

HeRD #111 - Paul's Methods & Northern Thai Church History

Koester in his book HISTORY AND LITERATURE OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY, page 110, describes Paul's missionary method in this way: "On the whole, a picture emerges which is characteristic for Paul's missionary method. He would settle in the capital of a province, together with a few tested associates, gather any Christians already living in the city, and expand his staff; together with these co-workers he would also found congregations in other cities of the area. During his absence he would maintain contact through messengers and letters in order to influence the further building and development of these churches. Paul's missionary work, therefore, should not be thought of as the humble efforts of a lonely missionary. Rather, it was a well-planned, large-scale organization that included letter-writing as an instrument of ecclesiastical policy."

At first glance, the Presbyterian missionaries in northern Thailand appear to have used the same missionary strategy, that is of starting in the provincial centers and then working outwards. There were at least two differences. First, Paul's movement remained a largely urban movement whereas the northern Thai church was predominantly rural. Second, Paul put strong emphasis on the nurture and pastoral care of new churches. The Laos Mission did provide some nurture and care, but it emphasized other forms of work, esp. educational and medical work. These two points, taken together, are important. In Thailand, generally, urban churches have shown an ability to care for themselves much more quickly than have rural churches. Thus, a predominantly rural northern Thai Christian movement requires more pastoral care and nurture. The Laos Mission, however, did not provide that level of care and nurture. It is my contention that the failure to provide adequate nurture and care has had and continues to have a profoundly negative impact on the life and ministry of the northern church.