improved but souls were not saved; there was a reduction in fervency and enthusiasm.
3. Pastors took over the churches and the people left the evangelising to him.
4. Missionaries were spread out too thinly.
5. Almost all the churches are in the rural areas. The few churches there are in the cities seem to have little activity.
6. Christians moved to other areas.
7. It seemed as if the climate for evangelism and church growth in the middle sixties grew less favourable.

The writer does not agree with all of these reasons. He suggests that the main reasons for lack of church growth were two: (1) The C&MA placed most of their missionaries in specialized jobs instead of evangelism, church planting and training lay-leaders by example. (2) They lacked a plan to mobilize the Christians in witnessing and soul-winning.

In a paper prepared for the Church Growth Seminar

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<sup>1</sup>Christen, "Churches in Laos", p.2.

in Bangkok in 1971, The Rev. George Heckendorf gives a few more reasons for lack of church growth in Northeast Thailand:

1. Trend to enforce conformity to a given pattern in ministry.
2. Lack of communication between nationals and missionaries.
3. Lack of consistent visitation to interested parties and young believers.
4. Failure to train leadership and urge nationals to take over their responsibilities in Christ.

Though there are serious shortcomings on both fields, these comments reveal the awareness of missionaries and their desire to seek new ways to enable the churches to grow. This is encouraging. The greatest need is for revival brought about by the Holy Spirit in the lives of both the missionaries and the nationals. Apart from this a comprehensive plan for each local situation must be worked out that could lead to a nationwide movement of church growth. There must be a better understanding of the cultural, social and religious barriers to church growth, not only by the foreign missionaries, but also by national Christians. Obviously the weaknesses of the Thai/Lao religious systems, "the place where it itches," have not been taken advantage of as a door for the entrance of the Gospel. The next chapter will seek to cover these aspects.

## Chapter III

### HINDRANCES TO CHURCH GROWTH

After 142 years of Protestant missions in Thailand, Christians total only one-tenth of one percent of the population; in Laos slightly more. Resistance to the Gospel has been great.

The tenacity of the missionaries in Laos does not make up for the paucity of their converts. Probably the missionary methods followed so far could be entirely reconsidered with advantage. (*Italics mine.*) Before doing so, some remarks on the state of the National churches and obstacles inherent in the social structure are needed.

#### Syncretism Within the Church

Throughout the book of Acts the snowballing increase of converts is striking.

...there were added that day about three thousand souls....Many of those...believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand....And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord....So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear from the New Testament accounts that the tremendous church growth throughout the first century is not accredited to any special training or knowledge the apostles and disciples possessed,<sup>3</sup> other than time spent with the Lord Himself.<sup>4</sup> What causes the Thai/Lao Christians to be less zealous in soul-winning? Do they not have the same Lord indwelling them through the Holy Spirit? The author suggests that the answer is syncretism inside their Christian faith.

Conversion is the first step away from Buddhism; if this step is only half done the ensuing Christian walk will be half-hearted. To start out as a Christian

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson, Christ and Crisis, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Acts 2:41; 3:4; 9:35; 16:5      <sup>3</sup>Acts 4:13

<sup>4</sup>"This god can be met...by anyone who has wisdom and is sufficiently trained," says Buddhism. Thompson, Memorial Lectures: Christianity and Buddhism, p.71. Wisdom and training are not needed to meet Christ.

while holding on to Buddhism and animism means no growth in the Christian life. Michael Green writes a fascinating chapter on conversion in Evangelism in the Early Church and highlights the issue like this:

.. Why Christian conversion was so surprising to the hellenistic man was the exclusive claims it made on its devotees. Christians were expected to belong, body and soul, to Jesus, who was called their Master, despotes, and was said to have redeemed them from alien ownership into his own....Conversion, then, in our sense of exclusive change of faith, of ethic and of cult, was indeed utterly foreign to the mentality of the Graeco-Roman world....At this period of intensive syncretism (italics mine) here was a faith which stood out like a sore thumb.<sup>1</sup>

Christian conversion is still exclusive! Incomplete conversions, based perhaps on an unclear understanding of the Gospel, make for carnal Christians.

There are four steps a person must take on the new way, steps which lead through the right door--faith, repentance, baptism, and confirmation. The first two

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lead to salvation in Christ, the last two to a victorious Christian life.

Faith is not merely assent to the missionary's teaching, It is not a subjective, emotional belief in the rightness of the other man's opinion or the inspiration of the Bible.

The true basis for faith is not faith itself, but the work which Christ finished on the Cross.... Christian faith is turned outward to an objective person. "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved."<sup>3</sup>

Faith is a gift of God; true faith is God's faith.

"Faith has to be built by the one who has it."<sup>4</sup> The willingness to khan sassana, or "to enter the religion", does not prove that Biblical faith exists in the inquirer's heart. Many enter the "Jesus religion" on the faith of the missionary, led by secondary motives such as English classes, hope of a good job, medical help, refuge, etc. If these hopes are not realised the convert leaves as easily as he entered.

In presenting the ONE WAY to the Buddhist, we must lift up the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>1</sup>Green, Evangelism, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>This does not mean salvation by works. See Titus 3:5-7.

<sup>3</sup>Francis A Schaeffer, The God Who is There, p. 133.

<sup>4</sup>Nida, Religion, p. 78.

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself.<sup>1</sup>

The missionary must pray for and expect God to make Jesus real by the Holy Spirit to the heart of a man, and he must be willing to wait for this before declaring that a man is a Christian. The claims of the historical Jesus must be presented in three indisputable areas:

(1) His life in its moral impeccability and its perfection, His miracles, His reactions to His enemies, etc.

(2) His teaching. Jesus Himself offered this as a test

of the authenticity of His mission. Focus attention on the Sermon on the Mount. "This sermon is really a sort of highway right into the heart of the ...

Buddhist, for the ideal of a morally and spiritually perfect life is deeply entrenched in his mind."<sup>3</sup>

(3) His resurrection. This is a crucial step where one can expect opposition and unbelief unless there is faith.

Let us not preach only on sin and salvation, or "the four steps everyone must know," thus making the WAY easy and simple. There is need for much sensitivity and understanding on the part of the missionary while talking with a Buddhist friend.

Repentance is the turning away from a sinful past and the turning to the Lord with an act of the will.

It must lead to the burning of idols and fetishes. This is called a "power encounter"<sup>4</sup> between Christ as the power of God, and Satan, consequently between Christ and animism. Gustafson, who has drawn attention to the syncretism prevalent inside the national churches, calls for the development of a "Theology of Power."<sup>5</sup> This alone will stop the continuation of the old religions side by side with the new one. There is a real necessity to not use the term "religion" when talking about the Gospel, but rather "the new WAY."

<sup>1</sup> John 12:32.

<sup>2</sup> John 7:17.

<sup>3</sup> P.M. Krishna, "Presenting the One Way to Universalists," Christianity Today, Vol. XVI, No. 21, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Gustafson, Syncretistic, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

While religions are mixed easily in this syncretistic society, a person can walk only one way at a time.

Baptism is an open act of witnessing to the world, revealing an act of will in following Christ.

Confirmation is God's gift of the Holy Spirit. It provides him with the equipment to lead a victorious Christian life. Committed followers of Christ will always meet opposition, stirred up by Satan.<sup>1</sup> The Christian must know how, through the Holy Spirit, to overcome temptations and how to suffer persecution. He must be able to resist Satan and the demonic powers. For this he needs the fulness of the Holy Spirit.

To lead a person to Christ and not to bring him into the experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is like recruiting someone for the army and not providing him with adequate weapons. If he goes to war unarmed, and unprotected for that matter, he will make little impression on the enemy, and likely as not will finish up a casualty or a prisoner of war.<sup>2</sup>

We must face up to facts and ask ourselves if this is not one reason for the casualties we have seen in the Lao and Thai churches.

How do Thai/Lao Christians syncretize Christianity with their old religions? It may involve animistic practices continued inside the church. It may be the fear of losing face or fear of the vengeance of the spirits. It may be the boasting of "good works" instead of the Cross when witnessing to others. Many Christians are paralyzed by such syncretism. They have no message for the heathen, no light shining in their midst, no urgency to save others. This is the first great hindrance to any church growth. It can be overcome only through full conversion of all church members and a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God alone can remove this great barrier!

#### Cultural Barriers to Church Growth

What customs must a Thai/Lao abandon before becoming a Christian? Is chewing betelnut sinful? Should he be asked to stop smoking, playing Cards? These questions are often discussed amongst missionaries.

The resistance of...Buddhists... to the Christian faith does not arise primarily from theological considerations. Their resistance arises primarily

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<sup>1</sup> F. J. Huegel, That Old Serpent, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Harper, Spiritual Warfare, p. 72.

from fear of "becoming a Christian will separate me from my people."<sup>1</sup>

The less social changes are demanded at conversion, the faster churches will grow. This principle calls for a greater degree of wisdom and insight on the part of the missionary than has been displayed in the past. He must be willing to disassociate himself from his own home church background and customs. The Gospel is the power of God! It will work the essential social changes from the "inside", through the lives of men and women serving Christ. This does not mean that the message of a holy God and of salvation by grace alone must be adulterated. There are barriers inherent in the Gospel which must remain--the offense of the Cross, true heart repentance, baptism, etc.

#### The Barrier of Language

The language barrier does not consist so much of the very complex problem of communication, but rather of the different languages people use. There is the "language of the heart," the true mother tongue which people use to make love, to mourn and to fight.<sup>2</sup> The other language is the trade language, propagated by the government, but often a strange tongue to the minority groups. While a modern state depends on it, the church grows fastest if the heart language is used for the Gospel.

Here is an area of conflict. Missionaries often learn only the trade language. But Thailand has four major divisions of Thai, not counting the numerous tribal languages. The speaking of the correct dialect and a good knowledge of it must receive greater attention by the

missionary.

#### The Barrier of People Consciousness

An Asian regards individual action as treachery. He thinks of himself as part of a group, not as a self-sufficient unit.

<sup>1</sup> Donald A. MacGavran, Understanding Church Growth, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> ibid., p. 193ff.

<sup>3</sup> In the great turning of the Lisu in Southwest China, J.O. Fraser mastered their tongue well.

<sup>4</sup> In Laos adulthood and wisdom is judged by the correct use of proverbs in arguments. Where does this leave the missionary?

<sup>5</sup> Donald A. MacGavran, Bridges of God, p. 11.

Group **decisions** and people movements are the natural thing for Asians; **only** a rebel would strike out **alone**.<sup>1</sup> MacGavran strongly emphasises the need to reach groups and **families** in order to keep their people **consciousness** intact. "**Where** Christians can continue marrying among their own kind, attending each other's weddings and funerals... there the church can grow both fast and **soundly**!"<sup>2</sup> More ostracism occurs among people with higher **people consciousness**, particularly against members of their group marrying outsiders. Christian movements against which ostracism can be used grow slowly, if at all. But there are highways for the Gospel **inside** each segment of **society**.<sup>3</sup> These are the "bridges of God", **namely, the** lines of blood **relationships**. There is great loyalty inside the kinship web and the extended family may stretch throughout the whole **country**.

#### The Barrier of Customs

It is easy to make a superficial judgment about other people. Westerners are **inclined** to think of the **Thai/Lao** as being lazy. On the other hand, the **Thai** were utterly shocked that Americans bathe **only** once a week for a Thai who does not bathe twice a day is not regarded fit for human **society**!<sup>4</sup> As many of his Western behaviour patterns are not **understood** by the Thai/Lao, the missionary may experience frustration and insecurity **while** learning new patterns. He must learn the set of behaviour which corresponds with his new role in the Asian **society**. Most **likely** he will be classified under "teacher"; as such he must act accordingly. The proper greetings, the correct way of walking, talking and sitting must be adopted. For the **sake** of effective communication, the missionary must **learn** how to fit into his new social **role**.<sup>5</sup>

The apostle **Paul** understood the need for identification with the people and wrote of the way to cross **cultural barriers**.

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<sup>1</sup> One can rightly be suspect of individual independent action.

<sup>2</sup> MacGavran, Understanding, p. 191.

<sup>3</sup> This is the thesis of MacGavran's Bridges of God.

<sup>4</sup> Nida, Customs, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob A. Loewen and Anne Loewen, "Role, Self-Image and Missionary Communication," Practical Anthropology, Vol. 14, No. 4 (July-August 1967), p. 160.

For though I am free, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win more. To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law...to the weak I became weak. I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some.<sup>1</sup>

His ministry was marked by growing churches. Identification with the people around us does not mean to "go native," adopting all their ways; it is rather the attitude of becoming one with them in sympathy, in sharing and in respecting one another.

#### Missionary Barriers

There is a growing awareness among missionaries that all is not well with their work. From responses to a questionnaire regarding mistakes missionaries make, three main factors emerge that hinder church growth: (1) Imposition of Western patterns; little identification. (2) Lack of strategy; little outreach. (3) Lack of communication; poor methods of teaching.

Imposition of Western patterns; little identification.--While the missionaries in Northeast Thailand  
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acknowledge a lack of identification with the Thai, self-criticism in the Laos field turns towards the Western patterns imposed upon the national church. The early Swiss Brethren missionaries structured the young Lao churches very carefully according to the Swiss Assemblies. Leadership of an Assembly is divided amongst several elders with an equal share of authority. Yet the  
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social structure of the Lao society is non-democratic. A serious barrier to church growth was erected by the missionary group in refusing to allow one of the elders to become a pastor. Concerning the Lao church one of the Brethren has written, "...A purely Brethren system is not favourable to rapid church growth, ...the New Testament patterns are not well defined as far as church ~~government~~ goes."<sup>5</sup> Can the missionaries change their own

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 9:19-22.

<sup>2</sup> Heckendorf, Survey and Boese, C&MA Work.

<sup>3</sup> Christen, Churches in Laos, p.2!

<sup>4</sup> Today no Asian nation is a democracy.

<sup>5</sup> Christen, Churches in Laos, p.2.

teaching on church government after 70 years? Or will only the withdrawal of the missionaries free the national Christians to adopt their own ways of running a church?

We like to picture it (the mission society) as a scaffolding. But what an imposing scaffolding! Scaffold upon scaffold, girders upon girders, and how small the building over which it towers....It leaves the foreigner in control of the building operation.

Often the missionary in charge of a station or an area is too capable for the good of the national Christians. He should do only that which the young church is unable to

do, not the things which it is unwilling to do. The paternalistic attitude inside the missionary group is basically a reluctance to surrender power and prestige. How well does the missionary enter into the thought processes of "his" Christians? Does he make a serious

effort to view things as they do? Many Christian customs taught by the missionary are not based on scriptural principles; they create a "foreign smell" around the churches!

We need to rethink our concept of the church. Are we dominated by structure or by function? This is the crucial question we need to face in a realistic manner. Men are looking for dynamic functionalism; they abhor static structuralism even in its most majestic form.

Lack of strategy.--This became apparent in Laos in the 1960's. Although many tribal workers from the O.M.F. were added to the number of missionaries working already in the Lao churches,<sup>6</sup> no significant new outreach was attempted. (During the last 10 years some 30 missionaries lived in 4 towns and 2 villages.) Due to the political situations in all areas missionaries had to move into the towns, but continued to try to reach the villages. Town population have been left unreached in spite of the concentration of missionaries in these places. Both

<sup>1</sup>Malcolm R. Bradshaw, Church Growth Through Evangelism-in-Depth, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Melvin Hodges, On the Mission Field, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Harold R. Cook, Strategy of Missions, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup>Use of organs for national tunes, translation of foreign hymns; western type buildings, service pattern, campaigns, etc.

<sup>5</sup>George W. Peters, Saturation Evangelism, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup>OMF withdrawal from tribal areas in 1961 and the years following for political reasons.

Thailand and Laos have weak town churches. Small groups of rural Christians absorb the missionary's time, or specialized work limits the missionaries who are available for evangelism and church planting. While the "spokes of the wheel" (outreach into surrounding areas) are worked on, the "hub" (town church) is very weak. Some town people in Saravane and Pakse, Laos, and in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, have told the writer that "the missionary is interested only in the farmers." Yet Paul, a master strategist, spent his time in cities, knowing that the city people would spread the Gospel faster and with more authority to the rural population than the reverse. News always moves downwards on the social ladder, not upwards. The temptation to visit friendly farmers instead of the better educated urban population is great. It is always easier to evangelize one's cultural inferiors where a poorer quality of language can be used less self-consciously. The church in Savannakhet, Laos, was started in the low class of society and has retained the stigma of being a phi i phob church. People of the higher social classes avoid any social contact with outcasts.

Strategic thought is needed in mission work. From the point of view of salvation all souls are equal; from the point of view of missionary strategy they are not equal.... We must win rulers... they are the engineers of the souls... winning them you win the people they lead and influence.<sup>1</sup>

Mission work in an unresponsive segment of population should be stopped, at least for a period of time.

2

Yet often the "mission station approach" with its gathered colony of believers is stronger than the desire to move out and serve in a "people movement."<sup>3</sup> Why was the call from leading men in the town of Khong, South Laos, for missionaries to teach them not heeded by the field strategists?<sup>4</sup>

In East Thailand missionaries were placed in strategic trading centers and occupied the district and provincial capitals. Yet they were drawn to rural work and the "spokes" approach, with neglect of the "hub", this has led to weak, non-growing city churches. Where shall

<sup>1</sup> Richard Wurmbbrand, Tortured for Christ, pp. 56, 57.

<sup>2</sup> MacGavran, Bridges, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 47, 68ff.

<sup>4</sup> In 1964 on a literature distribution effort by D. Wilson and R. Riegler.

the rural congregations find inspiration, guidance and fellowship, if the city church is not spiritually alive? "This one thing should characterize our mission strategy. We should constantly be thinking ahead and making provision for developments."<sup>1</sup>

Modern mission strategists have emphasized the fact that first century evangelism of the "whole world"<sup>2</sup> was achieved through group decisions, household salvation and  
<sup>3</sup>  
 people movements. Yet some missionaries today are reluctant to accept families and whole communities into the church, plagued by the cultural overhang of their own individualism.

Lack of communication; poor teaching methods. - Lack of communication and poor methods of teaching are a serious reproach to any missionary who has come to the mission field in order to communicate the Good News. Yet these problems are mentioned by missionaries themselves from all three societies working in the area.

Poor knowledge of the language is the first hindrance to communication. In spite of organized study times, language teachers, and in Thailand a well-equipped language centre, many missionaries remain on a language plateau, often corresponding to primary school level.

But more than the use of correct grammar and idioms is needed for effective communication. The spoken message is judged not only by its content, but by the carrier as well. Thus the receiver can reject a "good" message because of a "bad" carrier.<sup>4</sup> This leads back to the problem of identification.

When Lyall asked a Christian in Laos, "Why do your people find it so difficult to believe?" the answer given was, "Because they do not fully understand..."<sup>5</sup> Leaders of the church growth movement in Thailand<sup>6</sup> agree that even those who have been evangelized often have wrong ideas about the Gospel. Poor teaching methods with little

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<sup>1</sup> Cook, Strategy, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 17:6.

<sup>3</sup> MacGavran, Peters, Cook, Tippett.

<sup>4</sup> Nida, Religion, pp. 68-77.

<sup>5</sup> Lyall, Urgent Harvest, p. 174.

<sup>6</sup> Alex Smith and George Heckendorf.

relevance between the missionary's sermon and their actual problems hinders growth. Conversion is through the Word and the Spirit; therefore teaching of the Word must be clear and creative.<sup>1</sup> "Where the Word and the Church are not present in proclamation, the Holy Spirit does not unilaterally and sovereignly work out the salvation in Christ in the biblical and spiritual sense of the word."<sup>2</sup>

Richard's excellent book on creative Bible teaching can guide the missionary to a fruitful, effective and satisfying teaching ministry. He outlines four basic elements necessary for good teaching.<sup>3</sup>

- (1) People learn best when the learning is patterned. The student recognizes the goal and can see his own progress.
- (2) People learn best when they are able to see relevance to their own lives and motives.
- (3) People learn best when they sense mastery and feel successful as learners.
- (4) People learn best when they see results in their lives. The Bible teacher must be clear about his aim in teaching, i.e., to see lives changed. While each individual must respond to God for himself, the teacher must encourage response.<sup>4</sup>

"Rightly dividing the Word of Truth" requires more of the missionary than holding sound doctrine. Presenting the Word as knowledge only is a perversion of the truth. Faithful handling of the Word leads to a response to God, either positive or negative. This characterized Jesus' teaching. It should characterize ours. The cycle of Christian growth seen in Colossians 1:9-11 presents the Biblical pattern for teaching the Word. (See Fig.8. page 51).

The place of the Holy Spirit is crucial; there is no fruit possible without His action in the hearts of the

<sup>1</sup> Green, Evangelism, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Peters, Saturation, p 22.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence O. Richards, Creative Bible Teaching, p. 135.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> 2Tim. 2:15.

students. Yet we must stress that He does not oppose systematic Bible teaching. Some missionaries seem to think that the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit eliminates the need for planned teaching or for preparation. While it is true that knowledge about God does not save, nor does it transform Christians into victorious disciples, this knowledge together with a response in daily life situations leads to a growing knowledge of God;

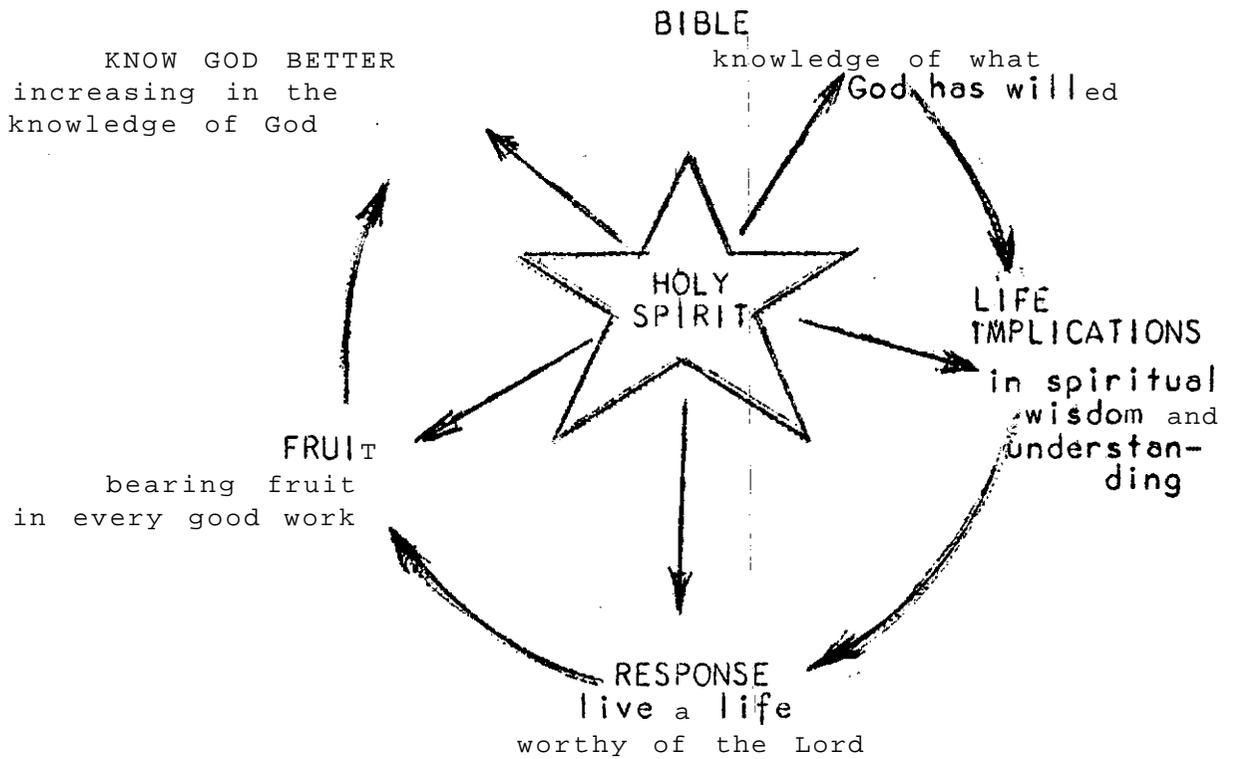


Fig. 8--Cycle of Christian Growth seen in Col.1:9-11.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence O. Richards, Creative Bible Teaching, p.94.

## Chapter |v

### MEANS OF PROMOTING CHURCH GROWTH

#### The Agent of Church Growth

Seeing the **overall lack** of church growth in North-east Thailand and Laos, **particularly in** the last two decades, and realising some of the cultural, **social and religious hindrances** to church **growth**, we **must** now seek a way of bringing about new and greater church growth. How can we bring men and women to conversion that **will** be genuine--a complete break with the **past** when taking new life in Christ? How **can** we win **families** and whole segments of society to Christ?

**It** is of greatest importance to recognise that Christ, through His Holy Spirit, is the Agent of **conversion**, of church planting, and of church growth. Apart from Christ we men can do **nothing**. Yet God chooses to use men, **filled and controlled** by the Spirit, to do His work.

In Acts and throughout the New Testament we see the Holy Spirit guiding His servants and giving them not **only** perseverance and zeal, but **power--power** to preach, to heal, to exorcise evil spirits, to work miracles. In Thailand and Laos where there is so much **sickness, demon possession**, and the power of Satan **is** known and experienced by the people, there must be a display of **God's** power over these forces. We missionaries must wait upon God in **prayer and** fasting and in study of His Word until we receive that "power from on high" with which to counter and defeat the power of the evil one. This is the only answer to the "**Buddanism**" that rules these lands.

A theology of power must be taught and **lived**. A religion of power must **be** experienced by the **converts** if they are ever to be **released** from the grip of Buddhism and Satan that has bound them for so long!

In answer to Chapter **II** the **practical** outworking of church planting and outreach, a **four part plan is** proposed in this chapter.

In answer to Chapter III, the writer suggests that missionaries need to learn complete submission to the Holy Spirit; to allow Him to close doors and to open others; to follow His plan rather than submitting ours for His approval; to allow Him to teach us and produce His fruit in our lives so that we will truly love the Thai and the Lao, both Christians and national-Christian leaders, and non-Christians. Love will teach us how to live in communion with the Thai and the Lao, how to accept needed criticism from them. Love will teach us to understand and respect their customs, their ways of doing things, to persevere in getting good language - language that will not cause them to comment "you speak good Thai/Lao", but rather will cause them to listen to our message!

Love must be seen in both inter-mission and church-mission relationships. Only as the nationals see our love for God work out in genuine love for them and for one another will they begin to understand about "the God of love". Missionaries must learn humility in working with and under nationals. These things can come about only if we receive a fresh outpouring of Pentecost. We missionaries need to be revived before the national Christians!

### Evangelism and Gospel Saturation

The New Testament gives examples of a wide range of methods used in evangelism. As there were many different people who turned to the Lord, the first century Christians used many methods to reach them. Philip got up beside the Ethiopian Eunuch for a time of personal Bible study;<sup>1</sup> Peter visited Cornelius and started household evangelism;<sup>2</sup> John and Peter healed a lame man and conducted mass evangelism.<sup>3</sup> It is with the example of Scripture that modern missions use so many types of evangelistic outreach. The important factor is that the method used is adapted to the local situation; if it is under the direction of the Holy Spirit, it will be.

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 8:29.

<sup>2</sup>Acts 10:34.

<sup>3</sup>Acts 3:11.

One of the vogue expressions used by missionaries is "evangelism." This might mean the distribution of tracts or the **first-time-ever** preaching in a new village. It might include literature sales or many other means to "give" the **Gospel**. What is the aim of **evangelism**?

Evangelism is, first and foremost, the salvation of **souls**. People with a passion for souls are evangelists or **soul-winners**, like the Apostle Paul and the Lord Jesus **Himself**. Secondly, evangelism is concerned with the growth of the church. "**The Lord added to the church daily....**"<sup>1</sup> The Head of the Church joined new believers to the church, it being His **will that** the church should grow through **evangelism**. Thirdly, evangelism hastens the coming of **Christ's** kingdom, and therefore, fourthly,  
<sup>2</sup>  
 it contributes to the glory of God!

Evangelism is the basic tool for church growth. The more it is polished by constant use and **re-evaluation**, the faster churches **will** grow. In the narrow sense, it is one's **confrontation** experience with the Person of the living Saviour, It **is** the **personal** soul-winning part of mission work. To arrive at this stage, there are other parts of **evangelism** involved. A clearer classification **facilitates** the assessment of the need, the response, and the harvest,

Peters<sup>3</sup> states that the movement of **evangelism** can not be accelerated, It **needs** time to develop in every aspect. He **distinguishes** four progressive steps: (1) presentation, (2) penetration, (3) permeation, and (4) **confrontation**.<sup>4</sup> Gospel saturation is the **full-orbed** process of a clear presentation of the Gospel, through **all** channels possible, and of continued repetition until penetration is achieved. This takes time. "Few people turn to Christ at the first hearing of the good news... the average **Muslim** had heard the Gospel some two hundred and forty times before it gripped his **heart...sufficiently** to turn him to Christ."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:45-

<sup>2</sup> R.B. Kuiper, God-Centered Evangelism, pp 106-116.

<sup>3</sup> Peters, Saturation, Chapter 29.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 188.

Evangelism is often practiced in the **confrontation** phase only. If the first three steps are neglected there may **still** be conversions, but it is doubtful, says Peters, **that** these conversions **will** lead to regeneration and **lasting results**. An illustration of this is the work of a group of Japanese **missionaries**<sup>1</sup> who held rigidly to the principle that "every creature has the right to hear the Gospel **once**". They preached extensively **throughout** South Laos, visiting each home once (and mostly **only** once), but without seeing any churches planted. Sound evangelism in the Thai/Lao cultural setting needs the harmonious relation of **all** four steps. Neither the first three, nor the fourth must be neglected; each must be **utilized** in its proper time and **place**.

Gospel saturation is of great importance for **meaningful** gospel **confrontation**. It becomes absolutely imperative to group **evangelism...or** group conversions. We thus urge **diligent work** in saturation, without neglecting **meaningful confrontation**.<sup>2</sup>

### Presentat ion

For a successful evaluation of preaching and **teach-**ing, the missionary must discard Western patterns and much of his own learning **previous** to his arrival on the **field**. Only through cultural sensitivity can the clearest and most relevant **way** of presenting the Gospel be found. This involves the message on the radio, the content of tracts, the spoken Gospel on records and tapes. It carries over to the movies and television. National writers, actors and musicians **will** be of help here; but they need to be grounded in Christ first. Otherwise a syncretistic presentation might **occur**. How **well-adapted** is the missionary's own presentation when preaching in the churches or in the open air? He must tailor the message to the needs and problems of his listeners, yet he has a great advantage over the **more** impersonal ways of presentation in that he can communicate with love. "Christianity as a way of **life** can **only** be communicated **meaningfully** in a living context by persons who have not only discovered the uniqueness of their faith but have

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<sup>1</sup>Working in Laos from 1960-1964.

<sup>2</sup>Peters, Saturation, p. 192.

<sup>3</sup>Cultural adaptation, without **compromising** the message, is a neglected "dynamic" of **evangelism**.

been captured by the love that led to the cross."<sup>1</sup>

### Penetration

Literature sales by Bible colporteurs and missionaries are vital in spreading the Gospel widely. This work is more successful in Thailand where there is a higher literacy rate than in Laos, Audio-visual penetration via films and radio can be used effectively in Laos where there is only a small market for literature.

### Permeation

Permeation is achieved through repetition of the above methods. A careful, gradual and persistent saturation process is the necessary pre-requisite for group

<sup>2</sup>

decisions and people movements. The households, which are the power structures of the society, must be sufficiently exposed to the monotheistic teaching of God, to the truths of His holiness, His power, His love, etc., before they can be moved on to a meaningful confrontation.

### Confrontation

Confrontation is the personal work of soul-winning. It is because confrontation evangelism yields the "results" that it tends to be over-emphasized. Yet at the same time, it is neglected. Few missionaries can boast of soul-winning. This paradox is hard to understand. Are the specialized ministries involved in promoting the first three steps of saturation evangelism more satisfying than the simple, direct ministry of visitation? Yet how much the Lao and Thai people like to be visited and to visit one another! No door bells to be rung; one can cough or call out and walk in through the open door. In his lively style Jack Hyles contends that visitation is not only the major task of the pastor's life, but also the very best way to start churches growing. More often confrontation takes place in Bible schools, in Sunday schools, at youth camps and at conferences.

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<sup>1</sup> Nida, Religion, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Peters, Saturation, main body of the book.

<sup>3</sup> Jack Hyles, Let's Build an Evangelistic Church.

Here the four steps are carried out by the same team of teachers, This might explain their success and popularity.

The two most successful movements, integrating **all** four steps of **evangelism**, are **Evangelism-in-Depth** in Latin America and **New-Life-For-All** in Africa. Both have made a great impact for Christ in their areas. They are careful in preparing the body of believers for the task of **presentation** through (1) **PRAYER** in organized prayer cells, and (2) **TRAINING** in personal evangelism, **counseling** and **stewardship**. The message to be presented has been prepared and **printed by** the sponsors of **New-Life-For-All**. Through this they produced a more unified program. "Few evangelicals realise the significance of a succinct, dynamic, relative message **in** an evangelistic movement....<sup>1</sup> This is an untapped dynamic of tremendous importance." Mobilized through the action of the Holy Spirit, and equipped to talk about Christ, the believers are sent out in teams to **visit**, with the aim of leading **people** to the Lord. The areas chosen have been penetrated by the Gospel already through previous **missionary** work. But any unreached classes are set apart for special efforts. The chain of events in the **Evangelism-in-Depth** campaigns is as **follows: Prayer--Training--Visitation--Evangelistic Meetings--Continuation**. It is the last link in the chain which is the weakest; follow-up is not sufficiently taken care of. This has resulted **in** the <sup>2</sup> **lack** of increase of actual church membership afterwards.

The Christian and Missionary **Alliance** proposed an **Evangelism-in-Depth** program for Northeast **Thailand** but it did not **develope, partly** due to **individualism** among the missionaries in the area. Basic to **any** in-depth program is the **full** cooperation of all missionaries and national leaders. Without this, **full** mobilisation of **all** believers is impossible to achieve. Leadership in such a program demands not only strong motivation but the ability to **impart vision** and patience to wait and work until there is oneness of heart and mind **among** the

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<sup>1</sup> Peters, Saturation, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

missionaries and national leaders **for** such a program of evangelism. **Only** then will full mobilization be possible; **Mobilization** to service must happen early in the **believer's** life. Service does not presuppose spiritual maturity.

Christians are not serving because they are **mature**, but rather that they might mature. They are not serving because they have achieved a certain degree of **holiness**, but they are **serving** that they might experience progressive **sanctification**.<sup>1</sup>

This factor is easily overlooked by the trained missionary. In any **total-mobilization** evangelistic program there **is** unprecedented opportunity for spiritual growth of every believer who **participates**. The result is both quantitative and qualitative growth in the church.

#### A Plan To Foster Church Growth in South Laos and Northeast Thailand

This **plan** is introduced in four sections according to the four areas of need for greater church growth. It is presented through diagrams for **the sake** of greater clarity. These drawings are **not** rigid, but rather have suggestive value. The circles **only** represent the **elements** in a movement towards growth. The agents are the Holy Spirit, the Word, and the believer, and are not included in the diagrams. Some of the elements can be used **simultaneously**; the beginning of a new one does not imply that the previous one has ceased to function or has become obsolete.

These elements represent the essence of research for the best biblical tools of church **growth**. They can, however, **only** be effective under the control of the Holy Spirit and through the action of the Word of God. Believing prayer must be **exercised**, with **perseverance, all along**.

2

The time limit estimated for this plan is two years. This is an experimental figure, although based on the opinion of senior **missionaries**. If after two years of genuine hard work no sign of a church is seen, the place should be abandoned as unfruitful and the workers moved.

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<sup>1</sup> Peters, Saturation, p.200.

<sup>2</sup> For personal reasons. Two more years are left to the author before next furlough in 1975.

DIAGRAM I

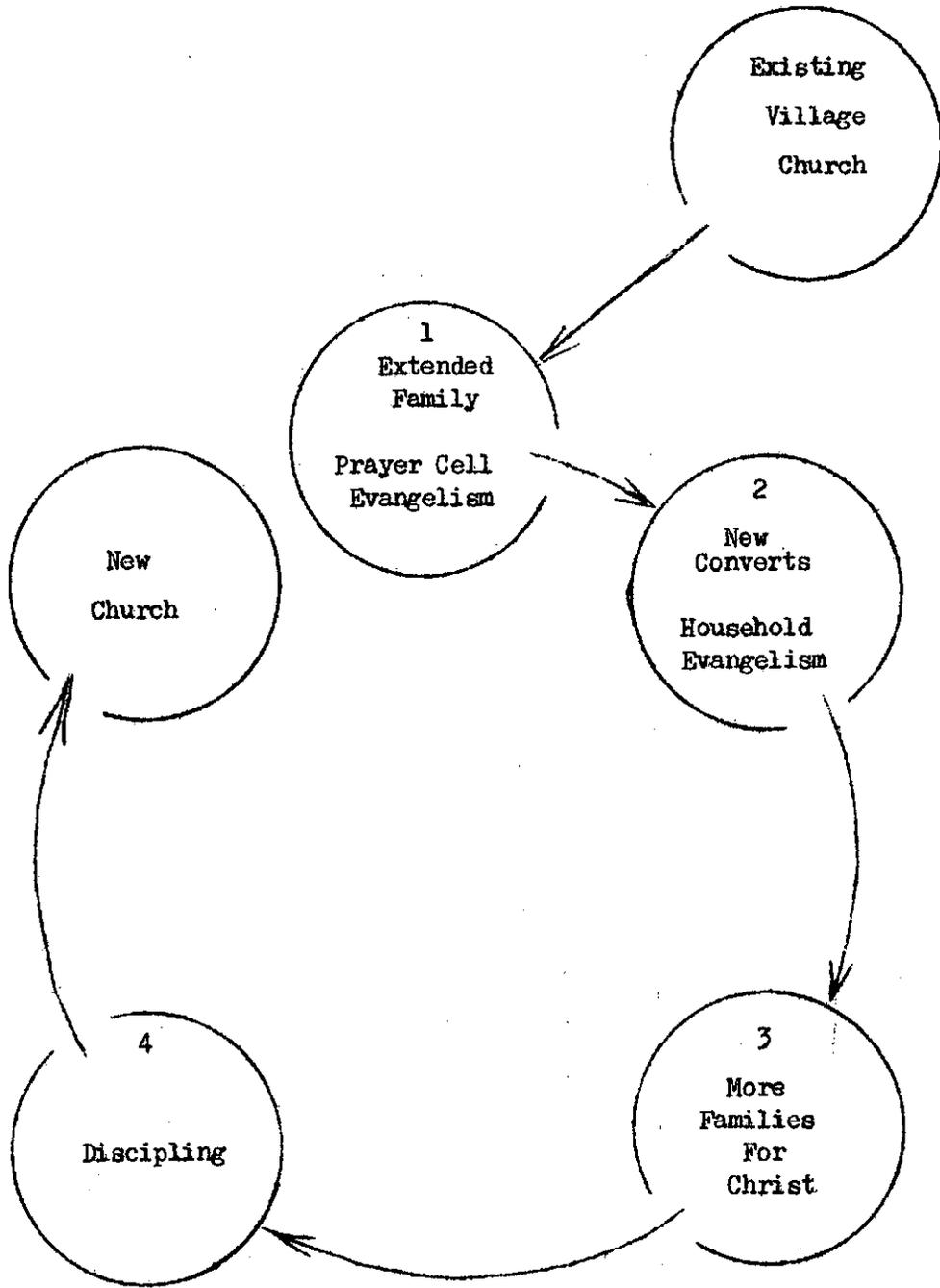


Fig. 9--The planting of a daughter church in rural areas.

DIAGRAM 1--Plan for the Planting of  
a Daughter, Church In Rural Areas.

The most common type of church in both fields is the **small village** church. Few of them are growing; the majority remain static with little outreach attempted. The missionary must act as the catalyst in the process of planting **daughter** churches.

Element 1--The extended family being reachable through prayer and visitation. "Possibly no one single factor will help the church...grow faster than... through the...extended family."<sup>1</sup> Blood ties are strong and the multiple, loose marriage arrangements cause a family to have a very wide range **geographically**. This kinship web provides natural channels for news to spread. MacGavran calls these natural channels the "bridges of God". The Christians must be encouraged to claim by faith the salvation of their relatives. This will give them **genuine** concern for them.

The missionary initiates prayer meetings limited to a **small** group. It is neither necessary nor helpful to have the **whole** congregation together. **Smaller cells** give a greater sense of **responsibility** to those attending. The prayer cell teaches Christians how to work together in a small group. They study the Bible, pray and witness with the support and encouragement of the group. **Such** a group should start **spontaneously**. Each member must take part actively in every aspect of the prayer **cell**.

Five basic **laws** serve to train in witnessing and to start a chain reaction of **soul-winning**. These five **laws** are:

- (1) Pray for relatives and close friends by name.
- (2) Witness to them using the Word of God.
- (3) Go back to them repeatedly until they **believe**.
- (4) Each individual Christian must teach each individual convert how to grow in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (5) Teach the new convert to pray for his relatives and friends and to **lead** them to the Lord, repeating the process.

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<sup>1</sup>Alex Smith, "Strategy for Church Growth in Thailand," p.6.

Unless a church produces **fruit** in the form of new converts, it will **die**. This applies to the individual Christian as **well**. It is imperative that Christians be active in **soul-winning**. The term "**soul-winning**" defines the purpose of the **Christian's** visit better than "witnessing". Many Christians think that if they have "told" the Gospel to someone they have discharged their duty. Paul went out to "persuade" men and women to turn to the Lord.

Referring to the actual working of the prayer cell, Smith says:

Each member of the prayer cell has a part to **play** in sharing. The members pray for: 1) Relatives and close friends by name. 2) The results of their previous witness **encounters**. 3) Those who **have** newly **believed** during their witness, and 4) Preparation of their own hearts and opportunity for further witness.

Each of the members share **in** the simple Bible study method. 1) They read a story **or** selection from the Scriptures, 2) They summarise in simple language the contents of the selection read, 3) They suggest practical lessons for spiritual growth and witness from the passage.

During the week, each member of the prayer **cell** witnesses to those for whom they have prayed. 1) They go to the unsaved rather than wait for the unsaved **To seek the** Christians, 2) They witness to them concerning Christ and the Gospel, and 3) They urge him to **commit** himself to the **Lord**.<sup>1</sup>

The great advantage of prayer cell evangelism is that it can start in a **small** way, and yet grow until it covers a whole country. It does not need a **large** and costly organization, and yet can be incorporated into any country-wide plan of evangelism if **required**. A further and very important benefit **of prayer cell** evangelism is that it can lead to revival in the church.

The strength of the prayer **cell** results from the concentrated study of God's promises regarding salvation and from earnest prayer. **Members** of the group can help each other in deciding who **will** be visited during the week. The mutual knowledge of the planned visitation greatly helps towards the **implementation** of decisions taken. The visitation program is continued week by week. As early as possible the missionary withdraws his presence to start another **cell**.

Element 2--Household evangelism as the new convert is visited **in** his home. This is where the old biblical method of household evangelism begins. Household evang-

<sup>1</sup>Smith, "Strategy", p. 17.

elism which leads to household salvation makes for a stable church.

By household evangelism we mean the principle decision on the part of the father and/or parents, and in deliberation with the members of the family, that the household ought to become a Christian home. Then, either jointly and simultaneously as a family unit, or individually, each member in personal decision relates himself to Christ as personal Saviour.<sup>1</sup>

In Asia, children are kept much more under the authority of their parents than in Europe or America. Consequently it is of vital importance that the parents should be won for Christ first. Children and young people are precious to Christ, but they are very seldom able to influence their parents for Him. Churches are not built by children's work.

In one area of India, household evangelism was carried out by having a Christian visit in an area. Any open home would be visited weekly for ten weeks. The lessons, printed in leaflet form, were studied together with the leader in the home. The leaflet was then left for the family to go over again. The lessons were prepared to include the whole family as a unit. This ten week program is necessary for permeation so that the new religion can be absorbed, discussed and evaluated by the whole family. The father, being the key to the family, receives priority treatment. In this type of work the missionary can leave most of the visitation to the Christian relatives. He must remain in the background as advisor. The ultimate aim of household evangelism is to establish Christian homes where the individual members can accept Christ with the sympathy, understanding and encouragement of the whole family.

Element 3--With the new family home as a base, regular meetings can be started. The principle of prayer cell evangelism should be taught to the new converts immediately. As they learn to reach out to their closer relatives and friends in the village, more families will be won to Christ. In this way the converts are taught to study the Bible for themselves, to pray regularly and to continue winning others for Christ.

Element 4-- Discipling the new converts by church members. As the new families are added, the missionary trains the members of the old church to disciple the

<sup>1</sup> Peters, Saturation, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> ibid., p. 164.

new converts. The goal of missions is not **just** to plant indigenous churches, but to plant missionary churches that move out to win the **lost**.<sup>1</sup> In the same way a **believer** must become a disciple who will attach himself to the Person of his Lord and **follow** Him. **Consecration**, obedience to the Scriptures, and a **willingness** to serve the Lord are marks of the **disciple**. He replaces the old values in his former life with the newly found Truth of God. **This** requires discipline and **watchfulness**. Therefore each new convert needs the help of a "pace-setter."<sup>2</sup>

The "pace-setter" is not so much a teacher as simply a friend passing on the rules of learning **and memorizing** Scriptures, the practice of prayer with others, and encouragement to **tell** others about Jesus. The "pace-setter" needs **to** have a deepening consecration and devotion to the Lord. He must **learn** how to care for those under his charge. The missionary's own good example **will** be better than words. The "pace-setter" must be a man of **diligent** Bible study. He must be **willing** to **memorize** a certain number of key verses. But most important of **all** he must grow in his private, hidden **life** in the Lord--secret prayer, intercessory prayer, victory over sin and personal discipline are parts of **it**. The aim of discipling is consecrated followers of Christ who are thoroughly trained in Christian thinking and practice. They **will** soon do the work of many committees and missionaries.

As the new Christians grow in **discipleship**, the gifts of the **Holy Spirit** **will** become evident. These men and women can be further trained for leadership through **lay** leadership sessions. Some **will be** set apart as elders and deacons. **All will** serve as witnesses and evangelists.

As soon as the new **Christians** meet together in their own building, the process can start **again--** the cycle of planting a daughter church **will** begin from this new church and reach out to their extended **families**.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Webster, "The True Goal of Missions," Christianity Today, Vol. XVII, No. 6, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>

See section on "Discipling", p. 25.

DIAGRAM II

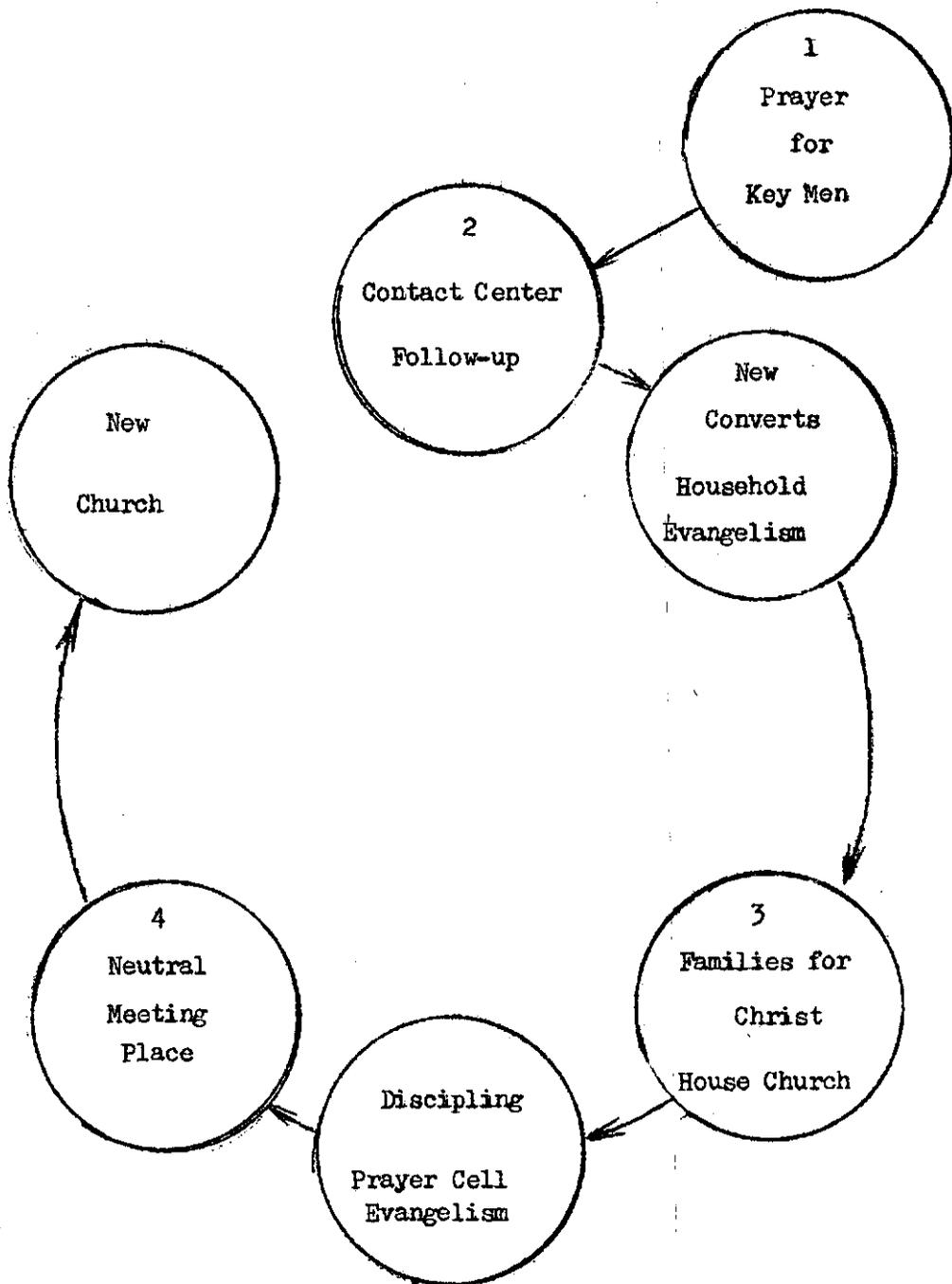


Fig. 10--Plan for the planting of a new city church.

DIAGRAM 11--Plan for the planting  
of a new city Church.

There are many towns in both Northeast Thailand and Laos without Christians or a functioning church. Here it is up to the missionary to start the work.

Element 1--Prayer is vital in the starting of a new work. It is necessary for the Lord to show the missionary the key segments of the society, the key men that He will bring to Himself, those whom He will use to win others to Himself.

Element 2--Open a Contact Center in town where there is easy access to people of all classes. This can be an ordinary shop-front type room in a conspicuous position. Simply arranged, it should be attractive with place for people to sit and read as well as room for a quiet talk. Attractive posters and Scripture texts on the walls provide ready visual aids while chatting with people or preaching. Tracts should be displayed in a convenient place for all to take away.

The Contact Center can be used for teaching English, but there is a danger of being so busy with English classes that there is no time for personal confrontation. One can be overrun with children who want to learn English. If English classes are begun it is wise to limit them to adults. It is the adults that must be won if a church is to be planted.

The Center must be open at regular times so that people will know when they can come. All those who show interest in the Gospel should be followed up by a visit in their homes within three days.

Element 3--The follow-up of interested contacts will take the form of household evangelism, seeking to win the whole family for Christ. This family and their home becomes a center for a house church where others can hear the Gospel. As Christians are added, those close by meet here for worship, Bible study and prayer. There can be several of these small house churches functioning in one town. In them the work of discipling is done, and from them prayer cell evangelism must branch out.

Element 4--Ultimately, a central church building will be needed. This gives the Christians the sense that they are not alone; it provides a place where the whole body of Christians can join together in worship and

fellowship. It can become a center for a lay-leadership training program in which prospective leaders from the country churches and from each of the house churches in town can be taught how to bring the Word of God to others.

The new city church should be challenged to reach out to further segments of the town's society. The aim of every Christian in the church is to reproduce himself. This is the aim of the church as a whole. Only so can it remain alive.

DIAGRAM III

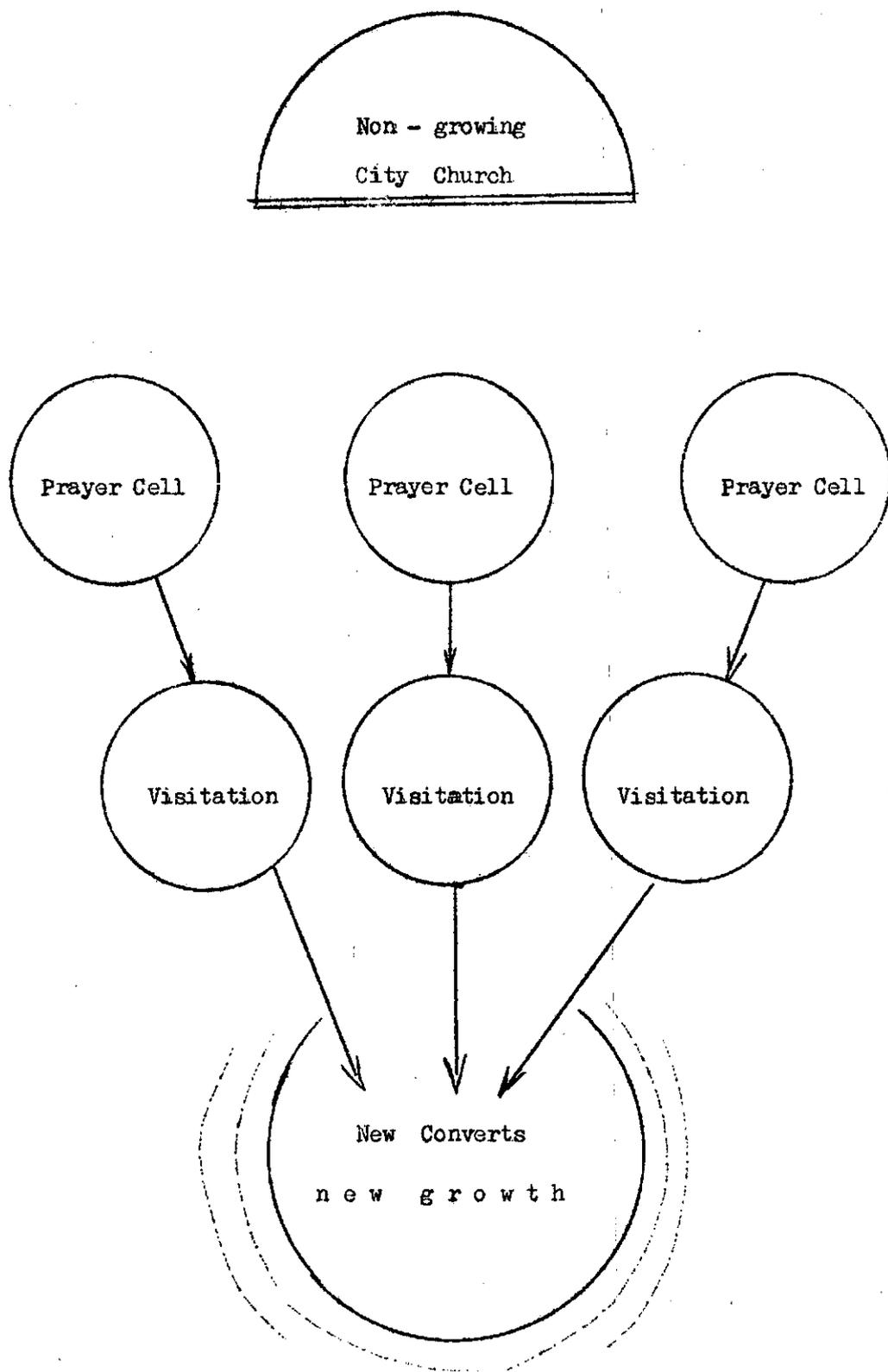


Fig. 11--Plan for growth in a weak city church.

DIAGRAM 1.1.1.--Plan for Growth in  
a weak City Church

This diagram is **self-explanatory**; its simplicity might surprise the reader. The fact that there are more non-growing churches in the two mission fields than **growing** ones is so disturbing to the author that this self-evident drawing is included as an attempt to break through the inertia of lukewarm **congregations**.

In Indonesia O.M.F. missionary Mac Bradshaw started prayer **cell** evangelism by praying for **just** one other man burdened for witnessing and outreach to join him. From the first cell there issued a **multipliering**, fast-growing movement of prayer **cells**. Every missionary can do as much. It takes believing and perseverant prayer. The vision is for the "yeast" of **small** prayer groups penetrating the whole "dough" of the sleeping congregation. It is necessary to ask the Lord for the conversion of outsiders (including relatives). The sight of newly converted members joining in the services is very stimulating. It **will** create a desire in others to serve and to pray. There is nothing as effective for waking up sleeping christians to the fact that they too ought to be winning others than a stream of new converts coming into the **church**.<sup>1</sup>

The keener church members **will welcome** advice and training in visitation. Teams of two **will** be sent to **neighbourhood** areas or to relatives. A regular scheduled weekly time for visitation is **helpful** as the common effort is a good stimulant.

The first step towards the **transformation** of a sleeping church into a living and growing one is the refusal to accept the **low** spiritual standard. It takes boldness in the Lord to ask for more. It takes **humility** to spend hours in private intercession until the first prayer **cell** is working. But what a reward to see what happened in the Acts happening **again** today.

And the presence of the Lord **was with** them with power, so that a great **number(learned)** to **believe** ...and turned and surrendered themselves to Him.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hyles, Let's Build,

<sup>2</sup> Acts 11:21 (Amplified Bible).

DIAGRAM IV

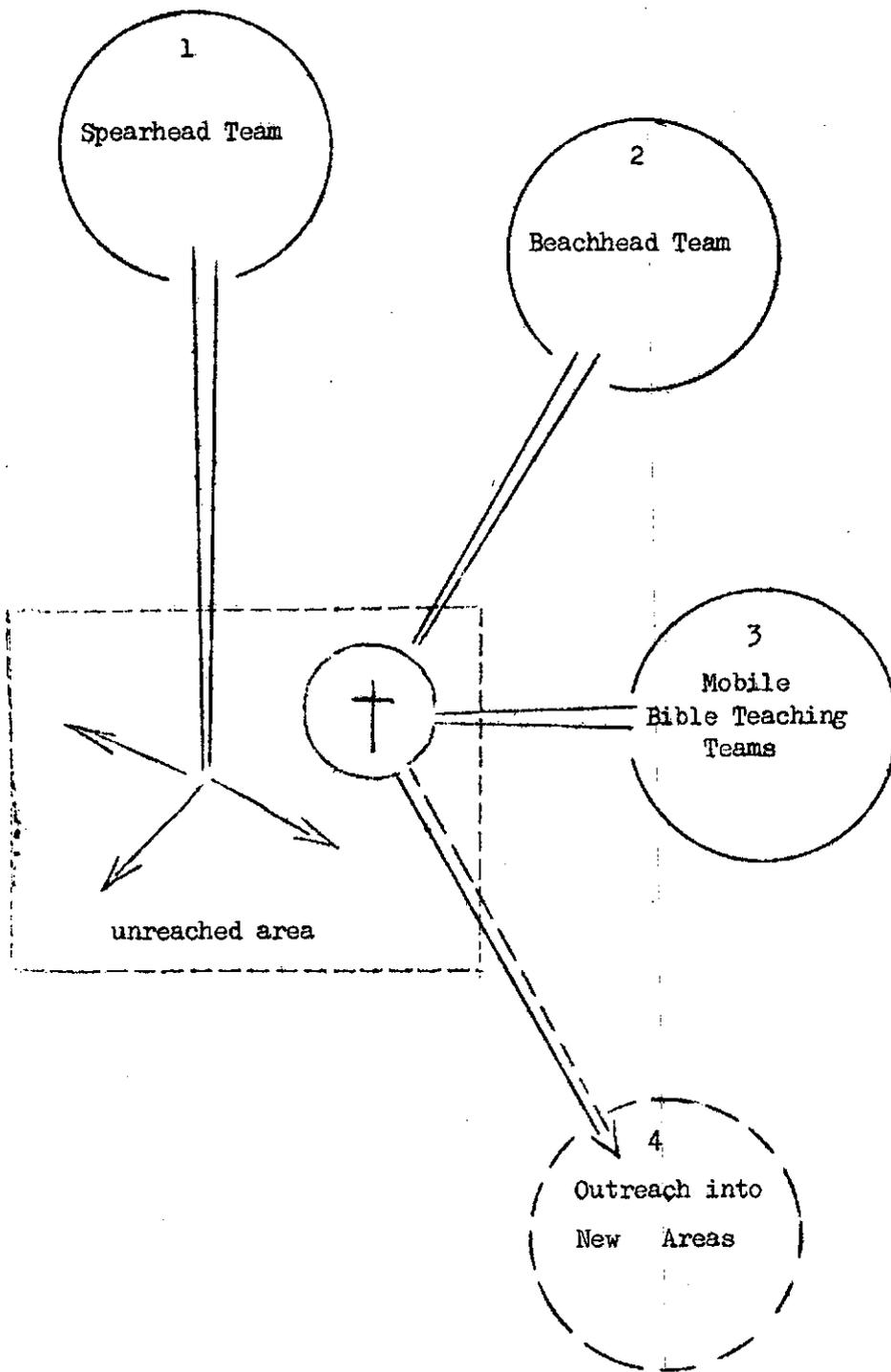


Fig. 12--Plan for the planting of a church in an unreached area.

DIAGRAM IV--Plan for the Planting of a Church  
in an Unreached Area.

This diagram is based on the teaching of Alex Smith.<sup>1</sup> The writer has no experience with successful outreach into virgin areas. The plan presented by Smith has been tested in the Ban Rai area of Central Thailand where churches continue to grow and to multiply.

The missionary can play a minor role in this plan, remaining in the background as organiser. Before the first team moves out there must be some presentation

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of the Gospel through widespread **evangelism** in order to find a responsive area. Into this region the team used as a spearhead moves in. Their **aim** is to permeate the **villages** where some interest has been shown with the Good News. Film and drama **evangelism** has proved to be singularly attractive and successful for this. Conversions occurred after seeing films on the **crucifixion**, the resurrection etc. Smith insists that, after every showing, the team must move through the **village** from house to house to witness and seek to bring people to decision. An extended time in each place **will** bring more fruit than a one day visit. The team is trained in personal **counselling** and **will** lead people to the Lord.

Immediately after this first visit the second team moves in to establish a beachhead in this area. Some of the spearhead team may be members of this team. The new converts are taught, gathered for **fellowship** and a new church is planted. **Discipling** must **be** done by this team. The sooner the new converts are **led** into soul-winning, the better they **will** mature as Christians. The new church **will** be **challenged** to reach out **right** away.

To **consolidate** and ground the new converts, **mobile** Bible teaching teams visit, **following** the example of Paul who "went from church to church **strengthening** them."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, "Strategy".

<sup>2</sup>By literature thrusts, radio, every-home crusade, etc.

<sup>3</sup>Acts 12:41 (Amplified Bible).

## CONCLUSION

During the time of **reading**, gathering material and searching for answers for this **thesis**, the Lord has spoken through the words in Ezekiel **34:11**.

For **the Lord** God says: **I will** search and find my sheep. **I will** be like a shepherd looking for his flock. **I will** find my sheep and rescue them from all the places they were scattered in that dark and cloudy **day**... **I myself will** be the Shepherd of my **sheep**... **I will** seek my lost **ones**. (Living Bible)

This is the promise of His searching and finding. It show His great longing to see more and more people saved and added to the Church which is the body of Jesus Christ. It is this assurance of **His plan** to go after the lost ones which has made it possible to persevere with the search for the best way to do **His will**.

And now **beware!** Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's **flock--His** church, purchased with His blood --for the **Holy Spirit** is holding you responsible as **overseers**.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Spirit Himself is the agent of all church growth. He **will** guide us towards better and simpler methods, just as He did in the time of the apostles. He will give a shepherd's heart to every one who is longing to be found faithful in this job.

The ultimate test of **all** that **has** been presented in the previous pages **will** be the future growth of the churches in Laos and Northeast Thailand as the writer and fellow workers **apply** the plans set out here to their **local situations**.

Let us face the fact that the **world** is open to belief in Christ as widespread as is our power to proclaim Him. The church can move forward mightily. It is God's will that she do **so**.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 20:28 (Living Bible).

<sup>2</sup> MacGavran, Understanding, p. 370.

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