

# **STRATEGY TO MULTIPLY RURAL CHURCHES**

A CENTRAL THAILAND CASE STUDY

By Alex G. Smith

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## FORWARD

Strategy to Multiply Churches in Rural Thailand should be carefully read by Thai church leaders and missionaries. It describes years of actual church planting. It is experience, not theory. It tells exactly what happened. It is an accurate, true account.

It is not unenlightened experience. A veteran missionary with church growth insight describes what happened. His intentions from the beginning were that the Gospel be proclaimed and men and women be encouraged to become disciples of Jesus Christ and responsible members of His Church. As he steadily carried out that intention, in the Thai society he so well describes, he met the successes and failures he describes.

Here we have intermingled three elements needed for successful propagation of the Christian Faith:

- a) A purpose in harmony with God's unswerving purpose to save men and women.
- b) Activities intelligently designed to achieve that purpose.
- c) An honest accounting of how well the intention was achieved.

Stated in theological language, this book tells us what methods of evangelism God is blessing in rural Thai society, in bringing men from unbelief to faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior, and in multiplying churches.

Good reading lies ahead. I commend the book.

February 1, 1977

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the major tasks facing the Church of Jesus Christ today is to effectively plant self-propagating churches in the rural areas of the world, especially across the heavily populated plains of Asia. About 65 per cent of the world's burgeoning population is found in Asia. Of this 65 per cent, eight persons out of ten live in rural areas. However, less than 5 per cent of Asia's population claims the name of Christ. Only a few countries are more than 10 per cent Christian, e.g. Korea 14 per cent, Indonesia 11 per cent. In these, as well as the rest of Asia, vast rural populations remain untouched and unevangelized.

### A. PROBLEM

Today the continent most ignorant of Christ is not Africa, which, according to David Barrett, is expected to be called Christian within 20 years. Nor is it Latin America, where the Holy Spirit is gathering large sectors of the human harvest into God's Kingdom. It is Asia that poses the great challenge for evangelization in our generation.

Now it must be recognized that anywhere people without Christ are lost in spiritual darkness. They are severed from a vital living relationship with the Almighty. Be they illiterate Indians in the upper Amazon, or cultured elites in the inner suburbs of New York, their condition is the same. Be they educated Africans in Nairobi, or unlearned vagabonds on the streets of India, without the light of Christ they are equally in spiritual darkness. In this sense we may think of Asia, both in its growing urban population and in the masses of its rural settlements, as a dark continent.

In these crucial days there is an urgent need for the church to grapple with the specific problems peculiar to this dark continent. Amidst political, economic, and social turmoil the Church across the globe must faithfully bare the cross of her evangelistic responsibility. She must intercede earnestly for Asia. She must send it her best Spirit-anointed manpower. Cultural patterns that complicate and often frustrate the communication of the Gospel must be understood. Solutions to family and kinship meshes that bar Asians from Christ must be found. Practical keys that unlock people bound behind closed doors of spiritual ignorance must be discovered. Such obstacles call for the development of strategies to be applied determinedly to each unreached population until congregations glorifying God's name are in fact planted.

Asia, of course, is not one monolithic giant. It is an incredibly complex assortment of languages, peoples, classes, occupations, ideals, and political systems. I am investigating the christianization of only one of these units.

The immensity of the need focuses on two great distinctive sections of population. First there are the huge populations that are within the sound of the Gospel, but are not yet effectively evangelized. They are within some possible contact with the Gospel, but

still are unreached for Christ. Here the national churches are called to accept their God-given responsibility.

Secondly, a much larger segment of people exist who have not even been reached with the Good News. Nor are they likely to be, unless there occurs a great explosion of cross-cultural missions. Some of these are tribes, others castes. Some are whole sections of cities. Still others are cohesive economic segments. Here missionaries from the existing national churches are needed. But the task is too enormous to leave solely to the local churches. The cooperation of Church and missions across the nations of the world is required. Thus a host of missionaries from churches in all continents including Africa, Asia, and South America should be sent forth.

A considerable number of missionaries have worked and are working in Asia. They carry on valuable ministries, yet some seem perplexed by the difficult task. Others admit being frustrated by the seemingly insurmountable problems. Although much mission and church activity is going on, few effective strategies are being employed to adequately expand Christ's rule to the nations of Asia; less still to the majority of rural people. Many strategies being employed fall short of actual and sufficient church growth. In some cases there may be valid reasons for this lack. The field may not yet be sufficiently ripe for harvest. In other cases honest evaluation may reveal weaknesses in present strategies. These must be corrected. More clear-cut plans to evangelize and multiply churches must be worked out in each land and in every unit of population, if Asia is to be claimed under the banner of Christ's cross. Such strategies must meet the specific needs of those populations, be based on the indigenous developments possible in those local native soils, and yet not reduce the eternal core of truth in the Gospel. They must follow through to the effective planting of functioning churches and their continued growth and multiplication to the glory of Christ.

## **B. PURPOSE**

The objective of this study is to describe the actual rural situation as regards evangelization in Central Thailand, and to design a workable strategy to multiply churches there.

I will review the biblical basis of church growth strategy as well as the historical development of the churches, together with insights drawn from the convert profile and field experience, especially from the province of Uthai Thani in Central Thailand.

It is expected that many of the underlying principles discovered will affect the thinking of missionaries in other lands also. This particular case study will yield lessons applicable elsewhere. I hope that such insights will stir the imaginations of others to develop strategies applicable to their own rural cultures.

The strength of the strategy suggested in this study lies in its interlinking cohesiveness. By this I mean that each element of the core strategy is so inter-related with

the other elements that to neglect one major aspect is to seriously weaken the whole structure. Neglecting one element destroys the strategy. The potential consequence of this is failure to reach the goal. Thus, the cohesiveness of such strategies must be maintained by a determined adherence to the biblical goals of church growth and mission. Furthermore, effectiveness should be measured by a critical evaluation based on actual growth resulting from the field application of that strategy.

Over the centuries Asian church growth has been generally slow, but accelerated growth in pockets of populations has occurred during the last five decades. One of the pockets of recent advance is Uthaitani. Small though the growth is numerically, it is significant compared to the slow growth and stagnation found in most parts of Central Thailand. Such a contrast makes this investigation necessary and valuable.

Some readers conversant with biblical foundations of church growth may wish to skip through the theological section or to go directly to chapter two. However, the goal of mission, the meaning of evangelism, and the validity of strategy in multiplying churches as defined in the opening chapter should be clear in the minds of such readers.

### **C. METHODOLOGY**

During this study I will employ various methodologies depending on the nature of approaches needed for the particular section under investigation.

Scriptural foundations for church growth strategies will be developed by studying the Scriptures from the perspective of biblical theology. Texts on the subject will also be consulted.

I will use an anthropological approach to describe the people of rural Central Thailand. They have been considerably described in books and articles on Central Thailand. To these I will add insights from personal experience gained from nine years of living in the rural areas and by research conducted by me while in Thailand.

Then I will recount the history of the growth of the various churches and missions by studying church records, reports, and statistics. In addition, I will analyze questionnaires on the structure and growth of each body completed on the field by responsible leaders of churches and mission. I will compile and study maps and graphs of church growth across decades, as well as survey books, articles, and correspondence relevant to the situation.

Next I will employ an analytical approach to expose the principles and processes of communicating the Gospel effectively. This will be done by collating and analyzing data from questionnaires completed by converts, by reviewing practical lessons learned from personal experience on the field, and by studying appropriate books.

The closing sections proposing strategy and projections will be developed by applying lessons and principles learned from the above investigations. I will study records, reports and correspondence of strategies practiced by other missionaries in Central Thailand. I will also analyze personal observations and practical experimentation done on the field.

#### **D. SOURCES**

Sources will include:

Books in McAllister Library (FTS)

Books in UCLA Library

Books in USC Library, including HRAF files

Books in Glendale Public Library

Thai Government Census Reports, Statistics, and data

Questionnaires completed by church and mission leaders

Questionnaires completed by Christian converts

Initial research reports from the R. C. Church survey

Some tape interviews of missionaries and Thai Christians  
(tapes in my possession)

Personal correspondence and field notes.

#### **E. LIMITATIONS**

This study will not be an exhaustive investigation of all the perspectives of church planting strategy, be they theological, anthropological, or historical. Nor will it deal with all the principles of church growth in depth. Nor for that matter will it be an analysis of the whole of Thailand. Nor will it deal in detail with all of the Church throughout Thailand. It will deal in detail neither with the Roman Catholic church, nor the Church of Christ in Thailand (the largest Protestant body), nor other mission groups. However, some insights will be drawn from these churches.

This study will be based largely on the development of congregations in the Uthathani Province of Central Thailand, the area with which I am most intimately acquainted. It will deal with some comparisons among the other churches of OMF in Central Thailand, though not to the same degree of depth.

## F. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Through nine years of field experience in Thailand I have learned much from my Thai brethren. I shared the conflicts and struggles of many in Uthaithani, leading scores to Christ, teaching them, and helping them establish small rural congregations. Much I have endeavored to teach them. Much they have taught me.

I am deeply grateful for the wise counsel of Dr. Donald McGavran, my esteemed mentor, and the encouragement of the Dean, Dr. Arthur Glasser. I acknowledge with thanks, help from the grant and aid fund of the School of World Missions, and permission from the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, under who I serve, to undertake this study.

A special appreciation is due my wife, Faith, who faithfully stood by me and typed the drafts of this thesis. I thank Dr. Anne Townsend for reading this manuscript and making helpful suggestions.

During this study I have gained helpful impressions from writings in various books from many sources. I sincerely thank the authors and publishers of those books, as acknowledged in the text and as listed in the Bibliography (pg. 262ff). Anyone wishing further insights should read more fully the references cited.

I acknowledge the debt of gratitude I owe to local churches in Thailand. Occasionally I have referred to O.M.F. churches, by which I mean those independent churches planted in close cooperation with O.M.F. missionaries. The term does not indicate an O.M.F. denomination, nor O.M.F. control over local churches. O.M.F. is an international fellowship of overseas, cross-cultural missionaries. Church planting is their goal. Local churches coming into being through O.M.F. are indigenous in the sense of being rooted in the local culture, free of O.M.F. subsidy, governed by national leaders, and free to choose their church association.

I am grateful to the officials governing Thailand. In general, there is much freedom in religious activities. Without this the growth of the Church would be impeded. I prepared this study in 1975/1976. The then current government is mentioned on page 70. Since then, in October 1976, a military coup introduced further order and reforms. A new government was appointed under Prime Minister Tanin Kraivixien. May Thai Christians everywhere be faithful citizens in righteousness, discipline, and loyalty as they spread the Gospel. Under current favourable conditions application of church growth principles discussed in this book will, I trust, result in church multiplication to the glory of God.

Above all I praise God for the privilege of ministering to Asia's millions.

## I. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR CHURCH PLANTING STRATEGY

Nearly 30 years after the end of the World War II, a bearded soldier of the former Japanese Imperial Army surrendered in the Philippines. For the last 29 years he had been hiding on the island because of an order given him by his wartime commander. “Stay put even if the Japanese army is destroyed.” In March 1974 the 52-year-old soldier handed over his rusty samurai sword to an officer of the Philippine Air Force. He gave himself up only after his former commander, now a book seller in Japan, came to the island with the official ceasefire order, telling the Imperial Army to stop fighting.

Almost 2000 years ago, the Lord Jesus declared a parable to his disciples in which they could clearly discern the command, “Occupy till I come.” He amplified the significance of this in His Great Commission. God’s command to mission had already been formulated in His foreknowledge before the Creation. As its necessity arose by the fall in Eden, His plan for redemption was activated. It was revealed through His inspired Word by the eternal Holy Spirit and in the power of His Son, Jesus Christ, who “became flesh and dwelt among us.” He thereby identified Himself with our humanity and communicated His message directly by word and deed. The object of His grace was mankind. His goal was to bring as many as possible to be the redeemed people of God. His determined but flexible strategy tenaciously pursued this goal to procure their reconciliation, even though it meant the cross. The climactic victory awaits Christ’s return for His Church and the consummation of His Kingdom. Meanwhile, His command is still valid. He calls His servants to exhibit the unquestioned obedience of the Japanese soldier “till He come.”

I will discuss the elements of mission summarized above under three major emphases—God’s goal orientation in His redemptive purposes, His involvement in communicating the salvation message, and His strategy to expedite His worldwide mission.

### A. GOD’S GOAL-ORIENTATION IN MISSION

#### 1. Setting His Goals for the Cosmos

The God of the Holy Scriptures is thoroughly “goal oriented.” Before the foundations of the world He had set His goals. Prior to the eternal ages He clearly defined His objectives and formulated His plans for their realization. Our everlasting God marches age by age through history towards the climax of His predetermined goals. Wright says that, “God is a dynamic Being, external to the process of life, engaged in the active direction of history to His own goals” (1952:22). His actions in creation, in history, in redemption, all point to His objectives. God is deliberate in pursuing the consummation of those goals.

The Lord Jesus was incarnated to realize God's eternal purposes. Jesus was goal-oriented throughout His ministry. "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). His objective was the cross. Nothing could deflect Him from it because, through enduring the cross, He would open the exclusive way to fulfill the Father's goal of redemption for lost mankind. Bitter though the experience of the cross be, its necessity for the redemption of the world governed the will and determined the action of our Lord. The joy of fulfilling that goal dominated His heart (Heb.12:2).

That man might be saved to enjoy the presence of God forever is the goal orientation which provides an essential unity to the whole Bible, welding Old and New Testaments into one definite focus. Thus, a consideration of both is necessary for any deliberation on mission.

As Creator of all, God holds a special relationship to His creation. He governs and sustains all through His loving grace. Even in the face of man's rebellion in Eden, the continued forsaking of the truth by His created children, and the persistent opposition of Satanic forces, God is concerned to reveal His way of forgiveness to all men. Since He is "King of the nations" the scope of His goal embraces the whole earth and includes all generations (Jer. 10:7). It envelops all nations, people, kindreds and tongues.

He created man a being with both spiritual and social dimensions. Sin with its consequences destroyed the efficient functioning of man's social as well as his spiritual being. Only through the spiritual redemption of His children can a truly social transformation emerge to bring in the wholeness of the Shalom peace which the world desires. Thus, mission and evangelism are prime elements in God's strategy of reaching His goal for the salvation of His people and the renewal of the world. The effective implementation of the redemptive mandate in bringing the nations to the obedience of faith is the key factor in initiating genuine uplift and social justice through the cultural mandate. The final victory over all evil will take place when He returns with "power and glory."

## 2. Embracing the World with His Missionary Heart

The emphasis of such an orientation throughout Scripture shows God as the seeking and finding God. It was he who came seeking Adam and Eve after their fall into sin. He later set Noah apart to declare righteousness and judgment to a wicked generation. He separated Abraham from the Ur of the Chaldeas to produce a holy nation as a testimony of His grace and power before the nations. He sent reluctant Jonah to declare judgment on "Gentile" idolatrous oppressive Ninevah. Even in the Babylonian captivity His purposes to reach the world were articulated through Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar's court and the bold witness of the three Hebrew lads. Later in the post exile era, Esther functioned similarly in the Persian palace. When the fullness of time had come, He sent His own Son, incarnate in the flesh, to be the perfect missionary servant to the spiritually lost world. After His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, he poured out His Spirit upon the Church that resulted, empowering her to spread the Gospel to the

ends of the earth, to every continent and people. His goal still includes the three billion people yet to be reached in today's world. Truly out of God's heart came an unprecedented demonstration of missionary seeking and sending.

A. *His concern for all mankind.* As the Father of creation, God's pervasive perspective included all the nations. His missionary heart extended to all. Psalm 150:6 reflects the universal concern of the redeemed that all creation might share His sovereign concern, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord." Elsewhere the Scripture indicates the inclusiveness of God's pervasive perspective and intent. "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name" (Psa. 86:9). This purpose is vividly portrayed in the call of Abraham, to whom He promised "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed...and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 17:3; 28:14; 26:4; 22:18; 18:18). In the Old Testament God's reduction principle from the total population to one man (Abraham), and later to one family (Isaac), one tribe (Jacob), and one nation (Israel) was not for their exclusive salvation, but for a missionary purpose to influence all nations. In the New Testament, the expansion from the few to the tribes, nations, and multitudes is fulfilled through the dynamic Christian movement. Isaiah's Servant Songs pinpoint God's missionary burden, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. 45:22).

The prophecies of Daniel point to the focal point of the final acts of history, when the smiting stone of Christ's Kingdom will supercede all others and will be established throughout the whole earth (Daniel 2:44; 7:14). In the last day the prophets declare that "many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day and shall be My people" (Zach. 2:11; 8:20-22; Micah 4:2). The consummating goal of God's mission is recorded in Revelation 7:9, 10:

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

B. *Reaching Gentiles in the Old Testament.* Another facet of God's universal concern and gracious outreach is revealed in concrete cases that spotlight His activity among the Gentile heathen. During the patriarchal period men like Melchisedec truly loved the Lord, though they were not identified with Abraham's chosen line. The fleeing Moses became a missionary to Jethro and his Midianite family, winning them into the family of God. Rahab's faith and decision was crystallized during the Israelite spies' infiltration of Jericho. The Jewish servant girl won Naaman the Syrian through her faith and witness. Unfortunate circumstances faced Naomi in Moab, but her lifestyle and faith drew Ruth to an irreversible commitment to the Lord. Both Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabitess were incorporated into the very lineage from which Christ sprang (Matt.1).

All these instances of extension into the Gentile world give insight to and underscore God's missionary purposes for Israel. When He called Abraham He had all men in mind.

Furthermore, Israel drew outsiders toward the Lord by attracting them to her holy lifestyle. As God's holy nation, Israel had the implicit responsibility to witness to the surrounding peoples. This was one of God's purposes in making her a kingdom of priests in the midst of the nations. For example, the Queen of Sheba was so attracted by what she heard of Israel that she traveled to visit King Solomon. She acknowledged her astonishment at the wisdom and prosperity Israel enjoyed under God.

When Israel's power to attract the nations was weakened through disobedience, sin, and compromise, God sent her into captivity in Babylon. His witness was thereby introduced to other nations by the diaspora. Following the exile a new wave of aggressive proselytism ensued. Synagogue communities were established and intense missionary activity spread. Jewish efforts to make proselytes wherever they went extended as far away as China. De Ridder expands this dedicated lay proselytizing mission of Judaism in detail (1971:75-127). The Pharisees were particularly zealous in mission. As a result synagogues of Jews and proselytes were spread across the Roman Mediterranean world by the opening of the New Testament era.

*C. Accelerated expansion in the New Testament.* In the Gospels, instances of Christ's dealings with the Samaritan woman (John 4), the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15), and the Roman Centurion (Matt. 8) foreshadow the greater gathering of Gentiles near at hand. One of Christ's twelve chosen disciples was Simon the Canaanite (Mark 3:18). Just before His betrayal, Greeks came seeking Jesus (John 12:20). At Pentecost there were "Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" who were no doubt converted among the three thousand (Acts 2:5-11). Acts records the gaining momentum in winning the Gentiles. Philip runs to interpret the Gospel to the eunuch, an Ethiopian proselyte. He also wins the Samaritans. Peter counsels Cornelius and his clan. Paul becomes the Apostle to the Gentiles, and the Gospel spreads throughout Asia Minor and Europe, gathering in the Roman Empire within a few centuries. All this reaching beyond the borders of Jewry was the beginning of the worldwide expansion of the Christian movement anticipated by our Lord when He predicted that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).

Whereas the Old Testament call to mission seems passive though implicit, the New Testament command for world wide missions is explicit and unmistakable. It is clearly recorded in all four Gospels, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20a RSV). It is found and followed in the Acts, as the Church witnessed "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Its impact persists throughout the Epistles. Writing to the Thessalonians Paul says,

Ye became followers of us and the Lord...ye were examples to all...from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak anything (I Thess. 1:6-8).

God is the dynamic driving force behind His goal of mission. Infused by His love, His people function as His representatives in accord with His concern for the redemption of the world. By their active presence and their aggressive proclamation, they persuade the heathen to be reconciled to God through Christ (II Cor. 5:11-20).

### 3. Working Out His Eternal Purposes

From the foundation of the world until the consummation of the age, God is working out His eternal purposes towards His Kingdom (Matt. 25:34). He is actively calling out a people for Himself from all nations, people, and tribes. Generation after generation He continues His mission until in the fullness of time “He gathers together in one all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10).

It is God who sustains and directs the universe (Col. 1:16, 17). He initiates and controls history. Some of His mighty acts in the redemptive process concerning the nations are recorded in Scripture. In Acts 13:17-39 Paul summarizes some of the active direction of God in dealing with His people. He called Abraham. He directed Joseph to Egypt for the preservation of Israel. He delivered His chosen people from Pharaoh’s oppression. He preserved them in the wilderness. He judged the wicked enemies and gave Israel the land. He provided judges and leaders for four and a half centuries until the prophets. At Israel’s request He established a kingdom under Saul and later under David from whom the Saviour Christ was prophetically promised. He used the Gentile nations to chastise His backslidden people and bring them to repentance. In the fullness of time He caused Augustus Caesar to order a census so that Christ would be born in Bethlehem according to prophecy (Luke 2:1-5; Gal. 4:4). He controlled events leading to Christ’s trial and crucifixion. He raised Him from the dead in vindicating Him as Redeemer. He sent the Holy Spirit and established the Church. He permitted bitter persecution to disburse the believers so the Church would be planted widely. He converted the persecutor, Saul, and sent him as the Apostle to the Gentiles. All these point to God’s working out His eternal purposes. God is moving history progressively towards the climactic fulfillment of His goals, directing the events of nations by His sovereign hand. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, and as the rivers of water: He turneth it withersoever He will” (Prov. 21:1).

God’s goals and purposes are fixed, but His strategy to reach them is flexible. As the spiritual life of His people fluctuate, and as historical conditions change among the nations, He also bends His strategy as far as is necessary to continue the ongoing of His purposes. He is pliable in the use of agents to fulfill His will. For example, where the Israelite family heads failed in their spiritual duty, He raised up the priests. When they became corrupt, He called forth the prophets. His strategy is pliable as needed. His unique Person and position in the universe gives Him the indisputable right to exercise

choice as to the instruments to be used in His redemptive intent. Therefore, His flexible strategy determines the right time, place, method, and people most suitable for reaching His goal.

God is in the enviable position to elect. He initiates election (Rom. 9:11-16). Indeed election is the core of God's strategy in the fulfillment of His purposes. It relates directly to "the purposes of God" (Rom. 9:11, 17). Being elected for God's purposes does not necessarily mean one is spiritually saved by God's grace. One is only justified or made acceptable before God by genuine personal faith in Christ the Redeemer. At times redeemed individuals like Abraham, Isaac, Jeremiah, and Paul were elected (Rom. 9:7). On other occasions election concerns those not justified, such as Pharaoh, Cyrus, and Judas Iscariot. The criteria in election seems to be inextricably designed to the purposes of God. At times it involves corporate groups like Israel, Babylon, and even the Gentiles, but it always relates to God's objectives (Rom. 11:17-22). The divine operation of God's grace issues directly through election to the fulfillment of His purposes in reaching His goal. It requires a response by the delegated agents in faith and obedience to God's directions. Election issues in the fulfillment of God's purposes even when the objects of election, such as Pharaoh, refuse to acknowledge God.

To what are these purposes of God directed? On what object does His consuming concern rest? What draws the focus of His divine activity? To this we now turn.

#### 4. Focusing on the Object of His Delight—"His people"

The burden of the Lord for humanity is all embracing. It includes everyone regardless of race, age, color, status, caste, or economic standing. It involves the physical, social, and spiritual well-being of man. God sends the sun and the rain on the just and the unjust alike (Matt. 5:45). In the Bible He gives principles for social justice and peace. Still more deeply He is moved with compassion on the multitudes scattered abroad without leadership or spiritual care (Matt. 9:36). He "so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son" who "died for all" (John 3:16; II Cor. 5:14-15). Indeed He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and the knowledge of the truth (II Pet. 3:9; I Tim. 4:12). Thus, God's grace provides for the physical, social, and spiritual needs of all men. But man's greed, pride, and rebellion have marred the equal distribution of this provision.

I shall major on the spiritual dimension here since the heart of mission is redemption through the Gospel of Christ. It is also essential to the character of the transformed company of believers. Furthermore, it is the key to solving the problems related to the other two concerns. The validity of the cultural mandate is recognized, but the primary element of mission is spiritual and foundational to effective social action.

As man in his sin responds to the convicting persuasion of God's Word and His Holy Spirit, he is regenerated by repentance and faith. These transformed people of God become the particular object of rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:10). The Revelation records the climax of this great company gathered before His throne in worship and honor (Rev. 7:9, 10). These people of God from all generations out of every ethnic group, from across

the whole globe are the object of His divine delight. For this great host the shed blood of the Lamb avails forever. Before Him will kneel the faithful patriarchs, redeemed Israel, and a multitude of born again Gentiles, all incorporated into one body. A heterogeneous lot they will be culturally, but what a united homogeneous group they will represent through love, praise and glory of Christ their Lord and Saviour. “He shall see the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). Here is the bull’s eye focus of God’s redemptive goal.

a. *The functional Church.* Now we must return to the present. History is moving towards that eschatological climax, but until that time is consummated the Church has much to do. Her mission to make disciples and incorporate them into local congregations continues. The focus of church growth strategy today is the local expression of that great “Church”.

1) Defining the concept. Before the church planter begins, it is vital for him to grasp a comprehensive concept of the functional church he is expecting to establish, as well as the universal Church. Thus he will clarify what is meant by the local functioning church and identify some of its essential marks. Although the visible congregation includes pseudo Christians similar to Judas Iscariot, as well as genuine believers, only born again members comprise the true Body of Christ.

The Church is not dead material like wood, stone, and cement. The Church consists of people, regenerated people through Jesus Christ, people with spiritual life, people in fellowship with God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ’s universal Church is made up of these people from all ages, all nations, all languages. But in each local community God’s will is that the local congregation be the full expression of His worldwide Church in miniature through the power of the Holy Spirit (Smith 1973:27).

In practice the local church usually includes some tares as well as wheat.

The New Testament indicates that God desires the multiplication of local churches as expressions of His power and grace here and now on a global scale. Jesus declared, “I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Referring to Matthew 18:15-20, Clemence writes that a small company of Christ’s believers who gather together in His name are empowered to begin forthwith to fulfill the functions of an organized Christian society, to work together, to plead together with Heaven, and to transact their affairs in the name and with the sanction of the heavenly court (1876:4).

These local independent congregations meeting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit are to be “miniature copies of the entire Church,” subject to Christ and always consulting His will. Each is to express

to its own locality what the whole Church is to be to the world. It is to be the representative of Jesus—His body. It

is to be as a voice crying, ‘Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely’> And its purity, its pity, and its love are to be of so high an order that in them the world may read something of the love and grace of the Church’s Head and Lord (Clemence 1876:4).

2) The Church’s evangelistic mandate. Near neighbor evangelism is a vital responsibility of each local congregation. Members are to be mobilized to communicate Christ effectively to their community. Special emphasis is needed on personal witness to relatives and friends.

A further insight needs to be observed here, for beyond the effective reach of the witness of local churches are many who remain ignorant of the good news of Christ’s power to reconcile and regenerate sinners. Recognizing this, Paul raises four questions which relate to strategy of missions. He simply asks,

But how shall they ask Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them unless someone sends him? (Romans 10:14, 15 Living Bible).

There are two categories of people to be considered here. First, are those whose culture is the same or similar but who are distant from contact with the Gospel. The Church must send evangelists to them, for they are lost without Christ. In a second category are those with diverse cultural distance. Here cross-cultural mission requires special missionaries to be sent to communicate the Gospel across these barriers.

Thus, the Church is responsible to send out missionaries under God’s direction to proclaim the Gospel and to persuade the hearers to believe in the Lord. Those who obediently respond by repenting of sin and depending on Christ by faith are joined to the Lord and the fellowship of His saints. Such extension of the evangelistic mission should aim to plant new churches.

3) Style of behaviour. The transformed lives of believers won to Christ are to issue in a behavioural pattern of life befitting God’s holy people.

Following the Exodus, God demanded a new lifestyle from Israel. He gave them precise principles and specific instructions for a style of behaviour suited to their “set apart” calling as the people of God. His Word divinely defined a cultural motif for holy living, all-embracing in its dimensions, particularly in social relationships.

The New Testament calls disciple to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22). The Epistles emphasize equally doctrine and deed, precept and practice, belief and behaviour. The Lord emphasizes genuine love as the seed for a Christian lifestyle. Thus, in no lesser way, God expects the principles of Israel’s lifestyle to be

revitalized through His power. He demands a lifestyle that befits the Church as the redeemed people of God.

b. *Model of the functioning church.* A three-pronged model shows the prerequisites for a functional church. First it is a lifestyle of worship and communion with God. Second, it is one of sharing and loving fellowship towards fellow members of the Body of Christ. Third, it exhibits concern for fellowmen without Christ. It is a total lifestyle designed to influence men by the power of Christ. The model is dynamic with vital relationships towards God (vertical), towards church members (internal), and towards the world of lost men (centrifugal). See Figure 1.

FIGURE 1  
THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE  
FUNCTIONING CHURCH

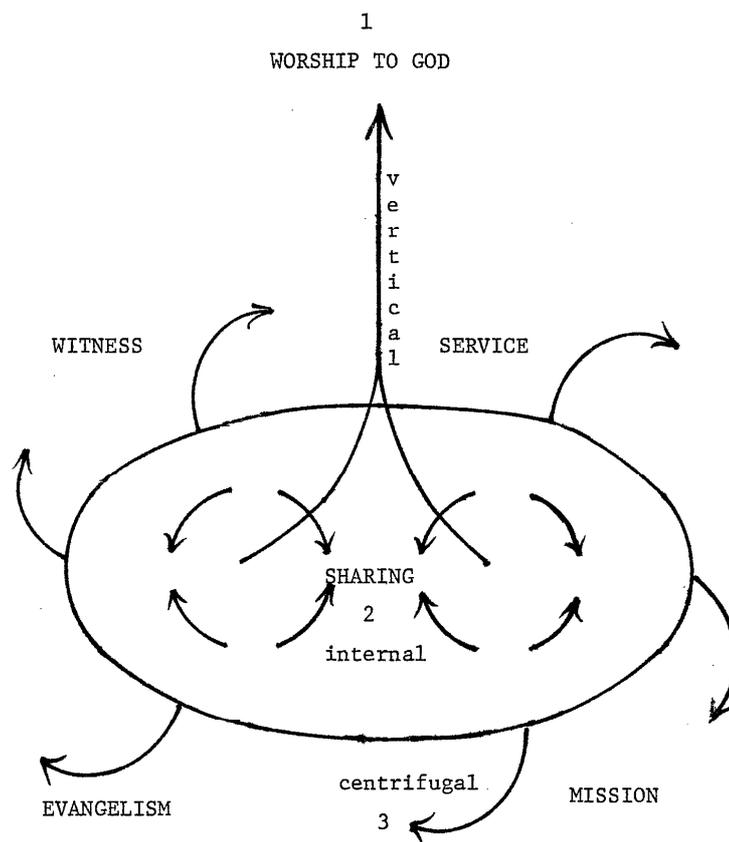


Figure 1  
Three Dimensions of the Functioning Church

1) A worshipping family of God. The first element of the functional local church recognizes that the members belong to the family of God whom they unitedly worship. Their unique relationship through Christ their Lord and Saviour binds them into one family and cements them together as one fellowship. The Scripture verifies this corporate aspect when it speaks of the Church as a commonwealth, a habitation of God, a city, a temple, a house, a family and a body. In miniature form these entities are reflected in the local community of believers.

Genuine Christians are not to be detached, isolated, or unconnected believers, but functionally united as responsible members of His Church. Clemence observes

that a church rightly constituted is a unity, and not a collection of units. A man may be a member of an independent church, but an independent member he cannot be (1876:15).

The well-ordered nature of the Church is described in I Cor. 12:12-28. The Church of Jesus Christ is one body (v. 12, 13, 20) comprised of many members (v. 12, 14, 20) each tempered and set in the body as it pleases God (v. 18, 24, 25, 28). Paul aptly summarizes for the Corinthian Church, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (v. 27). Christ is the living Head of the Church, while the Holy Spirit, like the heart, is the throbbing life of it through the members.

Each member has his own place, his own gift, his own function. And each is necessary to the whole. Each member has a gift no other member has. Each does something for the body which no other can possibly do...the function then is not that of an isolated member, but of a corporate body and its prime object is to exhibit the glorious life of Him who dwells within (Denovan 1961:47).

The spiritual development of the members of the Church is dependent on their continued and maturing relationship to the Lord God. This comes from deep worship and through obedience to His will. The early Church pictured in Acts 2:41-47 exhibits at least seven marks of a godly fellowship in their corporate relationship in meaningful worship. The 3000 who repented and were baptized into Christ on the day of Pentecost continued steadfastly in these marks.

(a) They gladly received the Word and continued to be taught in the Apostles’ doctrine (2:42). Consistent instruction in God’s Holy Word is an essential facet of spiritual growth.

(b) They met regularly for fellowship. This expression of worship was conducted daily both as united public fellowship at the temple and also in domestic fellowship in home gatherings (2:42, 46, 5:42). Griffith Thomas suggests that this corporate aspect is of supreme importance because unattached Christian life is impossible (1956:73).

(c) The celebration of the Lord's Supper indicates a vital and meaningful communion with the Lord. The breaking of bread was a symbolic remembrance of Christ's redemptive work and a reminder of His promised return. It was commemorated daily in the temple and in homes (2:42, 46).

(d) Prayer was a necessary exercise. Herein was deep communication with God requesting His supply, guidance, and forgiveness. Through prayer they indicated their full dependence on the Lord in their lives and in the establishment of His Kingdom (2:42).

(e) A profound respect and holy fear of God was engendered. The more God worked by the power of His mighty Spirit in miraculous ways through the apostles, the more they were in awe of Him (2:24; 5:5, 11).

(f) There was a consolidating spirit of unity and an open display of unprecedented unselfishness (2:44-45; 4:32-35). Here was love in action, spontaneously overflowing to meet the needs of others.

(g) Praise to the Lord rang throughout Jerusalem from the lips of Christians. Their hearts were overwhelmed with thankfulness to their Creator and Redeemer (2:47; 4:21).

This display of reverence for God and revolutionary change of life resulted in an expansion of God's work in the hearts of the surrounding community's population. The Lord not only gave the believers favour with the populace, but also daily added many believers to His Church (2:47; 4:4). There also arose jealous opposition from the Jewish leaders, and persecution followed (4:5ff).

These marks of the worshipping family, and the results that follow, depend on the Holy Spirit's ministry. To enforce them or try to initiate them in the flesh is folly. But this is the target of a worshipping church to which the church planter must pray, plan, and work.

2) A sharing fellowship. Primarily each member of Christ's body has the right to approach God directly. Being washed from his sins in the blood of Christ, he is made a priest unto God (Rev. 1:5, 6; I Pet. 2:5, 9).

In addition to this, as "members of one another" adjusted without discord into one body, each one has a distinct and responsible relationship to each other (Eph. 2:25; I Cor. 12:24, 25).

The Apostle John teaches that right relationship to God issues in a sharing fellowship of the believers.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (I John 1:7).

Furthermore, injunctions concerning "one another" are emphatically repeated throughout the Epistles. These many references may be arranged loosely in three

categories: 1) ministry one to another, 2) service one to another, and 3) attitudes one to another. Naturally, some of these overlap. A few are strongly culturally oriented (e.g. Rom. 16:16). But all relate to the relationship among members within the community of believers. Below is a summary that should be considered by the church planter as valid expression within the functioning fellowship.

(a) Worship ministry one to another:

- Teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs – Col. 3:16; I Cor. 14:26-31
- Edify one another – Rom. 14:19; I Thess. 5:11
- Exhort one another – Heb. 10:25; 3:13; I Thess. 5:14
- Admonish one another – Rom. 15:14
- Pray one for another – James 5:16
- Confess your faults one to another – James 5:16
- Forgive one another – Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32
- Comfort one another – I Thess. 4:18
- Testify one to another – Luke 24:32
- Tarry one for another – I Cor. 11:33

(b) Service one to another:

- By love serve one another – Gal. 5:13
- Use hospitality one to another without grudging – I Pet. 4:8, 9
- Receive ye one another – Rom. 15:7
- Bear one another's burdens – Gal. 6:2
- Wash one another's feet – John 13:14
- Have the same care for one another – I Cor. 12:25

(c) Attitudes one to another:

- Love one another – Rom. 13:8; I Pet. 3:8, 9
- Be kindly affectioned one to another – Rom. 12:10
- In honour prefer one another – Rom. 12:10

- Have the same mind one towards another – Rom. 12:16; 15:5
- Forbear one another in love – Eph. 4:2
- Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted – Eph. 4:32
- Submit yourselves one to another – Eph. 5:21; I Pet. 5:5
- Consider one another to provoke unto love and good works – Heb. 10:24
- Forgive one another – Eph. 4:32

The exercise of these sharing aspects of the fellowship results in spiritual growth and purification of the Church, increased brotherly love and concern within the Church, and open communication among the members of the Church. These lead to the preservation of the order and unity of the sharing fellowship.

3) A working community in witness and service. The Church is God's ambassador. Each is therefore responsible to be in contact with the Lord through spiritual worship, to be in harmony with the other members of His earthly staff, and to be in contact with the world, the sphere of his ambassadorial duties (II Cor. 5:17-21).

In other terms, the Church is like an electric conductor which in contact with her heavenly source of power is to be plugged in to effective spiritual witness and useful service to the unconverted world.

(a) Equipment: Of first importance is the believer's equipment for witness and service. Paul illustrates such spiritual equipment for the believer's life and work in Ephesians 6:13-18. Here is armor for protection against the attacks of myriads of spiritual enemies and antagonists. It includes salvation, truth, and righteousness, together with the shield of faith. As he ventures forth to spread the Gospel of Peace wherever he goes, he prayerfully depends on the Lord. His only weapon of attack is the Word of God, sharpened by the Spirit of truth. Here is the standard equipment for every soldier of the cross.

A second aspect of special equipment provided by God is the gifts that the Spirit distributes according to His will (I Cor. 12). Although some of these are for the internal functioning of the Church, many are for the effective witness and service outside the church. Some have a dual role such as gifts of healing, working of miracles, and discerning of spirits.

Lastly, some members whose gifts meet particular functional needs of the church's ministry are appointed by the Lord to leadership roles. The purpose of these specialized leaders is to train and equip the ordinary church members to effectively carry

out the worship, witness, and service of the Church (Eph. 4:11, 12). The Apostles were also vital to the extension of the Church in mission (Acts 13-20). Prophets no doubt received gifts in determining the mind of the Spirit in terms of strategy, personnel, and gifts needed (I Tim. 1:18; 4:14). The evangelists helped church expansion, while the pastors and teachers were engrossed in the Christian education of the church.

(b) Leaders: Administratively the New Testament speaks of three particular responsible leaders developed in Acts. There were apostles whose concern was the spiritual development in the churches (Acts 6:2, 4) as well as the oversight of the expanding church extending ever outwardly (8:14; 11:1, 2; 15:6). For purposes of practical administration it seems the apostles stayed in Jerusalem (8:1) and itinerated around the churches (9:32; I Cor. 9:5). Second, there were elder/pastors who shepherded the local congregations teaching them to grow in spiritual maturity through the Word (I Pet. 5:1-4) and overseeing the congregation's care (Acts 20:28). Finally there were deacons whose duties related to the physical needs and service in the church (Acts 6:1-3). These often exercised other spiritual gifts in ministry (6:8; 8:5; 21:8).

This concludes a brief review of the spiritual equipment available to the church in preparation for her witness and service. Now the ministry of the church will be examined.

(c) Ministry: [1] Witness – at the outset the witness of the believers for the expansion of the local church in their own communities should be noted. All have the general equipment available to them, all have their own personal experience of Christ, and all have their own relatives, friends, and contacts to whom they can testify. As the members witness faithfully for Christ, empowered by His Spirit and backed by the prayers of the congregation, there will be those who respond in repentance and integrated into the church's ministry.

[2] – Evangelism – then there is the extension of the church through church planting evangelism. Sometimes evangelists work alongside the witnessing members. In some situations the evangelist will work directly on his own. The end result is the same, however, namely the multiplication of the churches. (Acts 1:7; 8:31; 11:19, 22).

[3] – Mission – beyond this is the cross-cultural mission. Apostles reach across geographical, cultural, and communicational barriers to bring Christ to the ethnic peoples and to extend the Church. The first century apostles planted the Church in many of foreign cities and lands – Ephesus, Galatia, Athens, Philippi, Rome, Spain. Jesus said

and this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come (Matt. 24:14).

[4] – Service – Finally the practical service of love and compassion to the community must be observed. The poor are to be fed, the sick tended, the prisoners visited, the uneducated taught, and the social evils and injustices fought. The believers and the Church have this responsibility to their own communities, but above all they must

exhibit a transformed lifestyle that exudes the presence of Christ. The exercise of spiritual life in the individual, family, and community sphere is required of all God's children.

(d) Lifestyle: Initially the Christian must recognize that God alone holds all rights, titles, deeds and copyrights to everything in every department of his life. This is not mere words, but a binding foundation relevant to the Christian lifestyle. It affects style of living in private as well as public, in socio-economic as well as religious, and in family as well as business.

It is therefore, inextricably linked to stewardship. Its watchword is simplicity with discipline. It is neither extremely aesthetic nor excessively stoical. Worldly fads and personal prejudice do not overly sway it. Yet a discerning and sympathetic flexibility governs it, enhancing a living witness and aroma of holiness towards the lost world. Its concerns are both love and justice. Based on the high value God places on human life it portrays "otherness" rather than selfishness. In exhibiting the dignity of man, the Christian lifestyle issues forth in diligent labour and joyful service to God and man. Such a lifestyle becomes Christians as the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world".

(e) Conclusion: To sum up, the function of the church has a three dimensional dynamism. As a worshipping family its vertical function of corporate worship to God maintains contact with the Source of her life. Within the sharing fellowship is an internal interaction between members strengthening, purifying, and revitalizing the Church. Reaching out with centrifugal force to the world around in dynamic witness and service expands the Church. The mission outreach extends the planting of the Church in keeping with the purposes of God.

God's goal orientation focusing on His redeemed people and their function has been established. Is this the end or the beginning of the story? Does God stop short of any further activity that will cause that people to emerge from their sinful state? Does He stand idly by in His lofty heaven simply watching for developments? Or does He have an active hand in this matter of redemption? If so, in what ways does He direct events towards its fulfillment?

## **B. GOD'S INVOLVEMENT IN CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

God's active relation to the transmission of the Gospel is clearly portrayed in the Scriptures. It pertains to all ages and to all cultures since, as the eternal Lord of the universe, He is not limited to one particular ethnic group or to any specific time dimension.

Furthermore, the gigantic kaleidoscope of the multi-cultured communities of men estranged from God by sin always grips the heart of the Creator. He is eternally concerned to bridge the spiritual gulf and to cross the cultural gaps in order to accomplish the reconciliation of His alienated children. Consequently He sends forth chosen

emissaries as His witnesses – Abraham, Israel, the prophets, the Apostles and the Church. All these were commissioned to bless the nations, diverse though they be culturally, distant though they be geographically.

Therefore, a good starting point for the discovery of an effective strategy for planting the Church is an investigation of the action of our supra-cultural Lord in that process of communicating His divine will to the fallen race of spiritually lost mankind.

Three basic elements are discussed here: the unique revelation of God the Father, the miraculous incarnation of God the Son, and the dynamic activity of God the Holy Spirit. This trilogy forms a solid basis upon which church growth can be expected and the hard core principles through which it is produced.

### 1. The Unique Revelation to Men

Down through the ages of history man, without knowledge of the true and living God, has recognized that the elements around him, the natural environment that surround him, and the spiritual powers that envelop him seem antagonistic towards him. The battle against the elements is analyzed and interpreted. Drought, flood, disease, or pestilence are recognized as signs that the gods, nature, or spirits are displeased and angry. On the other hand, times of plenty and prosperity are interpreted to mean these deities are content and happy with man.

a. *Man's quest and the supernatural.* Wright points out that polytheistic man moves in the yearly cycle of life in sympathy with nature. The animistic elements of the prevalent religions lead man to a cyclical view of his world and the forces operating it. In order to attempt the stabilization of such conditions, heathen man is constantly trying to keep the "status quo" by making offerings to the gods, placating the demons, and in particular endeavoring to remain in harmony with nature. This is the trap in which man without God finds himself. (1952:24)

Such views are developed through man's conscious efforts to define the powers beyond himself as suggested in nature. He deals as rationally as possible with those problems that face him in a realistic effort to overcome them by using the best means, knowledge, and intuition available. Thus he develops concepts of God and salvation by using the best means, knowledge, and intuition available. Thus he develops concepts of God and salvation by projection from his finite mind and limited experience. Such concepts are incomplete because of man's fallen condition on one hand, and because he lacks the revelation of the true God on the other. Thus, this religion of the status quo, as Wright calls it (1952:24), confines him to alienation from the truth "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

Now this could be the plight of all men everywhere except for the direct revelation of God. There are, in effect, two religions in the world, the one which centers in projections of man's concept of God, and the other a distinctive exposure of the one true God to man concerning His character, being, purposes, and divine activity in relation to His creation.

b. *God's revelation to man.* This exposure started as a prototype of God's condescending cross cultural communication in Eden (Gen. 1-2). God deliberately selected Adam above the whole animal creation and disclosed the secrets of His will, being, and purpose to humanity.

1) By direct interaction. But then came the Fall as the first couple disobeyed. Would human rebellion so violate the holiness of God's divine character that He would reveal Himself no further? Was there to be an eternal silence from the Ruler of the Universe? Would man's sin quench the love of God and thus produce an irreversible barrier between God and man? God himself negated such thoughts when He opened the communicative channel of His grace to reveal Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8). He distinctly revealed Himself to man together with the concept of the redemption His grace would provide.

As he continued to unveil His will to the Patriarchs, He revealed His unique plan for the blessing of the nations to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-4). Throughout the biblical record the unfolding of His redemptive activity became more explicit. He revealed His truth to Joseph, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Daniel and other prophets. The writer of Hebrews portrays God as the One "Who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets" (1:1). In similar manner the apostles such as Paul and John received explicit revelations of the Lord concerning His will, His Word, and His purposes. The Bible is full of the revealed truth of the Almighty God.

2) Through God's powerful acts. In the face of His mighty acts during the Exodus period – the plagues, the Red Sea, and the miracles of preservation in the wilderness, and the Sinai disclosure – how puny seemed Israel's reversion to a golden calf, the projection of humanistic religion. Yet their experiences of God's revelation to them was never to be forgotten down to this generation.

The living acts of Christ's birth, His miracles, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension function as similar demonstrations revealing God's will for mankind and His provision of redemption. As "the confessional recital of the redemptive acts of God" (Wright 1952:13) the Passover is still celebrated by Jews, and the memorial of Christ's death procuring redemption for sinners is observed in the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:7-33). These acts reveal God's character and will through the recorded Word rather than by inference from history as suggested by Wright (1952:11-12, 44-45).

3) By written word. One of the greatest displays of God's revelation occurred at Sinai where He delivered to Moses His directions for His holy people, defined His laws for the nation of Israel, and detailed the specific design for the building of His tabernacle.

The decalogue is not the only revealed Word of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable..." (II Tim. 3:16). The Bible records the words of holy men who "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Pet. 1:21). David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was in my tongue" (II Sam. 23:2). God told His prophets, "I have put my words in thy mouth" (Jer. 1:9, Isa. 59:21). For this the revealed Word of God is the authentic foundation for the church planter.

The revelation of God's words, works, and acts recorded in Scripture provide the authority in strategy for the Christian mission. The accurately recorded principles and demonstrations of God's people expanding the Kingdom of God under the Holy Spirit supply a wealth of data for study. God's exposure of His divine being, His express will, and His activity for the redemption of His people reveal the dynamic for change that transcends nature. What a contrast to the cyclical syndrome of polytheistic projections.

Is such a revelation of God by His mysterious interaction with selected men, through His Word, and in His miraculous acts sufficient for the cross cultural communication of His redemptive design? Apparently not, for there is yet one supreme means by which God exposes His holy character and reveals His eternal will. That means is through the Lord Jesus Christ, the very Son of God.

## 2. The Incarnation – The Gospel “Medium”

In reality mission sends men out to break through cultural and other barriers in order to communicate a message of life and death import to the recipients. Failure to comprehend the message may result in serious consequences for the target audience. Mission requires selflessness, sacrifice, and perseverance of the sent one determined to accurately communicate the vital message.

a. *Prototype of cross cultural mission.* The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the supreme example of cross cultural mission. He was sent by God the Father from heaven into an alien world to declare a message, and to accomplish the only means of redemption adequate for sinful man (John 5:37-38; 6:39-40). He faced numerous barriers including the rejection of those He came to save. Christ's parable of the vineyard illuminated the reaction of the Jews toward the heir of heaven whom they slew (Matt. 21:33-43).

1) Expressing God's character and will. Jesus Christ was the fullest expression of God sent to reveal in the deepest sense the Word of God concerning His purposes for redemption. Both the holy and the loving characters of God were thus blended into that perfect expression of the Almighty's concern for sinners. John simply but comprehensively declares:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, ( and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth...No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (John 1:14, 18).

The writer of Hebrews is overwhelmed by the same concept:

God...hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory,

and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (Heb. 1:1-3)

Paul clearly expounds the process involved in this amazing cross cultural communication from God's throne to humanity's sinful hovel.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

2) Suffering through obedience. It is almost incomprehensible in terms of man's cultural bias and sinful prejudice to conceive of such an action. Yet the Holy Spirit records through Paul that profound condescension of God the Son voluntarily laying aside his divine prerogatives and humbly receiving human form in order to serve obediently for the salvation of lost mankind. That process led Him through persecutions, testings, and agony, culminating in a painful death on the cross. His vicarious sacrifice as a voluntary substitute opened the doors of spiritual freedom and pardon for all who trust. His claim that the Father had specifically sent Him for this mission as the eternal Bread of Life drew the opposition and rejection of the Jewish leaders (John 5:30-32, 36-38; 6:31-62). Nevertheless, to this end He was incarnated to "tabernacle among us."

This dwelling among us was no cloistered exclusiveness set apart from the life of the fallen race. It was complete identification, not merely infiltration. He personally communicated the divine mission in the language of the people, without respect to ethnic caste or cultural diversity. Christ provided a prototype for all servants of the Lord to follow in mission through the eons of church history. His pattern of condescending humility, personal self-denial, and sensitive obedience to the will of the Father is valid criteria for today's servants of the cross. Christ fulfilled the role of the servant prophesied in Isaiah (chapters 42, 49, 50, 53). His exemplification of this motif became the standard for the cross cultural apostolate. As willing bond slaves of Christ, Paul and other apostles obeyed the mission in the power of His Spirit. A vital ingredient in this role is the priority of relationship to divine authority. Paul pinpoints it, "Whose I am whom I serve" (Acts 27:23) Right relationship to God's authority and ownership must be preserved. Only then will the service that results be valid. A subservient attitude to others without recognizing God's overruling authority is disastrous folly. Christ remains our supreme servant example.

3) Preserving absolute holiness. God's unique medium of communicating across the void separating the absolute holy Being and the sinful creature was an entirely new thing. It would have been beyond the imagination of the Jewish mind but for the prior

revelation throughout the O.T. of the coming Messianic Redeemer-Servant. The Word of God representing the very essence of God's character, will, and action became visible flesh in the incarnation (John 1:1-18).

The virgin birth of Christ is a fundamental and essential event in God's plan of redemption. Through Mary's conception by the Holy Spirit, the miracle that produced the Redeemer promised from the "seed of woman" was fulfilled (Gen. 3:15). God sent forth His Son, made of a woman (Gen. 4:4). Here was God's involvement in mission in the deepest and most personal sense.

God's seeing the blindness and impotence of man to save himself provided the only way for the reconciliation of men. To be a complete substitute for man, Christ miraculously took on flesh, but in order to be uncontaminated by sin, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit. The virgin Mary was the natural vehicle by which very God of very God actually took on flesh and blood.

The Scriptures emphatically protect this glorious doctrine. First Mary questions the angel how this could be, seeing she was a virgin, unmarried and without carnal knowledge (Luke 1:34). Then Joseph her righteous fiancé is perplexed at Mary's pregnancy, but being an honest and responsible man thinks to break off the contracted engagement quietly. He correctly rejects responsibility for Mary's condition. But the angel reassures him that his is an unusual and miraculous action of God in fulfillment of the O.T. prophecy (Matt. 1:19-21) (Isa. 7:14).

After Joseph takes Mary home her virginity is protected by his abstinence, and the marriage is consummated only after the birth of the Holy Son of God (Matt. 1:25). The Holy Spirit protects the Messiah from any contamination of fallen flesh or taint of sin and preserves the truth that He was Christ the Holy Son of God. He was truly God and wholly man, preserved in perfect holiness yet completely identified with humanity.

b. *The essence of the Gospel.* The incarnate Word of God is inextricably related to the Gospel. The events of His life are vital elements in the Gospel message, especially His death and resurrection. Paul defines the Gospel as follows:

Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that  
He was buried, and that He rose again the third day  
according to the scriptures (I Cor. 15:1-4).

This is the unswerving core of the true Gospel. There is no other Gospel, warns Paul (Gal. 1:6-9). This is the message of good news that is central in church growth. Christ himself is the medium of the Gospel through which man alienated by sin can be reconciled to his holy Creator (II Cor. 5:19). There are three elements of this special medium that cause the Gospel to be the core message in church growth.

1) Christ's eternal Being. The first relates to Christ's deity. As John points out, He is the eternal God from the beginning (1:1-2). He was equal with God (Phil 2:6). Because He claimed no less than this, the Jews attempted to stone Him (John 10:23-33).

Furthermore, He is the Creator of all (John 1:3, 10).

For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and  
that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be

thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him (Col. 1:16).

Thus He has a perfect claim to man's worship and allegiance as their God and Creator.

In addition to this, He is the very source of life.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself (John 1:4; 5:26).

He held authority over his own life with jurisdiction to lay it down or to take it again according to His will (John 10:17-18). This He did, providing the medium of the Gospel through His substitutionary sacrifice.

The biblical conclusion faces man with his responsibility to acknowledge and to worship Christ as Lord. The aim of preaching "the everlasting Gospel: is to bring men to fear God and give Him glory, and to worship the Creator.

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters (Rev. 14:6, 7).

2) His redemptive sacrifice. The second element of the Gospel relates to the earthly life of our Lord from the incarnation to Calvary. His spotless life culminating in His vicarious death provided redemption through His grace (I Pet. 1:18, 19). Thus the mandate of His Great Commission requires "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). The response of faith is expected of all who repent and accept Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. Salvation is granted to them because of the sufficiency of Christ's substitution bearing "our sin in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness: (I Pet. 2:24). Thus, God requires of those He regenerates a changed pattern of life, in holiness and service in His Church.

The early Church in Acts exhibited these responses. The Epistles declared them to be the criteria for Christian life and practice. The persuading advocates of the Gospel proclaimed it was God's will that the response of faith issue in the demonstration of Christian growth and service. The impact of the Lord's life and death is a traumatic element in the Gospel, demanding a positive and an integral place in the strategy of God's mission. Not only did God provide redemption, but He expected sinners to respond and exhibit the fruits of His transforming power.

Furthermore, the Bible demands that the Church's presence issue in Gospel proclamation include the persuasion of the lost (Acts 2:38-40; 13:43; 19:8, II Cor. 5:11) and that persuasion be followed by the perfecting of the converts in spiritual maturity (Col. 1:28, I Thess. 3:10; Eph. 4:11-16). The substitutionary death of Christ is the basis for persuading and perfecting, and foundational to the teaching implied in each.

3) The exalted Judge. A third element in the Gospel is Christ's judgment of all creation (Acts 17:31; Rev. 14:6, 7; II Pet. 3:7) related to the resurrection and the return of Christ and the intervening time. The crucifixion was not the final crushing blow to God's attempt to communicate His message to man. On the contrary, it was the opening shot to destroy the Satanic kingdom, since three days later Christ rose from the grave victorious over death and Satan. His disciples' despair gave way to joy, discouragement to anticipation, and fear to boldness in the days that followed.

(a) His resurrection power: Christ's resurrection had revolutionary effects on the Church. Even a cursory survey of the book of Acts reveals that the theme of the resurrection became a key note in the apostles' preaching (e.g. 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:2, 10, 33; 5:30 etc.) This followed the post resurrection appearances of Christ during which He delivered His disciples the Great Commission to mission, and promised them power from the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:18-20). His dynamic entry on the day of Pentecost energized the Church to obey the evangelistic mandate (Acts 2). A spiritual revolution that affected individuals, families, communities, and the structure of society commenced that day. It will continue until those chosen redeemed of all tongues, tribes, and nations are brought in to complete God's people culminating in Christ's return.

(b) His return in judgment: Now our Lord's ascension to the right hand of the Father is referred to repeatedly throughout the Epistles (e.g. Eph. 1:20). Here He awaits the fore-ordained schedule for the second coming when He shall gather His redeemed disciples unto Himself (I Thess. 4:13-18; John 14:3). On the other hand He will punish the wicked with everlasting destruction in His holy vengeance of those who disobey the Gospel of salvation (II Thess. 1:6-10). His return will be marked by gathering all before Him and the judgment (Matt. 16:27; 24:30ff; 25:31ff; Rom. 14:10, 12). He shall judge all both live and dead in righteousness. All are held accountable before Christ (I Pet. 4:5; II Tim. 4:1).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ;  
that every one may receive the things done in his body,  
according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.  
Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;  
but we are made manifest in your consciences (II Cor.  
5:10,11).

(c) The intervening time: In the intervening time the Church watches for the return of her Lord. Her members, constrained by the love of Christ, are to act as His ambassadors, pleading with men to be reconciled to their Creator and Redeemer (II Cor. 5:11-21). The Apostle Paul affirms his compulsion to persuade men as a faithful steward of the Gospel (I Cor. 9:16ff). This desperate urgency demands accountable stewardship to God in church growth strategy. His commission to the Church set the stage for an ever expanding extension of the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Applications of His many parables on stewardship pinpoint the disciples' responsibility. He demands faithfulness until He returns – "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13).

In summary, the incarnation of Christ through the virgin birth reveals God's burden to bring the heavenly Gospel to the alien world of man. This living demonstration in human flesh of the only message adequate for the redemption of sinners and the

transformation of society was thus communicated. It was eternally dramatized for all generations in the events of the cross and the empty tomb. It will be culminated by the return in glory of our Lord Jesus. Herein is the eternal Gospel – the medium and the message, relevant for all ages and vital to the strategy of reconciling men to God.

Now a discussion of God's involvement in cross cultural communication is incomplete without a study of the Holy Spirit. This will be our next consideration.

### 3. The Holy Spirit – The Divine Communicator.

The dimension of the Holy Spirit is most essential in God's strategy for church growth. Yet it is so easy to neglect discussing His importance to the whole process of communicating the Gospel and producing churches. Christ knew how essential He was to the strategy of calling out a people for God. He commanded the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the historic day of Pentecost when the power of the Holy Spirit would empower them to begin the task of world evangelism and the establishing of His Church (Acts 1:3-8; 2:1 ff). From that time on, against immense odds, unrelenting persecution, and Satanic determination to exterminate the Church, the faithful people of God have survived, multiplied, and extended to the end of the earth. All this is the result of the Holy Spirit's work..

In fact, the activity of God's Spirit was closely related to God's communicating with man from the foundation of the world. It was also through the Holy Spirit that God revealed Himself to man. The Word of God came by inspiration of the Spirit (II Pet. 1:21). He was intimately involved in the incarnation of Christ. It was through the eternal Spirit that Christ offered Himself a sacrifice for sin, sufficient to satisfy the righteous demands of our holy God (Heb. 9:14). It is through the Holy Spirit that Christ's promise of constantly abiding with His saints is possible (Matt. 28:18; John 14:16-18). He is the source of power, meeting the spiritual needs of the believers and accomplishing the extraordinary demands of His servants (Rom. 15:19).

a. *His divine prerogative conditioning cultures.* The Holy Spirit is the source of all wisdom (Isa. 11:2' Eph. 1:17). His omniscience uniquely qualifies Him for the preparation of conditions in numerous cultures of the world simultaneously. God is concerned for His created children in every situation throughout the globe. He is the God of all cultures. Although He had revealed His redemptive plan through the Jewish culture of His chosen nation, Israel, His concern is for all societies.

In the varying cultural patterns and world views of populations across the world, God the Holy Spirit has been at work. He prepares elements, incidents, and illustrations in each culture as germane seed for comprehending the Gospel. Relevant cultural illustrations illuminating the true message of Christ's sacrifices may differ from culture to culture. The Gospel core does not, however, change. The keys that unlock understanding of the Gospel may vary from society to society.

Not everything found in all cultures is of the Holy Spirit. Nor is everything of culture necessarily evil. Each culture is equally valid in the minds of those living in that culture, facing those conditions, and applying the best answers learned from experience

in that culture. Nevertheless, the Lord is sometimes at work conditioning these cultures with surprising keys to the communication of the Gospel.

Evangelists depending on the Holy Spirit must be sensitive to those cultures in which he works. He must look constantly for clues that will provide keys to communicate Christ's redemptive message through the Holy Spirit's power.

A pointed illustration is recorded in *Peace Child*. When Richardson went to the Sawi he hoped to find some clue that would be a window light for the Gospel to that tribe. He was shocked to learn that the Sawi rejoiced in Judas Iscariot's betrayal because they idealized treachery (Richardson 1974: 203-204). They fattened the unsuspecting victim with friendship in preparation for his treacherous slaughter. Should such a culture be written off entirely? Had the Holy Spirit not been at work conditioning this culture? On the contrary, He had. Painful experiences of tribal warfare revealed the key prepared by the Holy Spirit. Richardson recognized the redemptive analogy in the giving of a peace child to restore order, mutual trust and peace (1974: 226ff). The Sawi movement to Christ was soon to follow as they comprehended the meaning of Christ as God's "Peace Child."

The Holy Spirit is active in communities of all cultures preparing hearts to respond to the divine invitation. Jesus taught that men's hearts are like different soils which produce fruit in different proportions in response to the Word of God sown (Matt 13). The Holy Spirit nurtures and prepares the soils of men's hearts in corporate communities and as individuals. He is the One who ripens the harvest, causing men to be receptive to the Gospel message.

Culture is a complex concept with myriads of facets, but the Holy Spirit is fully aware of the complicated mosaic of cultures and subcultures. The strata of societies, their classes and castes are no problem to Him. Through His multi-cultural wisdom He proceeds to cultivate responsiveness in the hearts of men. He is aware of the phenomena of social unit receptivity and is the agent that produces it through combinations of the needed complex factors.

The Holy Spirit works in political crisis, devastating war, debilitating disease, disaster and famine, to bring men to sense their need of God, and to hunger for an answer to their deepest longing.

The Holy Spirit prepares cultural keys for the Gospel, stimulates spiritual receptiveness, and producing the spiritual transformation of sinners.

b. *Dynamic producer of conversion*. The Holy Spirit is the life giving essence of divine power. He is the dynamic element in spiritual encounter. He communicates Christ to the heart of the sinner. Jesus said:

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me . . . He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you (John 15:26; 16:14).

The Spirit of truth draws men to Christ in the will of the Father. He empowers the Church to persuade men to repent and believe the Gospel. Through the Church He persistently invites sinners to be reconciled to God right up to the end (Rev. 22:17).

The Divine Advocate convicts and stirs the heart of those who receive the message. He reproves them of sin, and reminds them of judgment (John 16:8-11). He strives with the sinner (Gen. 6:3). He convinces, convicts and converts.

Transforming lives is the crucial ministry of the Holy Spirit. Communicating across the cultures of men, He breaks barriers of unrighteousness. Regeneration springs from Him alone (John 3:5-6). Through spiritual new birth He produces new creation in Christ, giving power to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil (I John 5:4).

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit produces Christian maturity in the new believer. The Epistles are full of teaching and injunctions for believers to walk in the Spirit, and to be filled with the Spirit. The inner strength of the Church and Christians in particular comes from the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 3:6).

No purposeful evangelism or mission can neglect dependence on the Holy Spirit. No church growth nor spiritual maturity can be accomplished without Him. He is the primary source and vital element in any strategy or mission.

*c. Propagator of Continued Church Growth.* The Spirit of Christ knows all the details of the future. He reveals them to His servants (see Luke 2:26; Acts 21:11). He guides Christians in the way of truth (John 14:26; 16:13; I Cor. 2:13). He teaches and directs them to solutions to their problems.

He is the Lord of the harvest and the eternal executive secretary of the divine mission of Redemption. He selected and sent forth Barnabas and Paul to extend the mission of the Church (Acts 13:1-4). The Spirit directed the Apostles in the mission to the Gentiles step by step, and at Troas guided them to Macedonia (Acts 16).

Being the conditioner of cultures, the Holy Spirit knows the factors that make populations receptive. Thus He directs His servants to these. That He majors on the responsive people whether they be individual, families, or other homogeneous units is seen in the Acts account of Philip (8:29), Peter (10:19-20), and Paul and Silas (16:6, 7, 10). He guide by both commanding and forbidding His servants concerning their routes and objectives, for He is concerned for the continuing extension of Christ's church.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to the members of the Church for the efficient function of it in worship and witness, in education and extension (Eph. 4:11, 13; I Cor. 12; Rom. 12). Apostles and evangelists are particularly suited for the multiplication of churches, especially where they function to equip the believers to work together in that ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The marvel of God's involvement in communicating Himself and the redemption He provided through Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit must rest here. Some observations of God's strategy in reaching His goals will now be discussed.

## C. GOD'S STRATEGY FOR MISSION

It is a mystery of the ages that God in all His perfection could have a problem. More so that this problem would arise out of His hands. By His omniscient will He originally created man perfect in His own image, and gave him the privilege of choice as an agent of free will. But when Adam and Eve succumbed to Satan's deceitful trap by exercising that right in rebellion against God's character and expressed will, His problem began. Nor was it to be solved quickly.

### 1. The Sin Problem

Under Satan's influence man's sins multiplied rapidly and in gross proportions. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" until the revulsion of the Lord against His fallen creation brought His righteous judgment in the flood (Gen. 6:5). Only Noah and his family were spared to repopulate the earth. But soon the conditions were as before. Subsequent ages displayed the same ugly pattern of sin.

Babel exposed the complex sinfulness which was uniquely man's. Since the fall his stubborn disposition and rebellious nature was openly exhibited. He built his high towers of pride with bricks of material prosperity. He determinedly sought to make a name for himself that reached to the heavens. In building his great society, man gravitated to concentrated centers of massed population. Here his self-centered greed led to collective cesspools of social sin, crime, and corruption. The sinfulness of humanity, emphasized at Babel, was the core of God's problem and remains the formidable obstacle of Christian missions today.

But God was aware that this problem would arise. Indeed, as already established, His goal for the redemption of sinful humanity was already crystallized from eternity. What then were some of the elements of His strategy by which He planned to accomplish His purpose?

### 2. Strategy or no Strategy

The first theological issue is whether there is a strategy or not.

a. *Objections*. Some deny any, affirming that it is unspiritual to talk of strategy. Others reject strategy, claiming that it counters the freedom of the Spirit.

De Ridder points out that A. Von Harnack in *Mission und Ausbreitung* suggests that "Jesus never gave any instruction in world mission" (1971:147). In a footnote De Ridder explains that Harnack does not regard Matt. 28:18-20 as an authentic word of Jesus.

John V. Taylor, General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society writes:  
I find no evidence of missionary strategy in the Acts of the Apostles. What I find there is an inspired opportunism (1974:1).

Most of such objections arise from a low view of Scripture. In the article “Did Christ Command World Evangelism” Harrison thoroughly exposes Harnack’s error (Harrison 1973:6-10). If one grants that in the Gospels and Epistles we do not have and cannot recover the words of the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul, then Canon Taylor’s position might be maintained. But I hold a high view of Scripture, and when one accepts the Bible as true it is immediately clear that the Lord commanded and the earthly Church followed a strategy of mission. This I now set forth.

b. *Christ’s instruction.* From the Scriptures it seems that Jesus prepared His disciples, at least psychologically, for missions to the Gentiles as well as the Jews, even though His present “assignment” as De Ridder calls it (1971:149), was restricted to Israel (Matt. 15:24 and 10:5, 6). His ministry occasionally touched the Gentiles showing they had some place in His plan – the Centurion servant (Matt. 8:5-13), the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28), and the Samaritan woman (John 4). In the case of these women it seems Jesus deliberately organized His itinerary to meet them.

Two incidents add to this preparation. The first is when Greeks came seeking Jesus just prior to the Passover and His crucifixion. It was the disciples Philip and Andrew who brought the news to Jesus. Christ’s response is significant, “The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” He speaks of His death as the corn of wheat resulting in multiplied fruit. The people standing by hear God’s voice responding to Christ’s agony in His coming death. God’s name would indeed be glorified. Jesus’ statement, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* men unto me” takes on expanded meaning in the context of these seeking Greeks (John 12:23-36).

The second incident occurred around the same time, possibly two days before the Passover (Matt. 26:2). The woman anointed Jesus’ head with precious ointment (26:6-13). Answering the criticism of the disciples, Jesus endorses the woman’s action.

She did it for my burial...whosoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her (26:12, 13).

Again His death is viewed in terms of the whole world.

To this must be added Christ’s prediction that “this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14).

Furthermore many of the parables of the Kingdom also hint at a wider extension to include the Gentiles, such as the see, the leaven, the dragnet, and the mustard seed (Matt. 13). In refuting the self-righteous Pharisees, following His parables Jesus warned they would be shut out of the Kingdom while those from the East, West, North and South would enter in with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets (Luke 13:28-30).

In all these accounts prior to His crucifixion, the intention of worldwide mission including Gentile nations was seen as part of His strategy to establish the Kingdom.

Arguments that no strategy for mission was followed are refuted initially by Jesus' own commands in John 20:21-23, Acts 1:7,8, and elsewhere, "Peace be unto you: as the Father has sent me, so send I you" (20:21). The analogy here is pregnant with concepts of strategy. In the two little words, "as...so" they are passed on to the disciples. As Christ was sent into the world, so they are sent to the nations. As Christ became incarnate flesh amongst hostile humanity, so they are committed to go into an alien world. Like Christ, they are to identify with lost men and their needs. They are to proclaim the Kingdom of God, calling men to repentance and faith. As Christ called them to follow Him and to fellowship together, so they are to persuade disciples to follow them as faithful representatives of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Similarly they are to instruct and nurture new converts as Christ did to them. As Jesus was constantly burdened to take the Gospel to other towns and villages, so too must they (Luke 13:32, Mark 1:38). As He deliberately set His face towards the cross to obtain redemption for all, so they must be prepared for the ultimate in sacrifice that the saving Gospel reach all. A definite strategy is inferred in those two little connecting words "as....so".

In Acts 1:7, 8 the words stand out boldly "ye...power...Holy Spirit...ye...witnesses...Jerusalem...Judea...Samaria...uttermost part of the earth." Herein is a strategy. Jesus had called his disciples to Himself. He died and rose to provide the way of salvation. Now viewing all of humanity, He establishes the strategy that will underlie His mission. He starts with those few disciples, the "ye" noted twice in verse 8. They are the key to spreading the Gospel. They are His chosen agents for disseminating the truth, but they are weak and human vessels. They need power, and Christ promised them power in the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 14:16-26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-15). It is their witness to Christ through their proclamation of His lordship and His Kingdom that is crucial in this strategy. This is the pivot around which the Church is to spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

Christ expands this strategy to these "sent one", His witnesses and unveils direct action for it in Matt. 28:19, 20. As they go proclaiming the Gospel in His power, they are to persuade men of all nations to become disciples of Christ. This entails baptizing those who believe, and teaching them to obey all of Christ's commands. Behaviour is in focus here, not just knowledge. That they understood this strategy from the first is clearly portrayed in Acts 2:36-47 and elsewhere.

*c. Paul's example.* Paul's ministry could hardly be described as haphazard or without planning. Nor was it dependent solely on fortuitous circumstances, nor guided by "inspired opportunism". It is clear Paul did have some strategy.

In entering a new place, his first action was to preach in the Jewish synagogue, if one existed. This strategy directed him to the larger towns and population centers where the synagogues were primarily located. Three possible reasons for this approach were: 1 He was a Jew and felt his responsibility to preach to the Jews first. 2 Converts in other places had relatives and friends scattered in different towns by the dispersion. McGavran points out that these became natural bridges for the spreading of the Christian faith. Note the many names Paul already knew in Rome before he arrived (Romans 16). 3 In the

synagogues were Gentile proselytes and interested “God-fearers” who were strategic for bridging over to the Gentile population. Paul certainly planned his travels and his missionary labors with these fringes of the synagogue in mind.

Furthermore, Paul and his fellow-workers followed a strategy of leaving the unresponsive in favor of the receptive. When fierce persecution drove them out, they fled elsewhere. When synagogue communities rejected them, they started congregations with those receptive. They gathered baptized converts into churches, ordained local elders, and followed their spiritual growth with prayer, concern, and occasional visits. When admonition or encouragement was needed, they wrote epistles or sent messages by traveling teachers to these churches.

Another element in the Apostle’s strategy was mobility. Schedules and itineraries were governed by the confirmation of God’s Spirit and the need of the local situations. There is little question that Paul had a strategy to reach beyond to unevangelized fields, first in Asia, and finally to Spain, as evident in his burden recorded in Romans.

From the above, it can be confidently affirmed that the early Church had and used a biblical concept of strategy. It certainly was not rigid, nor should it have been. The goal directed the strategy, not vice versa. The Holy Spirit also influenced the Apostles in local situations. The strategy was flexible, but definitely there.

### 3. Resourceful Flexibility in Problem Solving

God is no stereotype when it comes to solving the problems of His universe. His goals are fixed, but His strategies to reach them are flexible. In studying the Scriptures one can but wonder at His versatile resourcefulness in problem-solving situations related to His overall goals. His patience and grace are often tempered by pleadings and warnings. Finally He must take drastic actions for the good of His purposes in redemption. This is seen in the flood, Babel, Sodom, Red Sea, military action, captivity, persecution, etc. At all costs He will adapt His actions to suit the need of the current situation in order to accomplish the fulfillment of His redemptive plan for the expansion of His Gospel.

Satan often counter-attacks and tries to prevent that fulfillment. He is often frustrated. God never is, for He is in control. Satan is already in “check mate.” For example, God’s purpose was that the patriarchal family head be the spiritual leader of the local unit. Later when spiritual decay set in through the devil’s influence, God raised up the Israelite priesthood to function in this duty. When the priests became corrupt He called forth His prophets. In the mission of the Church he does the same. Where the Church failed, He raised up missionary orders within it. When they ceased to function adequately He established additional independent agencies. Where they become corrupted and slovenly in the missionary task, He will provide new agents. Thus flexibility of His action and strategy moves His purposes towards the eschatological conclusion of history.

God recognized the limitless lengths to which man's wicked imagination would go. The futility of the flood in leading men to repentance was not unknown to God. Once He saved humanity from self-destruction through sin, by the flood. At Babel his judgment fell again to prolong man's opportunity to fulfill His will. Through the confusion of tongues man was forced to scatter or to remain in communicative chaos. A serious implication followed for God and His faithful people. The cross-cultural communication of the Gospel to over 6,000 languages necessitated reaching out to every corner of the earth. Still today millions are to be reached. According to Winter, 87 per cent of the 2.7 billion unreached in the present age can only be adequately hear of Christ by cross-cultural missions (Douglas 1975:228, 229). Yet through the obstacles of "stammering lips and stuttering tongues" God's wisdom is seen. Only by regenerated man's dependence on God could such a Herculean task be accomplished. By it the glorious goal of Scripture is assured, when those of every nation, kindred, people, tribe, and tongue will stand before the throne glorifying the Lamb of God.

God's pattern is a model for His church-planting servants. Identify the problem of non-growth, spiritual decay, or arrested missions. Discern the situation carefully. Draw on all the resources that are fitting and available. Adapt the strategy to the conditions and be flexible in the plans and actions until the goal is reached. Of course, God's knowledge is superior to man's. Nevertheless, by prayerfully considering with Him the progress towards His objective of world evangelization and problems preventing that progress, solutions and alternative approaches to continue the expanding movement of His Church will be revealed.

#### 4. Divine Timing

One of the exciting aspects of God's actions in the history of His people and the world is that of timeliness. To be sure, God has His directed purposes and His goals. The amazing thing is that the eternal timeless God has chosen to subject events in His planning to the finite element of time. God is never, it seems, in a hurry. Yet He is never late. His outstanding patience is recognized throughout the Bible as well as in history. He waited another 120 years before sending the flood (Gen. 6:3, I Pet. 3:20).

In his elective purposes for Abraham there was no rush even for the production of a son, Isaac. Man may indeed question God if they were not sure of His unerring character. Even after the development of the "fathers to be" of Israel, Joseph spent thirteen years after his seventeenth birthday as a slave or in prison in Egypt, until he was exalted by Pharaoh. But God's purposes took another nine or ten years to bring Jacob and the Hebrews to Egypt. No pressure of circumstances need rush His elective time.

Almost 400 years passed and the situation of God's children seems worse than ever. Although the Hebrews faced frustrating conditions there, God allowed Moses 40 years in Egyptian education plus another 40 years in the desert before commencing the timely exodus.

Time means nothing to God compared to human estimates, but timeliness in His elective purposes does. He has His “appointed times” – a ripeness of time for judgment as in the Canaanites, or of redemption as seen in the Exodus. “When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son” (Gal. 4:4). Not too soon, nor too late; just right on eternal schedule for the redemptive purposes of Omniscience. Time was balanced on the pivot of history with the advent and death of the Messiah. The disciples were eager for the quick appearance of the kingdom, but the Lord reminded them that according to His eternal schedule the Father has set a day and time in which the kingdom shall be completely restored (Acts 1:7). Throughout history we can be confident in the timeliness of our God’s eternal purposes. How important then for the church planter to be on His schedule.

Having recognized God’s control of the temporal factor we need to note, however, that there is an element of urgency the Lord Jesus infused into His disciples through His teaching. There is no place for slovenliness. The Christian is to be constantly on the alert, to be watching and ready for the Lord’s return (Matt. 24:42; I Thess. 5:6). He is to be wakeful as to the purposes of God, careful concerning the wiles of the devil (I Pet. 5:8), and diligent in buying up the opportunities (Eph. 5:16, Col. 4:5). The Church is to be especially alert about the urgent task of meeting the spiritual need around them and of harvesting the ripening fields of responsive humanity (Matt. 8:36ff).

Say ye not, there are yet four month, and then cometh the harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest (John 4:35).

### 5. Emphasis on Receptiveness

Receptiveness is intertwined with the theology of divine timing. Receptivity is built into God’s universal strategy. God wants all people everywhere to hear the Gospel. But His concern is more than that, for His final desire is for those to respond and obey. The biblical principle of responsiveness cannot be neglected.

a. *Biblical example.* God foreknows those who will respond and those who reject. Thus in His divine prerogative He foreordains those who respond to salvation and those who reject to damnation. The stubborn scoffers of Noah’s day rejected God’s pleading and were destroyed by the flood. The unrepentant who cling to their sin must likewise be judged as Sodom and Canaan. On the other hand those who respond are blessed and delivered by the Lord such as individuals like Abraham, families like that of Noah, cities like Ninevah, and nations like Israel.

When Jesus told the parable of the barren fig tree which was cut down because it was unproductive for three years, He made a pointed rebuke to those who refused to respond and repent after hearing His Word for some three years (Luke 13:6-9). Lack of response to the preached Gospel brings damnation.

Jesus further illustrated the receptivity principle as He instructed His disciples concerning their mission.

And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city (Matt. 10:13-15).

Paul and Barnabas demonstrated the Lord's principle. They literally shook off the dust from their feet when the Jews rejected the Gospel with violent opposition. But they deliberately turned from the rejectors to the responsive Gentiles eager to follow the Lord (Acts 13:42-51). Corinth is another Scripturally documented case. Paul held the Jews who refused the Gospel of Christ accountable before God. "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go to the Gentiles." The receptive Greeks rejoiced. Many believed and were baptized. The Lord approved of Paul's action through a vision telling Paul to stay in Corinth and fearlessly proclaim Christ "for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:5-11).

b. *Differing levels of receptivity.* The parable of the soils indicate four different degrees of responsiveness in producing fruit (Luke 8:5-15). Like the farmer, the evangelist diligently sows the seed of God's Word in faith. He anticipates a bountiful harvest. He desires as much fruit as possible. However, out of experience he observes that some "fields" produce more than others. They are more receptive to the Gospel. Such discernment should lead the Church to abundant sowing and labor in those more fertile fields, in expectation of increasingly fruitful harvests of souls. This is good farmer mentality.

It is here that McGavran optimistically focuses strategy on the "growing points" among the increasing opportunities in today's world.

As concentration of resources on growing points comes to be the strategy of missions, we shall find ourselves in a new are of advance (1955:112).

It is God's will that the disciples be fruitful (John 15:5, 8). The more fruit produced by His Church, the more He is glorified. Responsiveness and fruitfulness go hand in hand, whether it be in the believer's own spiritual growth in grace, or in the gathering in of those who receive their witness to Christ.

c. *Seeking the responsive.* In church growth terms the Scriptures indicate that the resources and energies of the Church should be deployed to strategically "Major on the responsive." The Bible provides ample evidence that the Church is to seek the

responsive. In the parable of Luke 14:16-24, those who were invited to the great supper did not respond, so the master sent his servant to gather in all those who would accept his invitation (v. 21-23). A second time He sent his servant out to seek those who would respond until the hall was filled.

Christ's ministry was spent seeking the lost who would respond to His Word. He sought those ready to be found, like Zachaeus (Luke 19) and the Samaritan woman (John 4). His time was spent looking for those prepared to accept Him like the twelve disciples. The point of the Lord's three illustrations of Luke 15 is seek that which can be found.

Among other characteristics of mission, therefore, a chief and irreplaceable one must be this: that mission is a divined finding, vast and continuous. A chief and irreplaceable purpose of mission is church growth. Service is good, but it must never be substituted for finding (McGavran 1970:32).

At this point Glasser summarizes the emphasis on receptivity in relation to God's sovereign strategy.

Actually, the Church Growth Movement has taken this profound truth of God's sovereignty and translated it into a dynamic missionary axiom: 'Concentrate on the responsive elements of society.' It thereby exposes the inadequacy of the pietism that seems to say, 'Go where you are sent, even if you cannot expect a harvest.' If God is selective in His grace, if Jesus Christ in the days of His flesh deliberately bypassed some to reach others, should not His missionary servants expect His Spirit to lead them to concentrate on winning the winnable? Indeed, one cannot read carefully the Gospels without being impressed with the very deliberate way in which He ministered to the responsive (Matt. 9:13). (Tippett 1973a:57, 58)

d. *Dealing with the resistant.* It must be noted that Jesus did not completely abandon the resistant. He proclaimed to them too, but He was obviously doing so in order to warn of coming judgment, to call for repentance, and to locate those who were responsive. He deliberately withdrew from the masses who remained unreceptive and sought those whose hearts were ready. This was His priority. In God's timing and through the conditioning of the Holy Spirit, resistant populations sometimes turn receptive and are eager to obey the Word. Paul was forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach in the province of Asia and in Bithynia in order to reach the responsive Macedonians (Acts 16:6ff). Whether this was because Asia and Bithynia were then resistant we do not know. But that the apostolic team was led to the receptive is certain. The other areas evidently became responsive later, for churches were planted throughout the province of Asia in great proliferation. The seven churches of revelation were among them.

McQuilkin speaks of “God’s selectivity” through “His inscrutable wisdom.” He suggests one reason for this is that “God is selective on the basis of men’s response” (1974:37).

Discussing the Holy Spirit and ripened fields, Seamands continues:

The significance of all this is that just as crops grow differently and ripen at different times in different soils, so each piece of the mosaic, or each sub-society ripens and becomes responsive to the Gospel at a different time. Peoples and societies vary in receptivity....Wise missionary strategy suggests that, while we do not abandon resistant people, at the same time we should concentrate our resources in personnel and finances upon those peoples who are receptive to the Gospel. That is, we must harvest ripened fields (Tippett 1973a:105).

This leads us to note the harvesters in this mission ordered by the Lord.

## 6. The Agents of Mission

God is the prime agent of mission. He took the initiative to solve the problem of the effects of sin in the human race. He provided a perfect plan for salvation. He sent His Son to accomplish the means of redemption that through the vicarious atonement repentant sinners could be reconciled to a Holy God through faith. God the Holy Spirit is the prime mover in the hearts of men in convicting and converting power.

a. *Chosen ambassadors.* Strange as it may seem, the Sovereign of the universe deliberately chose to limit Himself in the propagation of the Gospel by delegating this responsibility to men of a new order. As man had caused the furor of the ages by his stark rebellion and blatant disobedience, so was he now to fulfill a mission of eternal consequence through the redeemed community. The men delegated to do this were in a sense very ordinary, but in another sense very unordinary. They were ordinary in that they were truly flesh and blood, and faced with the rigors of life together with the adherent temptation common to all. Yet they were different too, for by faith they had tasted of the new life through redemption in Christ and renewal in the Holy Spirit. The same, yet different, they were transformed agents chosen to be messengers of divine grace.

Redeemed mankind was God’s chosen media for proclaiming the Gospel. As bold witnesses they were His cross-cultural messengers, His instruments for salvation. Jesus declared,

As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you...Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations...But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you:

and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (John 20:21; Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8).

b. *Evangelistic ministry.* Whether in the Old Testament or in the New, God used those faithful servants as agents of His unusual redemptive plan. Among such servants were Abraham, Jonah, and Paul. The Lord Jesus called the twelve disciples aside and sent them forth in pairs to proclaim the Good News in a power encounter with the demons (Matt. 10). In like manner He sent forth the seventy as heralds of the Gospel (Luke 10).

In God's strategy there were some who would function in specific roles of leadership and ministry like the apostles. However, He always reserved a great force of common people who boldly witnessed to His name. Naaman's servant girl with her faithful witness to God's power can be counted alongside prosperous Lydia and diligent Priscilla, though they be generations apart. It was through the Church's lay people scattered by persecution following Stephen's death that the witness of Christ was extended far and wide, resulting in the planting of churches in many places beyond Israel's borders (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19).

Down through history the powerful ministry of a comparatively small number of dedicated believers accomplished amazing exploits for God. The feats of Gideon, Samson, David, and others stand out alongside those of the apostles, Philip, and Barnabas. Indeed the small and persecuted minority of Christians were attributed with "having turned the world upside-down" in a spiritual movement that swept many in the Roman Empire into the Kingdom of God within the span of a lifetime.

c. *Qualifications.* The qualifications for such men, as God's agents directed to mission, were the same for all succeeding generations. To be sure, spiritual transformation evidenced by a clear testimony and by a holy behavioural lifestyle was paramount. Only through men of the Word filled by the Holy Spirit was true transformation of society accomplished.

In those modern days, the agents of the Lord confront problems peculiar to the age. Without diminishing the spiritual gifts and attitudes required for mono-cultural or cross-cultural evangelism, the dedicated church planter should take advantage of valuable lessons on culture, communication, and principles of growth as they are available. These are valuable tools in this hand, but above all He must exercise his spiritual gifts, and be directed by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures.

d. *Responsibility.* One of the paradoxes of all time relates to Christian mission. Redeemed man is responsible to God for mission; yet he is dependent upon God to produce the resulting church growth. As stewards responsible to God, Christians are required to be faithful and obedient. In a word, church growth is an expression of faithful stewardship. As the parable of the talents clearly expounds, there is a day of certain reckoning with God when all His servants will be held accountable (Matt. 25:14-30). When the Lord comes to reckon with His servants after a long time, He expects a specific

account from each just as in the parable (v. 19). He will issue judgment and rewards appropriate to His servants' obedient faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:1, 2).

Is it any wonder then that in the light of the receptive populations and the consequent need to capitalize on their responsiveness, God desires to mobilize His delegated agents for the purpose of aggressive evangelism. His will is that millions outside His rule be reached with the Gospel, won into the Kingdom, nurtured by instruction from His Word, and incorporated into His Church. His strategy has the mechanism for the fulfillment of His goal through His obedient servants filled with and led by the Holy Spirit. Is there any wonder that in this context Christ calls for prayer and obedience to faithful stewardship in mission.

Therefore He said unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest (Luke 10:2).

### 7. Cohesiveness through Homogeneity

There is provision in God's strategy of mission for cohesiveness in relation to those being brought to Christ. He is concerned to avoid a maze of unconnected, unrelated converts.

a. *Overcoming isolation.* The problem of insecurity and dislocation often looms largest for the new believer, especially if he has to stand by himself in a pagan society, or for that matter in a highly religious one. His aloneness and the strangeness he feels are often the points at which Satan hurls his attacks. Ostracism from his own people, including persecution, adds to his plight.

Speaking of these problems of social ostracism in the lone believer's new experience, McGavaran suggests,

The most successful answer to ostracism is the conversion of chains of families. The lone convert is particularly susceptible to boycott. But after the first big groups have accepted Christ, ostracism becomes difficult (1955:20).

God in His wisdom has provided a strategy for such a cohesion among those turning to Him from societies which seem diametrically opposed to a biblical based community. This is through small or large people movements which usually occur within homogeneous units of people within societies. People movements are not mass conversion, but mutually interdependent, multi-individual, and often simultaneous decisions to follow Christ, made usually by people related or socially connected to each other.

The New Testament provided for this cohesiveness through the functioning Church. There is a cohesive unity which is of the Holy Spirit, but new believers strange to the concept of the Church may take time to appreciate this fully. But as new converts become members in the Church and are actively part of it, integrated relationship between members results as they grow together into spiritual maturity through worship, witness, and service.

b. *Structural strength*. There is strength in cohesive structures. A few pieces of iron by themselves are comparatively weak and useless, but welded together in the right structural form they are strong to withstand great pressures and weights. So likewise the social organization of peoples. Cohesiveness gives strength. Thus where multi-individual decisions are made for Christ in homogeneous units, there is great potential for cohesive strength and growth.

Such movements were part of God's strategy. In the Old Testament "the people of God" was a tightly structured social organism. Israel guarded her cohesiveness in relation to the promise and law of God. Where she failed to obey the Lord, social dislocation occurred.

Homogeneous units. An outstanding biblical illustration of homogeneous groups turning to the Lord is the family unit. Such was the case with Noah, and Abraham. The Acts records the conversions of several families who were baptized as households. There was Lydia (16:14, 15), the Philippian Jailor (16:30-34), Cornelius (10:1, 2, 24, 44-48), Cyprus (18:8), and Stephanus (I Cor. 1:16). The Church grew by multiplying united family units to Christ. Of the twelve disciples there was the close linkage of two sets of brothers. Seeing Christ's miraculous healing of his son, the nobleman "believed and his whole house" (John 4:53).

Similarly God's Spirit used other social structures. Ethnic groups turned to the Lord. Luke records such movements among the Jews (Acts 5), the Samaritans (Acts 8), the Gentiles related to Cornelius (10:24), and a great number of Greeks in Antioch (11:20, 21).

At times whole villages and towns responded to the Gospel providing a cohesiveness for consolidation. Samaria (8:5, 6), Lydda, Saron (9:34, 35), and Joppa (9:42) were some towns which seemed to turn simultaneously to God.

Furthermore there were social units related by crafts, social classes, and associations. In Jerusalem "a great company of priests were obedient to the faith" (6:7). Fellow tentmakers became Christians (18:1-4). Many who associated together in magic and possibly sorcery burned the magical paraphernalia and books as a demonstration of their turning to the Lord (19:17-19).

One important group who became sometimes antagonistic, sometimes responsive, was that of the synagogue. It seems Paul made it a point to go there because of the

contacts of friends and relatives of Christians often found there. At Berea there was a good response among the *whole* synagogue community (17:10-12).

d. *People movement nurture*. It was the Apostles' practice to follow through such people movements by faithful pastoral care, itinerant teaching, and spiritual counsel by letter. This is vital to the incorporation process of the functioning church, giving the converts a feeling of their responsible ministry in the church.

Speaking of the need for baptizing, teaching, and incorporating the converts from people movements, Tippett stresses the urgency to help them feel a sense of belonging and of identity,

People like to know who they are and where they belong. When there is a people movement out of paganism, and the people involved burn their fetishes, or destroy their sacred groves, or bury their skull trophies, or cast their sacred paraphernalia into the sea as a symbol of their cutting themselves off from paganism, it is important that they should not be left as people who do not belong to anything...Somewhere he should feel he belongs! (1973b:128, 129).

Cohesiveness through the homogeneity of people movements small or large is one part of God's strategy to strengthen the solid planting of His Church.

## 8. Church Multiplication

Finally, God is in favor of the proliferation of churches. He is concerned with a strategy that multiplies churches across nations to the ends of the earth. This is one of His goals.

The early Church exhibits this strategy. Following the scattering of the believers by Saul's persecution, their witness wherever they went led to the multiplication of new churches (8:1-4; 11:19-22). In Acts chapters 1 to 7 only the church at Jerusalem is mentioned. After the persecution and the subsequent conversion of Saul, Luke records,

Then had the churches rest throughout all Jude and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied (Acts 9:31).

Later the witness from Ephesus to all in the province of Asia led to the multiplication of churches such as those recorded in the Revelation and the Epistles (Acts 19:10).

The historical record of the New Testament and of the Early Church indicates that the multiplication of churches from town to town, country to country, and throughout the countryside was a primary element of the strategy employed. Such churches were not dependent on large buildings, many were clusters of house churches probably with links in church associations.

## 9. Conclusion

Let us return to the emphasis at the beginning of this theological section. God is goal oriented. His plans for the redemption of sinful humanity directed His actions to send Christ to accomplish that salvation. His Holy Spirit is deeply working towards those purposes by conditioning cultures and converting the responsive. God's strategy is flexible, utilizing those elements most conducive to the establishment of His Church across the globe. His key agents are redeemed witnesses, men who are stewards of the grace of God.

The Lord's mercy prolongs the impending judgment on the rejectors of His rule. In the meantime He extends the time for men to repent. He has given the Church a responsible mandate to evangelize to the ends of the earth. The day of His mercy is in force for the salvation of many, but the night is coming. His urgent command is, "Let the earth hear His voice." His ambassadors must urgently proclaim the Word in every tongue so that all the remaining three billion outside His Kingdom will have the opportunity to intelligently hear the Gospel, to respond to the Lord, and to be incorporated into His Church. The climax of His coming will herald the gathering of His people from all ages into one blessed Kingdom.

In all ages "the vigorous propagation of the faith is the Church's life blood" (Bright 1953:266). Bright affirms,

The Church, therefore, is not mistaken when she understands that her task is missionary. Indeed, her only mistake is that she has not understood it strongly enough. She is not to conduct missions as one of her many activities; she has in all her activities a mission; she is a missionary people – if she is not that, she is not the Church (1953:257).

Blauw endorses this (1962:129), and encourages the Church in continually "going out to the other nations (1962:117). This is the task of the people of God until the Lord Jesus returns in power and glory. 'Til then, however, the Church has her "marching orders."

Missionary work is like a pair of sandals that have been given to the Church in order that it shall set out on the road and keep on going to make known the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19) (Blauw 1962:125)

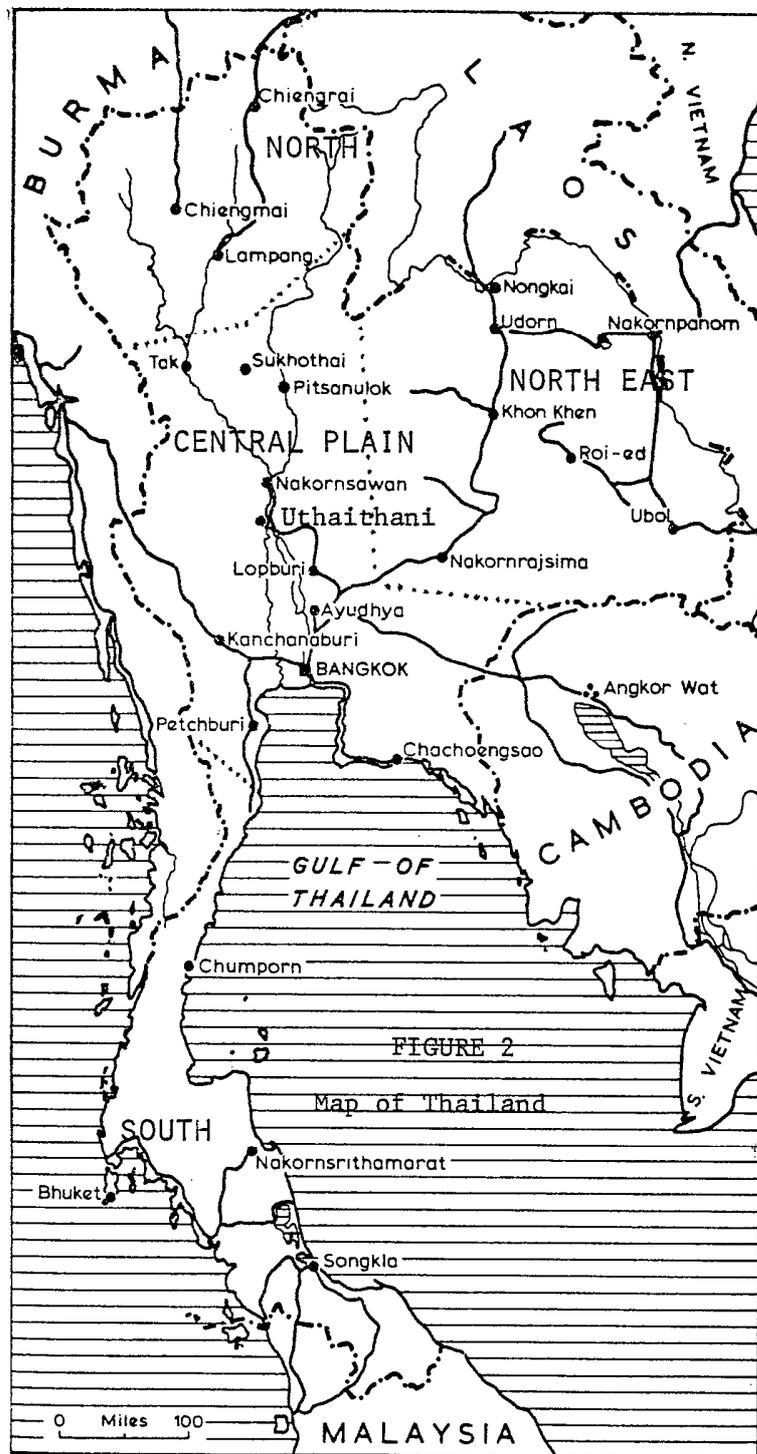


Figure 2 Map of Thailand

## II. THE RURAL SETTING FOR CHURCH PLANTING

Understanding the cultural setting is important in any cross cultural study. Since volumes of good writings on Thailand are in print, I will limit this description to a summary of the salient features. Any attempt to describe a setting in brief is fraught with dangers of omitting data others may consider relevant. Nevertheless, I will outline the setting foundational to some comprehension of rural Thailand, and will describe those features which are most applicable.

### A. BACKGROUND OF THAILAND

#### 1. Physical Location

Known as Siam prior to June 24, 1939, Thailand is located on the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. The Thai call their land “Muang Thai” meaning “The Land of the Free” (Government of Thailand 1964:10). Its shape roughly resembles an elephant’s head, bounded on the west by Burma, the north by Laos, the east by Cambodia, and the south by Malaysia at the end of its long trunk. Mountains and rivers form most of the boundaries of this 200,234 square mile kingdom (514,000 square kilometers), which is approximately one fifteenth the size of Australia or the U.S.A. without Alaska. (See map – Figure 2 on page 66).

The country falls into four natural regions – the mountainous North (42,000 square miles), the plateaued North East (66,000 square miles), the fertile alluvial Central plain (62,000 square miles). The life-giving Chao Phraya river system converges on the country’s only large city Bangkok, the capital. Thailand’s climate is tropical, and monsoons mark the rainy season from May through September.

#### 2. Historical Context

Modern scholars believe the Thai originated in North Western Szechuan about 45,000 years ago. They spread out along the Yangtse Valley. Later conflict with the encroaching Chinese forced them into waves of migration south, commencing with the early Christian era (Government of Thailand 1964:11). Several small kingdoms in the present Lao-Thailand area were established with Thai lords as vassals of the ruling Khmers. In 1238 the Thai gained their independence and established a large kingdom with the capital at Sukhothia. King Ramkamhaeng invented the Thai script and encouraged widespread acceptance of Buddhism.

In 1315 King Rama Tibodi moved the capital to Ayuthaya where, during the early sixteenth century, contact with the West was established. After the Burmese destroyed Ayuthaya in 1767 (Blanchard 1958:33) the capital was moved to Thonburi at the mouth of the Chao Phraya River. It was moved across the river to Bangkok in 1782 when the Chakri Dynasty which continues till today was established.

Thailand’s independence of colonial rule was preserved throughout the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and his son Rama V, although territories in Laos, Cambodia, Malaya, and Burma were ceded to France or Britain in order to preserve sovereignty.

King Chulalongkorn (Rama V 1869 – 1910) introduced many Western reforms and abolished institutional slavery (Blanchard 1958:35, 36). On June 24, 1932, a revolution for constitutional government overthrew absolute monarchy; nevertheless, despite limited power the king still represents a strong unifying national symbol in Thailand today.

## **B. ORGANIZATION**

The structure and political dynamics of any society tends to be complex, and over simplification is a danger. For detailed descriptions of the organization of the Thai society refer to studies by Insor (1961), Wilson (1962), and Ingram (1974).

### 1. Politics and Government

The coup d'etat of the 1932 military revolution which overturned the absolute monarchy, became the model for change. Over the succeeding forty-one years, twenty-seven coups and counter coups were launched. Most were bloodless and militaristic in character. Some failed (Mole 1973:70). Marital law was common, but not oppressive. Respites of democratically elected representations in each of the ten national elections were short lived. Military strongmen usually regained power through swift bloodless coups. Despite such power struggles, the kingdom remained reasonably stable. The mediatory voice of the monarch was often the unifying factor. Politically the last eleven constitutions have kept the basic premises of the original one.

Blanchard suggested that "Thailand's political system is still as undeveloped as its economy." There is widespread public apathy towards politics (1958:120). Insor (1961:66, 67) and Wilson (1962:75) agree. Innovations attempt to blend with old "autocratic in form and authoritarian in spirit" with "Western parliamentary and electoral forms" producing a Thai brand of democracy (Blanchard 1958:119-120).

A new catalytic element disturbed the old pattern in October 1973, forcing the resignation of the military government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn. Long delays and slow action to return the country to democratic rule caused university students to protest. When thirteen students peacefully calling for the speedy promulgation of a new constitution were imprisoned, a week of massed student demonstrations and armed clash with police followed. Blood was shed. Peace was restored only when the three former government strongmen fled the country. King Bhumibol Adulyedej (Rama IX) appointed Sanya Dharmasakdi, a university rector, as interim prime minister. He was the first civilian to this post in sixteen years. A new constitution was promulgated and public elections held in January 1975.

### 2. Social Structure

Many scholars support Embree's concept of Thai society as a "loosely structured social system" of "the individualistic behaviourism of the people" (Evers 1969:3ff). Blanchard says that,

Thailand contains few comprehensive formal organizations... The society is organized laterally rather than vertically.

Only two structures, church (Buddhist) and government, are built in pyramid form and encompass the whole country. Even these hierarchies mean little to most Thai; for them Buddhism means the local temple, and government means the village elders (1958:8).

The individual is, however, directed in the social world by four structures – family, village, temple, and nation (Blanchard 1958:9).

“The family is functionally the most significant social unit in the village” (Phillips 1965:37). The nuclear unit is dominant, but extended lines are also important for co-operative and reciprocal work, loans, and help in emergency.

In the village live other kith and kin (*phi nong*) through blood or marriage connections. “Social status is always of concern when two or more Thai are associated with each other” (Mole 1973:89). A Thai individual has few equals. Everyone else is seen in relation to himself as older or younger. Superiority is differentiated by age, position, or birth. The patron – client structure with “its superior – subordinate distinctions in both formal and informal relations” permeates the social structure (Mole 1973:62). “Consciously or unconsciously Thais are still living under the feudalistic influences” (Kim 1974:10).

The Buddhist temple symbolizes religion as “a dominant force in Thai life” (Blanchard 1958:11). Every male is expected to spend at least a lenten season of three months as a novice or monk. The social life of the village centers around the temple especially in forms of festivals and special holy days.

The feeling of belonging to the nation is a core belief of the Thai despite ethnic or cultural differences among the various branches of the Thai-Lao families. The king is highly honored and respected. Wilson indicates that kingship as a stabilizing influence is the most important element of the traditional government system existing in this day (1962:86). A strong component in integrating the nation is the Thai pride, loyalty, and love for their country. Although the Thai, Lao, and Chinese tend to look upon their own group as superior, there is unity through their oneness of citizenship under the king.

Class distinctions are generally reflected in the ruling class of the educated elite, and the lower class of the peasantry.

Wilson divides the ruling class into “a three tiered pyramid.” The top is the minority that dominates the ruling class – the head political leaders, and a few close to the throne. The second level is the general military officers, high grade civil servants, prominent parliamentarians, princes, and powerful businessmen. Third is the political public largely in the bureaucracy, school teachers, professional people, journalists, and commercial white collar executives (1962:60, 61).

The lower class may similarly be divided into at least two levels. The upper includes the money lenders, the middle men agents, and the unlettered merchants usually found in the provincial and district towns. A minority of wealthy farmers and some who

own extensive land could be included. The balance of the population, mostly peasants with small properties or hired fields, would form the large base of the second level. Kim suggests that Buddhist monks could be seen as a third class (1974:19).

### 3. Economy

The Thai economy is predominantly a “rice economy” with 85 per cent of the population employed in farming, fishing, or forestry (Blanchard 1958:302).

A growing prosperous agrarian economy is the backbone of the national economy. Agricultural products are the main exports... About 30 per cent of the total Gross Domestic Product originated in agriculture, though this percentage is decreasing as diversification of the economy proceeds (ICOWE 1974:7).

In 1967-1971 a second economic development plan stimulated rapid growth in the manufacturing, particularly in construction and textiles industries. Mining and quarrying continue to flourish. The expansion of hydro electric plants, highway improvements, and communication systems financed by loans from the International Bank, the United States and other countries, facilitated growth in national income. Major exports in order are rice, rubber, teak, tin, and textiles. The Thai baht remains a stable Asian currency. In 1971 the gross national product (GNP) per capita was 3,781 baht or US \$186.00 (National Statistical Office 1973:27).

## C. THE PEOPLE

### 1. Population

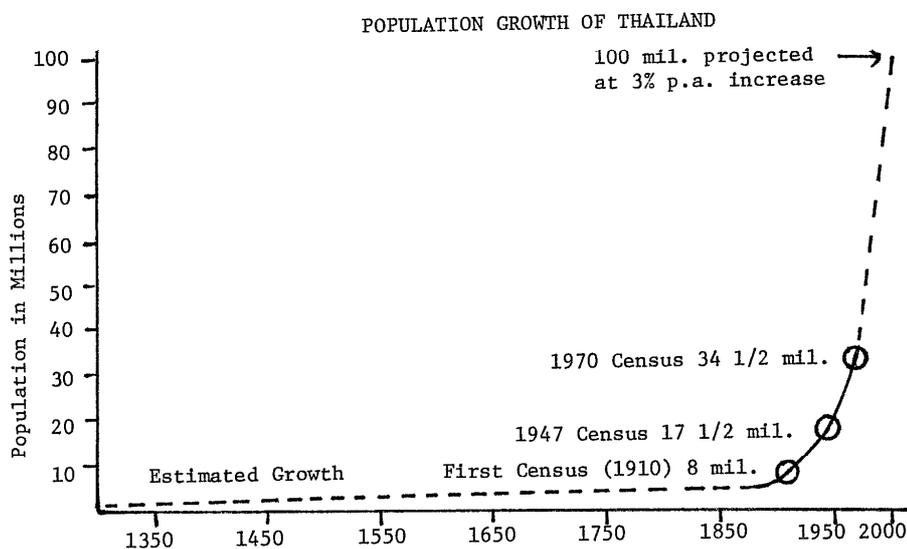
The 1975 population of Thailand is estimated at 40,000,000. The preliminary report of the 1970 census showed a total of 34,152,000 excluding tribal minorities in the North (National Statistical Office 1970:1, 7). The population of Thailand is increasing at a rate of approximately 3 per cent per year, among the highest in the world. At current growth rates, Thailand population is anticipated to be approximately 90,000,000 by the year 2000. However, the third 5 year plan has a goal to reduce this population growth to 2.5 per annum (Population Growth in Thailand – second edition, 1972). Bangkok, the capital, is increasing at almost 5 per cent per annum, and has a present population of almost 4 million. 85 per cent of the population are under the age of 15 years.

Over 80 per cent of Thailand’s population are ethnic Thai stock. The main groups are Central Thai (or Siamese), the Lao (or Isan) of the North East, the Khon Muang of the North, and the Pak Thai in the extreme South. Smaller Thai groups are the Pu Thai in the North East along the Laos border, the Shan (or Great Thai) in the North, and the Lu.

The Chinese form the most important minority group, generally estimated between three and four million, the majority of which are in Bangkok and the provincial towns, as well as the Kra peninsula in the South. Because of inter-marriage with the Thai, and the Chinese assimilation into Thai society, which is better than in any other S.E.

Asian land, exactness of Chinese ethnic percentage is difficult to estimate. It is probably between 12 and 14 per cent. About 750,000 ethnic Malays are concentrated in four provinces of South Thailand. Over 20 other tribal minorities are not generally included in the population census. In the nine northern provinces, nine tribes comprise over 270,000 approximately 150,000 of which are Karen (Chiengmai Tribal Research Center, 1971-1972). Khmer, Kui, So, and Vietnamese may reach 250,000 in the North East of Thailand. Several groups of Sea Gypsies and Negroid tribal mountain peoples are located in the South.

FIGURE 3



Source: Adapted from National Census Data and Brochure of Population Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

Figure 3  
Population Growth of Thailand

## 2. Languages, Literacy, and Education

Although there are four major Thai languages, central or “Siamese” Thai is the kingdom’s official language. The North, North East, and South also use their own distinct dialects. Other ethnic groups speak some 30 different dialects, including several varieties of Lao and Karen.

The law requires children between the ages of 7 and 14 to attend primary school, unless already completed the seventh grade. The government has upgraded school facilities and improved training of teachers. The majority of children in Thailand

complete four years of schooling. Of all the children who start school only 15 per cent enter grade 5. Only a quarter of those completing four years education will continue formal study. Approximately 700,000 out of a total of 4 million lower elementary school children (about 22 per cent) had to repeat their grades each year. Three fifths of the repeaters failed their examinations. Only a minute proportion of the students will enter the nine universities (1968 Official Thailand Year Book).

Adult education for the illiterates of Bangkok and the larger towns uses night classes and functional literacy programs. Although a literacy rate of 70 per cent is claimed, the standard of such literacy is generally poor. Rural children completing fourth grade often become illiterate within a couple of years through insufficient motivation and reading materials.

### 3. Cultural Characteristics

Although an incomplete study of social values and traits may distort the overall picture, I will point out only the dominant characteristics of the Thai.

- a. *The "Social cosmetic"*. Phillips carefully described the "Thai Peasant Personality" in a central Thailand village. He says that one important Thai characteristic is their "social cosmetic" (1965:66). Extreme politeness, generosity, and propriety color even adverse personal feelings. The Buddhistic philosophy of tranquility teaches them to repress feelings, not expose them. Friendliness and courtesy that foreigners quickly notice is a reflection of this "social cosmetic." Face to face conflict is avoided, and feelings masked in diplomatic ways. One of the highest Thai virtues is the "cool heart" (*cai yen*), which remains calm in all circumstances.

- b. *The "sanuk" way of life*. *Sanuk* means enjoyment, fun, and pleasure, but it is more than these for the Thai. It is

...an attempt on the part of the villagers to lead a psychologically integrated life, wherein the time and energy one gives to an activity is rewarded immediately and directly with pleasure (Phillips 1965:60).

Life is a play and all the Thai are actors. *Sanuk* is a way of life, a release mechanism and practical philosophy balancing the "social cosmetic".

The common phrase *Mai Pen Rai* – "never mind, it doesn't matter" reflects unconcerned freedom enjoyed by the Thai. Through their "Mai Pen Rai" attitude to life's crises Insor says the "Thais are masters of unconcern" (Insor 1961:112).

- c. *The "saduak sabai" attitude*. *Saduak* (convenient) and *Sabai* (ease, comfort, satisfied) seems to be an outcome of the "sanuk" philosophy of life. Like all people, the Thai seek personal convenience and comfort with a free abandonment. This is so

reflected in their attitudes and way of life that outsiders regard them as one of the most “easy going” people in Asia. Some falsely interpret this as laziness. When compared to the Chinese, the Thai do not over exert themselves generally, but the majority are far from lazy.

The “saduak – sabai” concept reaches beyond concern for oneself in the genuine concern for the well being of others. A courtesy included in the normal greeting is to inquire as to the well being of the person greeted, and relates to the “social cosmetic.”

The dominant emphases of the “social cosmetic,” “sanuk” enjoyment, and “saduak-sabai” traits, though real, can be misleading if they are seen as strict stereotypes for all Thai all the time. Like human beings everywhere, Thai daily practice exposes exceptions as pent up frustrations give way to occasional outbursts of anger, hate, misery, worry and such like.

d. *Thai – freedom*

The word “*thai*” means free. Pride in this freedom dominates the Thai life. Its main expression is in the individualism already mentioned upon which the “loosely social structured society” is built. The freedom of individuals is tempered by their relation to all others in the “*phi nong*” superior-subordinate relationships of life.

This gives rise to the *kreng cai* attitude, a respectful fear and deference especially for superiors in age, position, status, or birth. It expresses that polite concern against encroaching on a superior individual’s freedom. Referring to the *kreng cai* trait, Mole writes:

The operation of this concept is so strong that middlemen are used to negotiate between socially distanced individuals or different strata (1973:74).

e. *The “sassana” (religious) dimension.*

Just about every element of Thai culture and structure is affected and permeated by religious influence. Since religion is “the keystone of Thai culture” (Mole 1973:58) it affects human relations, rituals, acts, governmental structure, and all else in a most pervasive manner. Because of its importance and complexity I shall now discuss it in more detail separately.

## D. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Under the Thai Constitution there is religious freedom. The king, however, is obligated to be a Buddhist and the upholder of religion.

Approximately 94 per cent of the Thai subscribe to Buddhism. Muslims comprise another 4 per cent of the population, Confucianists 1.3 per cent, and Christians 0.5 per cent. An analysis of the population by religious affiliation is found in Figure 4 below.

<p>Figure 4 Population of Major Religious Communities in Thailand</p>
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	1970
Buddhists	32,102,000
Muslims	1,366,000
Christians	187,000
Confucianists, Hindus & others	497,000
TOTAL	34,152,000

Source: Preliminary Report of the 1970 Population and Housing Census of Thailand – National Statistical Office

Note: Hill tribes not included in census.

Outwardly Buddhism dominates Thai religion. Scholars note, however, that Thai Buddhism is extremely tolerant and syncretistic. Over the centuries it has incorporated Brahmanism, animism, and elements of other belief systems. Wright, who himself was in the Thai Buddhist priesthood in Thailand says, “Buddhism and animism are intimately fused in the Thai heart” (1968:1). Into the cardinal teachings of Buddhism the Thai “have blended in the cosmology and astrology of Hinduism, ghost and spirit worship, and supernatural beings” (Kim 1974:16). Thai folk religion is modified animism, combining spirit cults, Brahmanism, and Buddhism into one integrated composite whole. Its hard core of animism is surrounded by Brahmanistic deities and ceremony with a strong covering of Buddhist teaching and religious forms.

### 1. Animistic Substructure

“Animism predates Buddhism in Thailand and remains an important component of popular religion” (Blanchard 1958:12). The original base structure of Thai religion includes belief in spirits and the supernatural.

- a. *“Phi” spirits.* The *phi* spirits include a wide range of meanings. It is used for ghosts, the spirit of the dead, and the dead body itself. Manifestations of demons (*maan*) are also called phi. In the strict sense “phi” refers to the spirit of the dead – ghosts.

The Thai’s relation to the “phi” is one of fear. They propitiate the “phi” with offerings. Benedict confirms that “acts of prayers and propitiation in Thailand are made to the “phi” rather than in Buddhist worship” (1952:17). The “phi” can scare of deceive them, bother them, and possess them. Possession is either voluntary or involuntary (Textor 1960:183). “Phi” are both benevolent and malevolent. Sometimes the Thai request the “phi” for help, cures, and protection.

There are many complicated categories of “phi” but basically I will classify them into four groups. The first is certainly from Thai animism. The other three may have been interposed from Brahmanism.

- 1) Ghosts of the dead. The most feared “phi” are those of persons who meet sudden or violent death, or died in childbirth. These are inevitably malevolent (Blanchard 1958:98). The Thai believe that cremation is the means of freeing the spirit. Until the body is so disposed, they are afraid of the ghost. Some “phi”, especially those whose death was violent, remain to haunt and seek revenge. Thai frequently vouch that they have seen such “phi.”

- 2) The property spirits (*Phra Phuum Chao Thii*). Spirit houses perched on top of five foot poles are found everywhere across Thailand, on top of city buildings, in rural house compounds, even in Buddhist temple grounds. These resident “phi” exist by themselves. They are the guardian spirits of the property. Visitors staying overnight are expected to acknowledge the property spirit before retiring. He is invoked for safe journeys, and in family crises. Offerings of flowers, incense, and sometimes food or figurines are made to those spirits.

In the past, men (voluntarily and involuntarily) were placed alive in the foundation holes of bridges, buildings, or gateposts of the city to become the protective spirits (Benedict 1952:17). I have talked with elderly Thai teachers who confirmed this past practice.

- 3) The guardian spirits (*chao Pau*). The influence of these spirits is often defined territorily. They are usually the spirits of prominent men of the past, such as the founder of city or province, or a pious monk renowned for his powers to do miracles and such like. These are usually worshipped at shrines. People returning to an area after a long absence usually make obeisance and give offerings to these area guardian spirits. In some villages the master spirit of the village receives offerings representing every household at an annual ceremony of making merit to the “phi” (*them bun phi*). Some “spirit lords” guard sections of roads and the surrounding districts. Bus drivers honk their horns at them acknowledging them as they pass. I have seen some drivers take both hands off the steering wheel and “*wai*” (in obeisance) to the guardian spirit.

4) Nature spirits. Spirits are believed to be in certain trees, rivers, mountains and other natural phenomena. On occasions I have seen farmers put down their tools as they pass by a certain tree and make obeisance to it. The reason given is, “someone once saw a spirit near this tree.”

Unusually shaped natural phenomena such as caves, rocks, or twisted vines are sometimes revered as having resident spirits.

- b. *Supernatural objects (Phra Khryang)*. In a significant study of the central Thailand village of Bang Chan in 1960, Textor categorized 118 non-Buddhist supernatural objects and beings. Many of these objects are sacralized by magical manipulation of priests or people with much merit. They are objects believed to be infused with supernatural power. Since such supernaturally empowered objects are common property of the community, one can only “rent” them, not buy them. Gustafson listed some of Textor’s categories (1970:111-116).

I studied the different types of images and objects with a Thai teacher in Uthaitani. Data used in this analysis comes from my field notes, September 3-4, 1968.

1) Powerful sacred objects (*Khong Khlang*). There are basically two types of “phra” images. “*Phra*” is the honorific title of power used for the king, the Buddha, his images, the priests, and certain supernatural objects. “*Khong Khlang*” are strung on the body around the neck, waist, or wrists. A few are surgically implanted in the body, usually the arm. The first group are images of Buddha which are kept on worship shelves in the house or office (*phra bucha tang to*). The second group are small objects which are kept on the body of the person (*khwaen phra*), which are divided into two classes.

- (a) One group comprises small figurines of Buddhist phras or other sacred amulets (usually Brahmanistic). Some of these are believed to draw the affections of the opposite sex and are usually used by men. Others attract money and insure selling success. Women frequently use these.

- (b) All other objects form the second group of supernatural things. They are classified into three further categories.

⇒ “*Kaew ta sya*” are for protection and invulnerability, especially from bullets and knives. Under the power of the resident influence they stop the gun from firing, or cause the bullet to miss its mark.

⇒ “*Ka tuk*” are for protection of health from disease and spirits. Some use “*ka tuk*” to make them feel brave. Many of the supernatural objects in this class are small encasements

(*muan*) of specially inscribed paper, metal, or cloth, rolled into small scrolls. These are usually made by priests.  
 ⇒ “*Bia Can*” are usually in the form of a shell which are also used to protect from “phi.” These shell supernatural objects are now uncommon

2) Sacred cloths. There are at least three types of cloth materials which are magically manipulated in order to infuse special powers into them. Although these cloths are more in keeping with Brahmanistic practices, they are usually sacralized by Buddhist priests.

- - Holy string (*Daajsai sin*) comprises threads of red and white coarse cotton threads made into strings. It becomes potent in the following manner. In the Uthai area the people take their cotton string to the temple of Wat-tham-ma-nuun to make obeisance to the priest. They then place the cotton (*daaj*) in front of the image of Buddha so that it becomes charged with sacred power.

Holy string is tied around the wrists of sick children and sometimes adults in an attempt to ward off the spirits or to retain the child’s soul-spirit (*khwan*).

It is also wound around the heads of the bride and groom joining them in the Brahman marriage ceremonies. In some small weddings the *daaj sai sin* is extended around to the guests in the room for them to hold.

It is prominent in the Buddhist death rites, placed on the coffin and strung around the funeral pyre. The Thai say this is to protect them from the “phi” of the dead person, and to help lead him to heaven.

Holy string is tied around the top of the first post of a new house under construction. It is often tied around other posts at ceiling level and remains there until the house is demolished. Its main purpose again is protection first of the builders and then of the occupants.

Holy string is also used in the blessing of household ceremony.

Holy cloth (*Pha yan*) are pieces of cloth that have been blessed by the priests, usually including special magic writings and mysterious drawings often in the form of the number nine. They vary in shape – triangle, pennant, square. Again protection is the key thought. They are commonly placed in shops, homes, or on the ceiling of buses above the driver’s head.

Enchanted cloths (*Pha pluk sek*) are regular cloths that the people take to their special priest in order for him to chant over it so that sacred power is transferred into it. These are often found near the driver of buses alongside a framed portrait of the priest who “charged” the cloth with power. Protection from spirits and consequent accidents are their function.

3) *Tattoo (Sak)*. Large and extensive tattoos in intricate designs are often seen on men. In the older generation these tattoos cover the legs from the knees to the crotch. The new generation usually have only small tattoos on other parts of the body. Some have only a tiny mark of special design made in some inconspicuous part of their bodies.

Sacred tattooing is commonly done by the Buddhist priest, who blows on the tattoo spot transferring special power to that person. This is intended as a magical device to make him strong, brave, invincible, and invulnerable. Boxers, ruffians, and criminals inevitably have a tattoo somewhere.

One Uthai bus driver had a large wild dragon tattooed on his back. He was a rough and tough character. One day he was very angry at his wife and was about to hit her when some friends restrained him. Annoyed he took scissors and cut his own arm to show the power of his sacred tattoo. The women around imagined they saw blood squirt out, but on close investigation they could not find a drop!

4) Sacred incantations. Two oral expressions of supernatural power are “*Khathaa*” and “*Mantra*.” While these sacred chants are similar in form, their functions are usually different.

The *khathaa* is one of the most common exercised means of invoking supernatural power by both villagers and special practitioners usually, but not necessarily, in conjunction with other sacred objects, and a dealing with “*phi*.” They are short Pali phrases recognized as sacred, but unintelligible to the majority of people (Textor 1968:68).

*Mantras* are lengthier and usually used for curing by priests and sacred practitioners.

5) Holy water (*Nam mon*). This is a common element used by priests and spirit practitioners in healing and exorcism. Genuine holy water is produced only by Buddhist priests in the food bowls. The priest fills the bowl with water, places a special leaf in it, and chants the sacred incantation. While chanting he places a lighted candle on the rim of the bowl allowing drops of wax to drop into the water. When he feels it is sufficiently potent he snuffs the candle out and drops it into the bowl.

Another form of obtaining power through holy water is practiced at Buddhists festivals – particularly the Song Khran new year. The Thai pour water over Buddhist images placed prominently in the market. The water is thereby charged with the image’s power. The Thai wash their faces in the water, or wipe their faces with the dripping yellow cloth which hangs over the shoulder of the image. A few even drink it.

## 2. Brahmanistic Influence

When the Thai immigrated southward from China they had extensive contact with the Brahman religion prevalent among the Khmers. During the Ayuthaya period the Thai defeated the Khmers and brought some of the leading people back as captives to Thailand. Teachers among them introduced Brahman concepts to the Thai. These Indian Brahman ideas were gradually assimilated into Thai religion and politics.

Five influences of Brahmanism made an indelible impact

- a. New spirits (“phi”) like the tree ghosts, the property spirits, and the nature spirits of mother earth, water, air, and fire were incorporated into the Thai religious system (Kaufman 1960:198). These have been expanded under “phi” beginning on page 53.
- b. A pantheon of supernatural beings were introduced to the Thai peasants. The Indian epic Ramayana was full of new deities. The Lord of Spirits, and the Keeper of the Dead (*jom phra baan*), and many minor gods (*thewada*) flooded into the syncretistic stream of Thai religion. Instead of learning these many new names, the Thai compressed the whole pantheon of gods into one concept – “all things sacred” (*sing sagsid thang laaj*) (Textor 1960:460-463).
- c. The soul-spirit concept of *khwan* came from Brahmanism. This provided a system for the life cycle rites. Since Buddhism had no appropriate ceremonies, the Brahman rites filled the gap. Ceremonies using the “holy string” identified the stages of the life cycle from post natal to cremation, including rites of passage into puberty (hair top-knot ceremony – not commonly used nowadays), preparation for entrance into the priesthood (*baud naak*), and marriage. Offerings are made to the “theweda” not the spirits.
- d. Most Thai ceremonial rituals are of Brahman origin. Beside rites of passage are three broad categories of rituals.

1) Festival rituals. The Thai new year (*Song Khran*) in April aims to awaken the nature cycle for another year of fertility and rain. At the end of the rain season (Nov.) the Loy Krathong festival focusing on the “Mother of Waters” is held. These two Brahman rituals have become Buddhist ceremonies (Kaufman 1960:194-196).

2) Fertility ritual. Kaufman describes other animistic Brahmanistic rituals which take place between these two festivals completing the nature fertility cycle and farming (1960:201-207).

(a) The first plowing ritual (*Raeng Na*) is set by astrologers. The farmer burns candles and joss sticks in the corner of his field, and recites chants calling

the Rick Mother and all the “thewadas” to bless the field with a good crop and protect the rice. He ploughs three furrows counter-clockwise around the field to complete the ritual. Regular plowing can then commence.

(b) The rice seed bed ritual (*Raeng Tog Kla*) invokes the blessing of the rice goddess before the rice seeds are sown in the small plot.

(c) In the transplanting of the rice plants ritual (*Raeng Dam*) food, as well as candles and incense, are offered to the rice goddess requesting a good crop.

(d) The ritual of Chalew is held late October when the rice is fat. Some sweets and branches of ripened paddy are hung from the crotch of a couple of bamboo poles, entreating the rice goddess for a bountiful crop.

(e) A further ritual following threshing precedes the gathering of the rice into the storage bin (*Tham Khwan Jung*). A doll representing the rice goddess is made and fed some rice and special foods.

(f) Before the new rice can be eaten by the family the ritual of first-rice blessing is performed (*Tham Bun Khaw Mai*). Buddhist priests chant over the rice, and give their blessing that evening. The next morning the family feed the priests after which they partake of the rice freely.

3) House rituals. I have already noted the use of “holy string” in relation to the housepost ritual. Before the owners live in the building, a house warming ritual must be performed. Priests encircle the house with “holy string” and chant. The following day the priests return to bless the house by sprinkling holy water on the house.

A further ritual of household blessing (*Tham Bun Baan*) is held when the family has been especially prospered with good crops, cured illness, or lottery winnings. The priests are again called to bless the house and family.

The ceremony of setting up the house of the property spirit, inviting him to reside therein, is performed by the Brahman (*mau phum*). Holy water is poured and food offerings made. The Buddhist priests are sometimes called in to add their blessing (Kaufman 1960:198).

e. Astrological divination is another Brahman innovation. The Thai frequently visit the astrologer (*mau duu* or *mau lek*) asking his discernment as to whether they should move house, embark on a new endeavour, and so on. They seek the astrologer to find out the auspicious date for any proposed action. From their date of birth he consults his books and predicts the appropriate day and time.

The timing of important ceremonies – whether public functions or private rites – is never set without consulting the local abbot or a

Brahman astrologer, who makes lunar calculations to ensure an auspicious date (Blanchard 1958:93).

- f. *Other ritual practitioners.* Blanchard summarizes succinctly, Many shamans, spirit doctors, and other intermediaries between the world of man and the ‘phi’ still attempt to control the spirit powers by means of magical rites, charms, and spells. In some cases they become oracles through ‘spirit possession’ or function as sorcerers. Most commonly, however, they exorcise sick villagers of evil spirits (1958:103).

In Thai most of these practitioners are called doctor (mau). I list briefly some practitioners and their roles:

- *mau boran* – herbalist cum shaman Kaufman 1960:177-178
- *mau yaa* – herbalist cum physician
- *mau phi* – exorcist shaman intermediary
- *mau tham* – shaman medium exorcist (Tambiah 1970:272ff)
- *mau paw* – shaman by blowing
- *mau song* – diviner consultant diagnostician (Kaufman 1960:179 , 180)
- *mau duu* – diviner astrologer fortune teller
- *mau lek* – diviner astrologer fortune teller
- *mau khwan* – Brahman doctor of khwan soul shaman
- *mau phun* – Brahman doctor of rituals (Kaufman 1960:199)
- *mau pha tad* – surgeon
- *mau tam yae* – village midwife
- *tiam* – medium of guardian spirits (Tambiah 1970:344)
- *cham* – spirit medium (called to office by possession)

This list is not exhaustive, but gives some conception of the prevalence of practitioners related to spiritual, psychological, and physical sickness, particularly related to influences of spirits. Some Buddhist priests also exercise some of these roles.

### 3. Buddhist Overlay

The Thai had contact with Mahayana Buddhism in China before their migration south where further growth of the Mahayana branch was fostered through interaction with the Mon Khmer peoples (Gustafson 1970:20). During the 11<sup>th</sup> Century in North Thailand the Theravada sect took root and was absorbed into the local animistic religion (HRAF 1956:26).

Late in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Theravada monks were sent from Ceylon to Nakhom Sri Thammarat in South Thailand. Theravada Buddhism spread north as King Ram Kam Haeng invited the monks to reside in Sukhothai, the capital, to spread their teachings. The

official espousal of this branch of Buddhism eventually unified Thailand under one modified animistic religion, coated with a strong overlay of Theravada Buddhism.

Over the centuries the emphasis of animism eroded classical Buddhism, and several reforms were attempted. The most famous one was by Prince Mongkut (later King Rama IV). He established a stricter monastic school which still continues among the minority.

Kaufman says (1960:11-12) these major factions exist in practice of Buddhism in Thailand:

1. the intellectual Buddhist emphasizing the philosophical aspect, trying to harmonize it with science (Neo Buddhism Blanchard 1958:116),
2. the liberal educated Buddhist seeking to change Buddhism to conform with modern life, and
3. the rural peasant Buddhist practicing traditional Buddhism in its modified animistic form,

Since books expounding the concepts of Buddhism abound, I will bypass any extensive explanation of its philosophy. Instead I will point out those factors which are dominant among the peasant population of rural Thailand.

- a. *Knowledge of Buddhism.* The average Thai peasant has limited knowledge of philosophical Buddhism. Yet the basic precepts are fundamentally integrated into his religious system.

He believes everything is suffering, and that the causes of desire and ignorance resulting in his present state seem beyond hope of eradication in this life. Nevertheless, he endeavours by self reliance and self effort to get free of the grip of his “*karma*” from past existences. Theoretically he depends entirely on himself and his own self alone (*Phyng ton eng*).

In the endless wheel of life he is traveling from suffering to Nirvana (a state of non-existence or extinction). In this process he believes he must pass through countless reincarnations, which will be determined by his karma from the merit/demerit relationship of his own effort in life. Thus his concept of Buddhism in practice is a casual system by which he seeks to improve the status of future lives. As the karma action of past existence has determined his present state, so present action in life will determine his next existence.

- b. *Merit – demerit (bun – baab).* The central concern of all Thai religious activity is the individual acquisition of “merit.” The aim is to store up as much merit and reduce as much demerit as possible. Of the hundreds of

ways of acquiring merit (*Bun*) the main ones are:

1. Financing construction on new temples
2. Becoming a monk or novice
3. Donating for repairs on temples
4. Giving food daily to the monks
5. Attending temple on holy days and festivals
6. Keeping the five basic precepts all the time
7. Making pilgrimages to Buddhist shrines
8. Buying token “gold leaf” to stick on the Buddha’s image at the temple
9. Having a son ordained as a monk
10. Giving alms

The main causes for demerit are breaking these five precepts:

1. Do not destroy life (in any form)
2. Do not steal anything
3. Do not commit fornication
4. Do not lie or speak falsely
5. Do not partake of intoxicants (liquors or drugs)

The five prohibitions (*sin ha*) are the basic tenets of rural religion. They are, however, highly ideal. As true of most populations, an appraisal of the “real” life situation shows that violations of their ideal laws are prevalent everywhere. Occasionally the five precepts are all practiced for a day in order to build up merit, while they may be neglected in any strict sense on other days.

- c. *Hell – Heaven (Narok – Sawan)*. The Thai Buddhist hell is a purging process, and heaven a stepping stone to another reincarnation in the struggle of the soul to attain nirvana enlightenment and extinction.

Following death the spirit essence or consciousness (*winyan*) will go first to hell, with many levels, to expiate his demerit before going to heaven to enjoy his merit before rebirth. If he had a large balance of merit over demerit they believe he would go to heaven directly (Tambiah 1970:54)

- d. *The temple (Wat)*. “The Buddhist monastery or temple is omnipresent in Thailand” (Benedict 1952:14). It is the hub of the village and the heart of the Thai community, unifying the village. In 1970 there were 25,659 monasteries in Thailand (National Statistics Office 1973:8).

The temple as a community center is the focus for social and religious functions. A few decades ago the “*wat*” served as center for worship, school, town hall, local hotel, hospital, morgue, community chest,

counseling agency, sports playground, and bank among others (Kaufman 1960:113-115). Although a number of these functions such as schools and hospitals are generally independent government agencies now, the influence of the temple still plays a dominate role in the life of the peasant.

The villagers are organized around the temple in community functions, providing for its subsistence and sharing in its ceremonies and festivals. In practice the women are usually the large majority.

- e. *The priesthood (Sangkha)*. The priesthood is a highly structured organization. Each “wat” is, however, largely autonomous, though highly disciplined under the guidance of its abbot (*Cho Wat*).

The 1970 statistics of the Department of Religious Affairs record 194,561 priests and 116,027 novices resident in the Thailand monasteries (National Statistical Office 1973:8).

Priests play a central role in the social and religious events of the village. They have a high status above everyone else. They are *Phra*, a title of “high” power. They are looked upon as a-sexual – a kind of third sex.

It is a social obligation for every young man to spend at least three months in the monastic life of the temple. This has become a rites of passage, since a man is reckoned as “raw” or “green” (*khon dip*) until then. Generally it is socially accepted as a pre-requisite to marriage. It provides valuable opportunity for further education to young village men. To enter the monastery is a social obligation to the community, the family, and the parents.

Sons entering the temple service pass on considerable merit to their mothers. The Brahman service of *Baud Naak* which precedes the official entrance into the temple also emphasized the mother’s goodness and merit. Entering the priesthood is an important occasion and indicates extended family and community solidarity.

- f. *Ceremonies*. The Buddhist calendar provides for various annual ceremonies co-ordinated with the agricultural cycle. Beside those with animistic or Brahmanistic foundations already described, there are five notable Buddhist festivals besides the annual temple festival held during the dry season:

- Festival of Buddha’s first sermon – coinciding with the large Lenten candle making ritual – (July)
- the beginning of the Buddhist lent (*Khaw Phansa* – July)
- the end of the Lenten period (*Ook Phansa* – October)

- ceremony presenting Buddhist robes (*Thaud Kathin* – November)
- all saint day commemorating the spontaneous gathering of 1,250 disciples of Buddha (*Mukha Bucha* – May)

All these festivals and ceremonies increase the income of the temple and priests, as well as provide a psychological relief or safety valve for the Thai. Most are fun occasions. The weekly holy day (*wan phra*), set by the lunar calendar, is a central feature of Buddhist practice. Ordination ceremonies for monks and novices are set by arrangement, as well as other family occasions requiring the presence of the priest, such as important birthdays, marriages, and funerals.

The funeral is one of the most significant ceremonies. It is usually quite elaborate and costly. A Thai proverb says, “the dead sell the living” (*Khon taaj khaai khon pen*). Because of the money needed to make merit at funerals many go into debt. There is a social obligation within the family to share the cost. A certain amount is required of each family member. If one has insufficient, he must borrow to obtain it or he will be censured by the relatives and friends (Field Notes 1968, Nov. 9) Like most funerals it is a family and community friends affair requiring considerable preparation, showing respect at the last rites.

The cremation ceremony is one of the chief functions of the Buddhist monk. Thai consider it essential to have the priests perform the ceremony, since they lead the spirit essence (*winyan*) on its way to release, directing it heavenward by their various chants. They also add merit to the dead one and provide incantations protecting him from the evil intention of others, but not from his own karma (see Tambiah 1970:179-194).

From the expansive dimensions of religion in Thailand suggested in this overall survey, its centrality in culture and influence of the total world view is self evident.

Despite the apparent inconsistencies among animism, Brahmanism, and Buddhism the Thai view their syncretism composition as one integrated whole. They have chosen those elements out of each which, when incorporated into the total system, contributes to that holistic mechanism.

The above assumptions are generally those adhered to by those found in this study throughout the rural areas of Central Thailand. Most of them live in simple homes with little furniture and few conveniences. Construction is usually of hand-sawn timber and bamboo. Thatch and galvanized iron are used for roofing. Water is drawn from the local well, or a nearby stream. Lighting is by crude oil lamps. Charcoal is used for fuel. The family buffalo is the most valuable possession. Most of the family activities revolve around farming, but various religious activities draw them into the social community around the Buddhist temple.

### **III. HISTORICAL PROGRESSION OF CHURCH GROWTH**

An overview of the history of the entrance and growth of Christianity in Thailand will set the stage for the present study. Since some recent theses such as Kim's (1974) give considerable historical data on the Church in Thailand, I will avoid detailed duplication. Instead I will give a bird's eye view of missions with a focus on the current status of Christianity in the Thai Kingdom. The stage will be narrowed to the Overseas Missionary Fellowship's work in Central Thailand, and especially to an in-depth study on Uthaitani which will form the major section of this chapter.

#### **A. OVERVIEW OF MISSION HISTORY**

The influence of the Roman Catholic Church preceded that of Protestants by some 300 years.

##### **1. Roman Catholic Missions**

Christianity probably first reached the Thai in 1511 through Roman Catholic priests accompanying the Portuguese Embassy of Alfonso de Albuquerque. In 1555 two Dominican priests took up residence in Siam. Both were martyred – one in 1556 and the other in 1569 (1967 Catholic Directory of Thailand.) The Paris Foreign Missionary Society entered in 1662 and other priests and orders increased the Catholic presence (Government of Thailand 1964:19).

Strong resistance was met and few converts were made. By 1680 there were only 600 Thai Catholics. The 1967 Catholic Directory of Thailand records

Having failed in their attempts to convert the Thai people, they turned to the Portuguese and other Christians of foreign origin.

During these years a Greek Catholic adventurer named Constantine Phaulkon had great influence as a minister to King Narai, but no movement to Christianity was seen. Evidently political power struggles sparked off a violent anti-foreign (particularly anti-French) revolution in 1688 following the death of the king. Phaulkon was beheaded and the Catholic priests banished or imprisoned (Government of Thailand 1964:5). The Christian's work languished over the next 140 years. Nevertheless in 1828 when the Protestants first entered there were still four Roman Catholic churches in Bangkok and one each in Ayuthaya and Chantaburi (Wells 1958:5).

In 1885 the Catholics inaugurated a strong emphasis on modern Catholic schools. Education and hospitals remain their main focus. This is reflected in a larger proportion of Catholic students in universities than the Catholic presence in the whole community.

A recent emphasis is on the growth of the Thai clergy. In December 1965, Thailand's first Catholic arch-bishops were appointed. Both are supplemented by three Thai and five foreign bishops, 280 foreign priests from 11 different orders (1973 Christian Directory of Thailand) and 129 Catholic nuns from 14 orders (1968 Thailand's Official Year Book).

At the end of 1972 the community of the Roman Catholic Church comprised 167,194 members. The majority of them are located in North East and East Thailand (50 per cent), and in Bangkok (30 per cent). Many are Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian descendents.

By using the general rule of thumb ratio of 3:1 community membership is converted to comparable Protestant communicant membership. Thus, the equivalent adult Catholic communicant membership would be about 56,000 (Dec. 1972). (At the end of 1973 Protestant communicant membership was 43,000). Annual Catholic adult conversions were as follows – 1,167 in 1959, 1,171 in 1962, and 1,584 in 1966 (Catholic Directory of Thailand 1967:24)

## 2. Protestant Missions

The opening chapters of Well's History of Protestant Work in Thailand show that the Protestants faced no easier situation than the Catholics did a century and a half before.

- a. Early traumas of mission (1828-1878). Ann Judson had translated Matthew's Gospel, the catechism and a tract into Thai during interaction with Siamese prisoners of war in Rangoon, Burma. The Gospel was lost, but the other two were printed in India in 1819

- 1) Pioneer missions. The first Protestant missions in Siam began in 1828 with Karl Gutzlaff, formerly of the Netherlands Missionary Society, but then independent, and Jacob Tomlin of the London Missionary Society. After translating some of the New Testament and completing most of the English-Thai Dictionary, both left by January 1832 without a convert.

The American Board (ABCFM) entered in 1831. After eighteen years of work without a single Thai convert they terminated their work in 1849, transferring their workers to China.

The American Baptists began work in 1833, and in 1837 they established the Maitri Chit Chinese Baptist Church which is the oldest indigenous Protestant Church in the Far East. They majored on the Chinese. Few Thai were won. The mission withdrew in 1893.

The American Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions arrived in 1840. The Presbyterians maintained a continuing mission in one form or another to the present. Like

the other missions, they met many barriers such as an anti-foreign king, some opposing Buddhist priests, and rampant disease. An estimated 35,000 died of cholera in Bangkok in 1849. As many as 2,000 a day succumbed to the epidemic (Wells 1958:1, 23). After 19 years the Presbyterians baptized their first Thai convert (1859).

2) Struggle for survival. The early accounts of these brave missionaries indicate the incredible stamina they exhibited in the face of unbelievable suffering and discouragement. Deaths were frequent. "In all, sixty-one Protestant missionaries to Siam died on the field" (Wells 1958:2), half of them during the first half century of missions. However, the spiritual seed sown in travail was to prevail until a Thai church was formed to the glory of God.

It was a severe and costly conflict in those early years. In 1829 Gutzlaff and Tomlin had been in Bangkok only a few months when the Minister of Foreign Affairs asked Mr. Hunter, a prominent English merchant, to take them out of the country. They appealed, requesting in writing the reasons for which they were being expelled.

This remonstrance took effect, and they were allowed to remain, but they were admonished to distribute books more sparingly. A royal edict was issued forbidding Siamese to receive Christian books. When Dr. Abeel returned to Bangkok in 1832, he found that a second edict prohibiting the distribution of Christian books had been issued (Wells 1958:12).

In 1835 three missionary families were evicted from the Wat Kok area partly as a reprisal against the infringement of a sea captain shooting pigeons on the temple grounds (Wells 1958:9,11)

Ten days after his arrival in 1835, Dr. Dan Bradley received a request in the name of the king to visit a company of slaves and captives ill with smallpox and cholera. He opened a medical dispensary and treated daily about 100 patients, most of them Chinese, giving them Bible verses along with their prescriptions. "The Bradleys were evicted from the Wat Kok area, along with the Johnsons (Wells 1958:11)

Again wells describes the problem of culture clash and religious tension:

In 1850 four convert teachers were jailed for being in the employ of missionaries. The year before, eight Roman Catholic priests were banished from the country because they did not comply with the government order to turn their animals over to the Crown, and thus 'make merit' to offset a serious cholera epidemic.....

.... On January 4, 1851, a great fire entirely destroyed the Baptist Mission property, including the dwellings, chapel, printing press, and stock of books. The 1850 second edition of the New Testament was completely destroyed. The origin of the fire is unknown, possibly it was arson (Wells 1958:19)."

After King Mongkut came to the throne in 1851, such antagonism completely disappeared in the capital. However, opposition in the North was still faced. "On September 14, 1869, Noi Sanya and Naan Chai became Christian martyrs at the command of Chao Kawilorot" (Wells 1958:55). After several years of opposition and danger, relief was gained through King Chulalongkorn's 1878 pronouncement of religious toleration.

*b. The emerging Church (1878 – 1945).* The Church had begun during the late part of the first fifty years. Churches had commenced in Bangkok (1849), in Petchburi (1863), and Chiangmai (1868). They were comprised mainly of the missionary families. As converts were made, they were added to the membership.

McGilvary and McFarland had opened Petchburi in 1860. Six years later McGilvary moved to North Thailand to commence a mission to the Lao. For the next forty-five years he itinerated widely, evangelizing and planting churches. The greatest growth occurred in North Thailand. Churches were multiplied throughout the villages. The effect of this movement remains today as 74 per cent (19,734) of the 26,691 member Church of Christ in Thailand (C.C.T. started by the Presbyterians) is in the north.

The emphasis of McGilvary's approach was the planting and multiplying of churches by going out into the villages to preach, teach, and heal. Evangelism was the primary concern, followed by the establishment of congregations for nurture.

The seeds of a second approach to mission had already begun in the pioneer years. The Thai resistance confronted missionaries head on. Since there were great physical and educational needs all around, the missionaries responded with medicines and schools hoping to alleviate suffering and ignorance, and to reduce the Thai resistance. This became a primary approach to missions.

Missionaries introduced the first printing press to Siam (1835), started the first school for girls (1836), performed the first modern surgery (1837), the first successful smallpox inoculation (1838) and vaccination (1840), the first ether anesthetic (1847), established the first permanent hospital (1881), and began the first systematic care of lepers (1892).

From 1845 missionary Jesse Caswell taught English and science to H.R.H. Prince Mongkut, then a Buddhist abbot. Caswell died in 1848 and Prince Mongkut became King Rama V in 1851. That year he invited three women missionaries to teach English to the women of the palace (Wells 1958:10,24). During his reign King Mongkut introduced many Western innovations which led to the modernization of Thailand.

In this climate of introducing change, the second approach to missions gained momentum. Schools and hospitals became a main focus entailing more personnel and finance. Furthermore, many of the potential church leaders and evangelists became employed in these institutions.

This approach was in some ways opposite to McGilvary's. As the Thai came to the institutions, they were presented the Gospel. Initiative to reach out to the whole population and to the families of these students and patients was largely lacking. Although Christian schools and hospitals produced a large blanket of good will, they failed to make an appreciable impact on planting the Church among the non-Christian populations (Smith 1971:4,5). They did help retain many of the children of Christians trained in them.

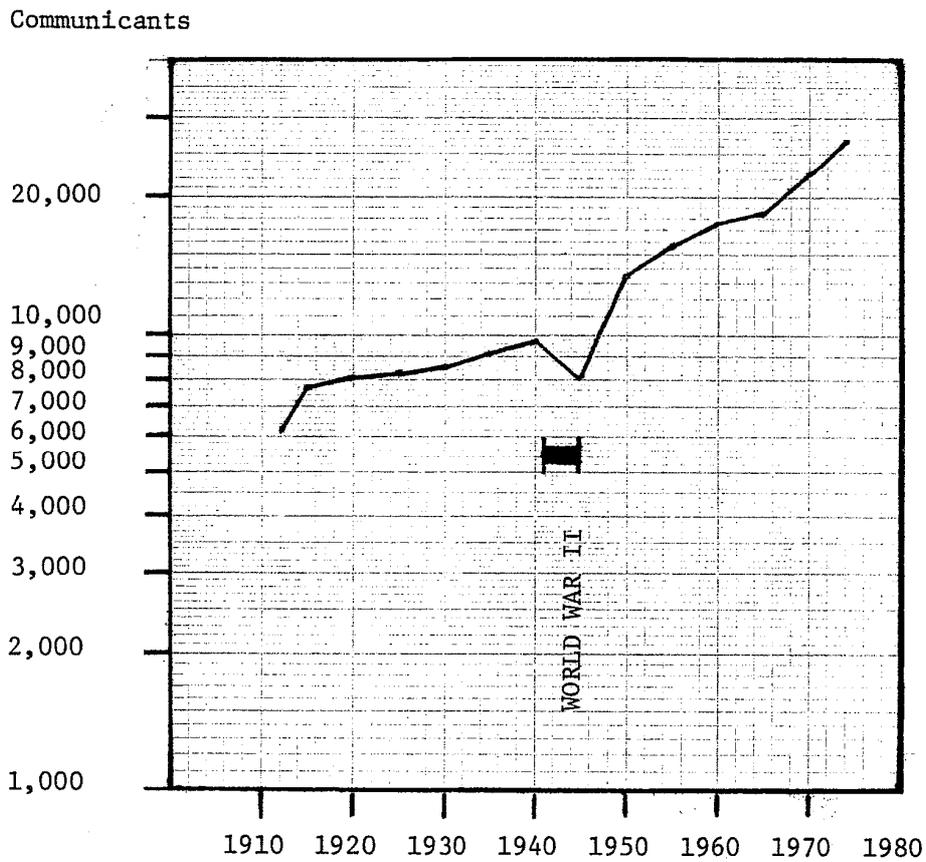
In 1912, the year after McGilvary's death, the Church had grown from a handful to 6,084 members. By 1940, the year prior to the Japanese occupation in World War II, the Church of Christ in Thailand had 9,712 members. During those 28 years the Church had grown 59 per cent with an average annual growth rate (AAGR) of 1.6 per cent p.a. (1912-1927 the AAGR was 2.5 per cent p.a. and dropped between 1927-1940 to 1 per cent p.a.). Since by normal biological growth a church grows about 3 per cent p.a. it must be concluded that the Church made little impact on the surrounding community and failed to bring a good proportion of its youth into membership. (See Figure 5 on page 102).

During these years the Presbyterians organized the structure of the national Church of Christ in Thailand which was constituted in 1934. God's Spirit brought revival during the visit of John Sung (1938-1939). This quickened the Church and converted many who became the leaders of the Church as it faced the persecution of the war 1941-1945. Missionaries were interned, property lost, schools closed, and pastors forced to seek other employment. Many Christians turned back under pressure, but a good number returned after the war (Wells 1958:160-161).

Prior to the war several new missions were added. The American Bible Society commenced their work in 1889. The Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts arrived in 1902, but terminated in 1940, although the Church of England Chaplaincy continued at Christ Church. In 1903 the English Church of Christ Mission started working with Lao Sung and other tribal groups.

In 1918 the Seventh Day Adventist Mission entered. Their work centered around Chinese and emphasized medicinal and educational ministries. In 1929 the Christian and Missionary Alliance started work in North East Thailand. During the first 17 years of difficult work some 75 believers were won. These dissipated during the war.

Figure 5  
Growth Rate of Church of Christ in Thailand



Source: C.C.T. Office Bangkok (Table 1)

The disruption of the war somewhat purged the Church and showed the Thai Christians they could stand with God’s power apart from the missionaries. This was true of the educational institutions as well as the Church.

*c. The influx of new mission (1946 – present).* The Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) under its national leadership quickly regained its poise following the war. The need for evangelizing many unreached areas of Thailand drew new missions to it.

In 1947 the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade arrived to work in the provinces south of the northern Church of Christ in Thailand churches. Over 400 Sgaw Karen have been baptized and dozens of small rural congregations among the Thai and Lao begun.

The Finnish Free Foreign Mission also entered in 1947 to work among other northern and eastern rural areas. They have about 3000 converts.

The Swedish Free and the Norwegian Free Christian Missions started sending missionaries in 1949. Later they amalgamated as the Scandinavian Pentecostal Mission, and worked mainly in the North and in Bangkok.

In 1949 the Southern Baptists started work in Bangkok. Most of their work centered on the Chinese and city churches, though they have a small hospital at Bangkokla. Their membership is approximately 1400. The same year the American Churches of Christ commenced work among tribes in North Thailand who now have small churches among the Meo, Yao, and Khamu.

When after ninety years of ministry in China the China Inland Mission was forced to withdraw, the Presbyterians invited their missionaries to join in the evangelizing of areas of Thailand. In 1951 the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), the new name of the CIM, began work. Within a few years it had the largest missionary force in Thailand. In 1973 the OMF had 230 career missionaries and ten short term workers located in four regions in Thailand. In the North they majored in tribal evangelism among the Meo, Yao, Lisu, Ahka, Shan, and Pwo Karen. Approximately 600 have been won from these tribes.

An average of three fifths of OMF personnel minister in Central Thailand. About half of them work in medical ministries of two hospitals and over a score of leprosy clinics. A survey of the church growth in this area will be given later in this chapter. In the South OMF works with the large Muslim population and the Thai. A hospital at Saiburi and several stations have gathered only a handful of converts. In the North East recent entry among a million mostly unreached Lao people has yielded only a handful of converts so far.

In 1951 the United Christian Missionary Society of Disciples of Christ took over from the English Church of Christ. They work under the CCT.

The American Baptists re-entered and focused their attention on the tribal Sgaw Karen and Lahu, both of whom have shown good response. The Karen Convention now numbers around 3800, the Lahu about 1700.

The New Tribes Mission also entered in 1951. They work among Lawa, So, and Karen tribes in the North and Thai in the West and have about 500 believers half of whom are Lawa.

In 1952 the Christian Brethren commenced mission work mostly among Sea Gypsies and Thai in South Thailand.

The following year the Marburger Mission joined ranks with the CCT to work in the Chiengrai Province of North Thailand.

From 1960 to 1974 a dozen other new missions came to Thailand. Among them were several Pentecostal Churches, some mass media missions, and a number of associates working under the CCT.

All mission agencies working in Thailand can be classified under three groups. First are those affiliated with the CCT. Second are those who are members of the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT) organized in 1970 and recognized by the government. Lastly are those who are independent and not affiliated with either of these two bodies. In the appendix Table 2 is a schedule of all the missions in their respective categories with their foreign personnel as noted in the 1973 Christian Directory of Thailand. The CCT had 131 foreign missionaries including several Asians, and the EFT 18, and the independents 234, totaling 783 foreign missionaries.

### 3. Current Strength of the Church

The Christian community in Thailand as can already be surmised is numerically small despite four and a half centuries of Roman Catholic and one and a half centuries of Protestant missions. The Protestant communicant membership was 42,980 by September of 1973.

At that date I sent questionnaires to 28 missions including eight whose records were amalgamated fully with the CCT. Twenty-two missions were amalgamated fully with the CCT. Twenty-two missions responded plus one report with consolidated data of five Pentecostal missions prepared by a reliable Pentecostal source. One mission failed to reply. Although some reports were incomplete, I had subsidiary data from a 1971 questionnaire to fill the few gaps. I am confident that the schedule found in figure 6 on page 106 gives the most accurate figures available on the Protestant Church throughout Thailand at that time. Two English congregations of Westerners, Christ Church (Anglican) and Evangelical Church (C & MA), as well as small foreign congregations of German, Japanese, Korean and Lutheran were not included, as statistics were not available.

The Protestant Church is only 0.1 per cent of the population, one of the smallest in the world. The Church of Christ in Thailand is the largest denomination with 56 per cent of the total Protestants. It reported 26,691 members at the July 1974 annual meeting.

Between 1940 and 1955 the CCT grew to 15,816 at an average annual growth rate (AAGR) of 3.3 per cent p.a. reflecting the resurgent growth following the war with its defections from Christ (1940-1945). The AAGR of the previous 17 years was a low one per cent p.a. From 1955 to 1970 the AAGR was 2.3 per cent p.a. and in the next three

and a half years rose to 5 per cent p.a. Between 1970 and 1974 the goal of the CCT was to double their membership. The actual growth over the first 3 ½ years was only 19 percent. (See Table 1 of selected CCT Statistics in appendix).

Figure 6  
1973 Protestant Church Membership in Thailand

<u>Church or Mission Name</u>	<u>Communicants</u>
American Churches of Christ (non CCT)	293
Christian Brethren (est.)	100 +
Church of Christ in Thailand	24,226 (1)
Gospel Church of Thailand (Dec. 31 '72)	1,785
Karen Baptist Convention	3,791
Lahu Baptist Association	1,650
New Tribes Mission	449
Overseas Missionary Fellowship	1,425
Philippine Association of Baptists (Dec. 1971)	45
Thailand Southern Baptists	1,380 (2)
Seventh Day Adventist Church of Thailand	1,686
Worldwide Evangelization Crusade	700
Pentecostal Churches*	<u>5,450</u>
<b>TOTAL PROTESTANT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP</b>	<u><b>42,980</b></u>

\* This does not represent a formal united church, but is a composite figure of the baptized memberships of the American Assemblies of God, Finish Free Foreign Mission, Pentecost Assemblies of Canada, Scandanavian Pentecostal Mission, United Pentecostals, and independents.

Note: Statistics do not include minority foreign congregations except (1) International Church (375), and (2) Calvary Baptist Church (161).

Sources: Questionnaire and correspondence returned by missions in October, 1973, or Church/Mission statistics at September 30, 1973, except where indicated.

Two aspects behind this growth were the impetus of revival and the renewed emphasis on evangelism. The influence of the Thailand Congress on Evangelism (Jan. 1970) followed by Church Growth Seminars, encouraged this growth throughout most of the CCT districts.

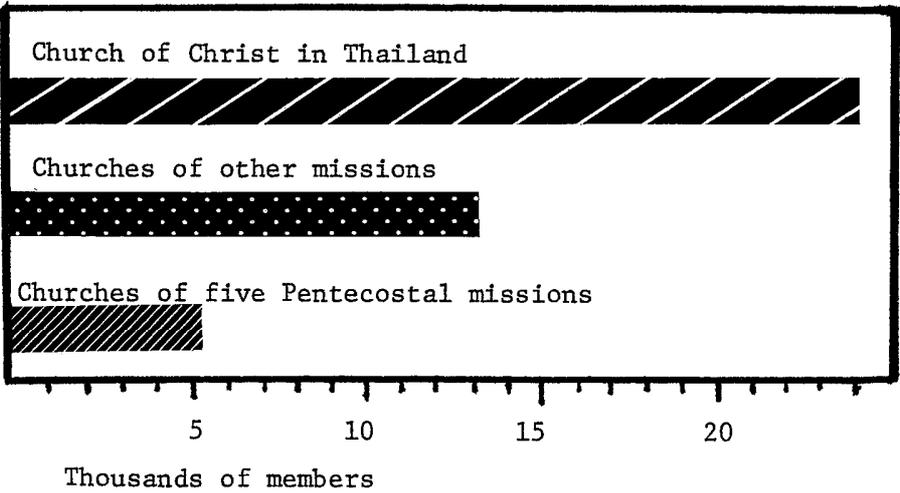
During these years the districts of Nakorn Sri Thamarat and Bangkok grew fastest with AAGR of 11 per cent. Bangkok's growth is inflated by the Udon churches which transferred into the CCT. The Chiangmai district responded with an AAGR of 10 per cent. The emphasis of prayer cell evangelism especially from McCormick Hospital was one of the key factors in this growth. Next was the Chiengrai province where the revival began in 1970. It grew at an AAGR of 8 per cent. See Table 2 in Appendix.

Many of the younger missions including most Pentecostal agencies emphasize direct evangelism and church planting and have little emphasis on institutional ministries of hospitals and schools. A few like OMF divide their energies between the two. Most other missions are growing faster than the CCT. Protestants are growing faster than the national growth rate and the Roman Catholics. The Church is expanding at the points where direct evangelism is used, and where church multiplication is the goal. In the appendix Table 5 shows comparative memberships and AAGR of churches in Thailand for the decade 1960 – 1970 and the three years 1970 – 1973.

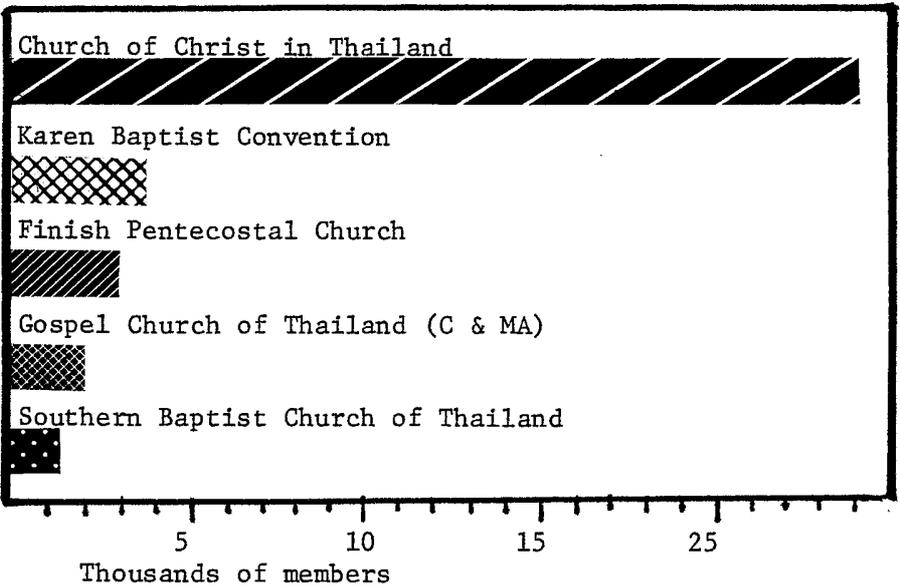
From this data of the 1973 questionnaire, I prepared a profile for the International Congress on World Evangelization. Anyone interested in the major Christian programs, activities, and emphasis of Thailand missions should refer to that pamphlet (ICOWE 1974:3-6)

With this birds-eye view of the churches, we now focus on the growth in the Central Thailand field of the OMF before studying Uthaithani, where the most dynamic growth has occurred.

Figure 7  
Comparison of Protestant Church Groups in Thailand  
30 September, 1973



MEMBERSHIP OF SOME PROTESTANT CHURCHES  
IN THAILAND



Source: Figure 6 (page 106)

## **B. THE OMF CHURCH IN CENTRAL THAILAND**

### **1. The Situation**

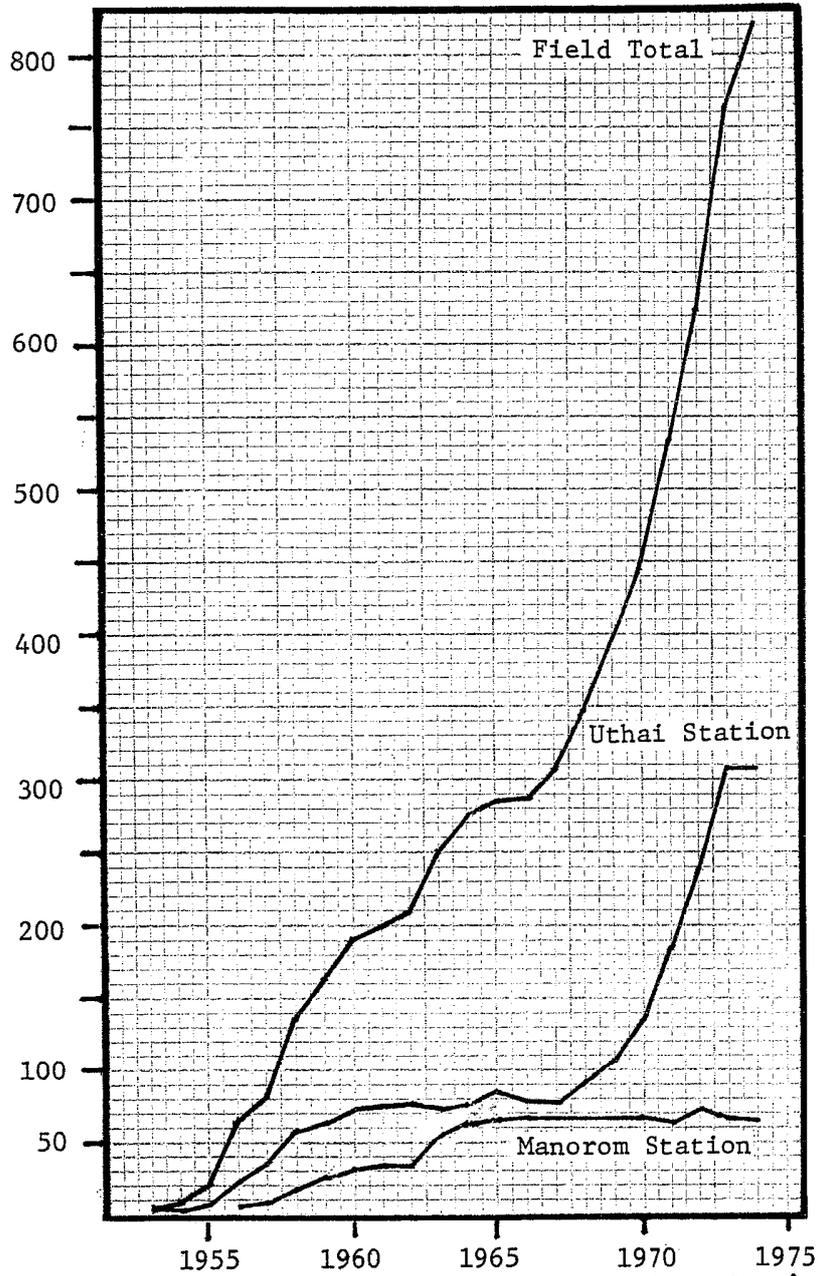
The area under discussion lies north of Bangkok in the central region covering the eight provinces of Saraburi, Lopburi, Singburi, Angthong, Chainat, Uthaitani, Nakorn Sawan, and Pichit. The combined population is three million. (See appendix Table 10 for provincial populations). Farming is the occupation of the majority. Provincial towns and district centers form the nerve centers of selling and commerce. Central Thai (Siamese) language is spoken, though small enclaves of various Lao dialects in the villages and Chinese in the markets are also found largely as bilingual functions with Thai. Fourteen small villages of Pwo Karen are located in western Uthai.

Two decades ago two small Chinese congregations under the Church of Christ in Thailand, and a few scattered Chinese Christians, formed the only Protestant witness in these central Thailand provinces. In 1953 the Overseas Missionary Fellowship entered this virgin territory at the request of the Church of Christ in Thailand and the Presbyterians of U.S.A. Today the Protestant Church in these eight provinces of three million people is only 820 or about 0.03 per cent of the population. This includes 774 members of seventy-three small OMF congregations, the two CCT Chinese Churches, and one Pentecostal congregation that broke away from OMF. The OMF student church of forty-seven members planted in Bangkok in the last three years is not included as few, if any, of its members relate to the provinces under consideration.

### **2. Church Growth Patterns**

The net growth of the OMF churches is seen in figure 8 on page 110. Considering the small numbers, a steady growth has been maintained with an accelerated growth since 1967. During the last decade the Church has tripled, with an average annual growth rate of eleven per cent, which is equivalent to the annual rate of growth of the previous five years 1959 – 1964 (six years after the work commenced).

Figure 8  
Baptized Membership OMF Central Thailand



Source: OMF Central Thailand Statistics - Superintendent's Office (Table 4)

An analysis of church data indicates that the large majority of this growth has been among the Thai people. Only a minute percentage, possibly two per cent, are Chinese. A slightly larger four per cent are Lao. However, even these minorities would claim Thai citizenship. In fact, the inter-marriage and integration of Thai-Lao-Chinese makes it very difficult to obtain absolute accuracy of the ethnic breakdown. I know of a number who avowedly claim to be pure Thai by blood relationship, but whose background is more Lao-Thai mixture, or Chinese-Thai.

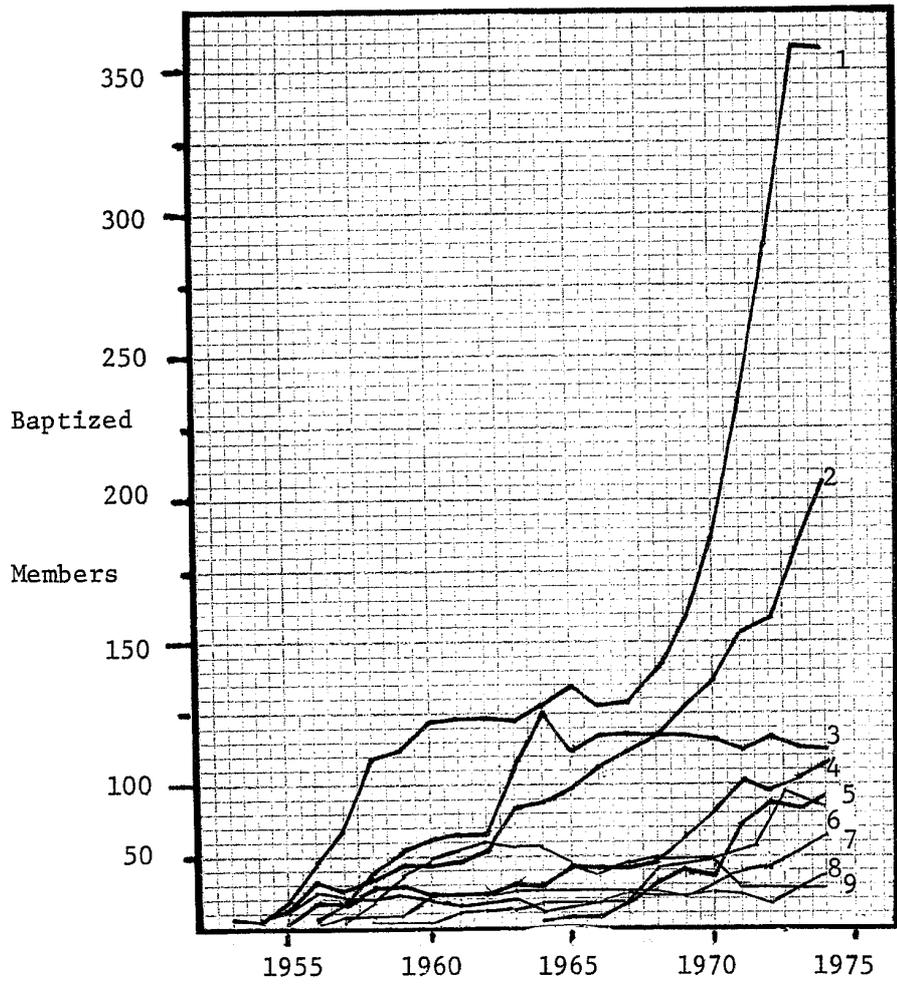
Almost all this growth has been among the farming rural community. There are a few businessmen and shopkeepers among them. Most of the Chinese are in this latter category. There are very few who are middle income people; the vast majority are in the lower economic bracket.

*a. Two patterns.* Two main strains of growth characterize the Church. First, is the Leprosy church growth which is a significant movement. Most growth in the earlier years was amongst lepers and their families. In most areas, except Uthai and Chainat, even this growth has been slow (see figure 9 for comparative stations). This developed into the sala churches, whose character has gradually changed over the years, becoming more mixed congregations of leprosy and “well” believers (see page 127f).

The second stream was the well (designation of Christians without leprosy) churches. In most of the provincial towns these have had a struggling existence. The churches connected to the two hospitals at Manorom and Nongbua are mostly well congregations. Their numerical growth has been related largely to the hospital employees. Very few of the community not connected to the staff have joined. On figure 8 (Page 110) the graph of the Manorom Church indicates stagnation. The Uthai churches growth is also graphed. The upsurge from 1967 is due in large measure to a breakthrough in well churches in village areas, particularly in new development frontier areas. See figure 10 (page 118) for comparison of growth of sala and well churches in Uthai where both streams of growth are evident.

All told, about forty-eight per cent of the believers in Central Thailand are well, the balance being leprosy Christians. The surge of the recent movement of well congregations in Thai has raised this percentage. The present proportion of Christians to population of 199,000 in Uthai province is now 0.16 per cent which is higher than the Protestant average throughout the nation.

Figure 9  
Net Growth Baptized Memberships by Stations  
OMF Central Thailand



- |            |              |              |
|------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Uthai   | 4. Lopburi   | 7. Singburi  |
| 2. Chainat | 5. Nongbua   | 8. Saraburi  |
| 3. Manorom | 6. Paknampho | 9. Chumsaeng |

Source: OMF Central Thailand Statistics - Superintendent's Office (Table 4)

b. *Dynamics of growth.* Based on statistics for the field, the typical average growth of the churches in Central Thailand could be described as follows. Of one hundred professions of faith recorded in an area, sixty-six would be baptized into the church. Another ten would transfer churches within the provincial boundaries and three from outside. Of this total of seventy-six, four deaths and five reversions would occur within a few years. Furthermore, twenty-two would transfer out of the church in the same period, fifteen of whom would leave the province. A total of forty-five from the original one hundred professions of conversion would remain locally in the church. (Table 6 and 7) The dynamics of Uthai growth are graphed in figure 11 on page 119.

The Manorom Church, connected to the large hospital, has a larger transfer mobility and a higher reversion (10%). The student church in Bangkok is built on forty per cent transfers in. It has the highest reversion rate (13%), but has only eighteen per cent transfers out. To sum up, there is an average loss of thirty-four per cent of the professions of faith, and a thirty-two percent loss on the original baptized members from all causes.

### 3. Analysis of Growth and Stagnation

Much is hidden behind a consolidated growth graph, but the field total graph on figure 8 indicates a steady growth rate increasing in the last seven years. However, figure 9 is more explicit in showing the growth of individual stations.

a. *Summary of growth of stations.* As stated above, Uthai is the strength of the Church's growth. It accounts for thirty-seven per cent of all the members. There was a leveling off of the sala churches 1960 – 1966 mostly due to loss through transfer, the key local leaders being in resident Bible schools in North East Thailand, and intense spiritual conflict from both external and internal forces. This resulted in the backsliding of quite a few. The leveling off of Uthai in 1974 was due to a larger number of reversions (13), of transfers out (21), and slowness in baptizing new believers (25). A total of 129 adherents awaited baptism at the end of the reporting year. Had the majority of these been baptized before that date, the same rate of growth characteristic of the last three years would have occurred.

Chainat's healthy growth of sala congregations also steadily support the growth of the churches, representing nineteen per cent of the total.

Two new churches in Ladyaw and Bangkok have shown good growth in the first few years.

After years of stagnation, renewed vigor has come to Lopburi through the sala congregations, and in Singburi and Paknampho through well congregations in the town and villages.

Several stations became stagnant after a promising growth (1957 – 1962). Chumsaeng/Pichit area has continued to cascade down to a plateau. Angthong has also had painfully slow growth, while Saraburi has begun to grow slightly in the past few years, after years of leveling. The missionary forces in these difficult stations have been light during the last five years, though reinforcements have been added in 1974.

Two stations are tied closely to hospitals with large concentrations of medical missionaries. The Manorom Hospital was opened in 1956, and its facilities have been expanded several times. Early growth from hospital employees occurred through 1964. A plateau then followed a sharp drop in 1964, the result of eighteen transferring out. The smaller hospital at Nongbua has also seen encouraging growth, but has leveled off since 1972. In the last two years outreach into the surrounding areas has been emphasized, resulting in the possibility of a few small village congregations around these hospitals. The Manorom statistics for 1974 show thirty-five adherents who need incorporation into the Church.

b. *Future strategies for growth.*

1. Revival is needed in many congregations, especially those established ten years ago or more.
2. Research should be undertaken in the areas of culture, communication, existing church growth, needed functional substitutes, and strategies to plant churches in difficult communities.
3. Goals should be set to plant and extend three kinds of churches: a. sala b. village c. town
4. The problem of mobility must be resolved, possibly by missionaries spending more time following up, teaching, and establishing the believers until new congregations are set in their new locality.
5. The 34% gap loss between professions and baptisms must be reduced. A speedier integration of these new believers into the Church must be promoted.
6. Family evangelism must be a primary approach and the believers taught to follow up lines of their family and friends to the limits, keeping the contacts alive and open.
7. Multiplication of churches must be taught, stressed, and practiced.
8. Local working group seminars in the grass roots churches on church growth and in family evangelism will be conducted and evaluated.
9. Night time evangelism and nurture may change the routine pattern of the “day time” missionary, for then the people are accessible.

10. Integrated strategies for church planting, including locating the responsive, evangelizing the receptive families, establishing the church, nurturing the believers, and training the pastors, etc. are to be followed, tested, evaluated and recycled.

11. All virgin and unreached areas should be considered as prime targets for evangelism, and surveys taken.

12. The total missionary and national constituency should be mobilized and co-ordinated to work as one efficient unit using all individual gifts to the best advantage of planting the Church, without personal or departmental competition.

13. The present growing points of church growth must take priority for expansion out to the limits.

14. Mobile task forces ready for movement to receptive areas for aggressive evangelism, strategic nurture or other church planting elements should be organized and actively engaged according to need.

15. Strategies to make children and youth ministry issue from the church are needed, as well as means to incorporate the youth into the church function.

16. Priority for efficient training of local pastors requires study, experimentation and upgrading.

17. Above all, care must be exercised not to smother the church so that it becomes dependent on the missionary or the national pastor, but rather to promote its own initiatives and spiritual gifts in reproducing churches.

Having surveyed the Church across Thailand, and observed in particular the struggling beginnings of churches throughout the OMF area of Central Thailand, we now direct attention to the developments of the Body of Christ in the Uthaitхани Province.

### **C. INDEPTH STUDY OF CHURCH GROWTH IN UTHAITHANI**

In many areas of Thailand much evangelism has not left Christian congregations. Correct understanding of the way in which the system of evangelization practiced at Thai did break through to significant church planting required, so it seemed to me, (1) a blow by blow account of what we missionaries and national did, and (2) a summary of the principles and procedures involved. This chapter then tells the story, so that the reader can share in the groping, sense the leading of the Holy Spirit, observe the mistakes and the failures, and see the principles developing. Any reader who wishes, however, to come to grips immediately with the system of evangelization employed should skip this chapter and go on to the next at once.

#### **1. Preliminary Presuppositions**

Churches are produced through the action of the Holy Spirit. The supernatural work of conversion and of incorporation into the spiritual Body of Christ is His. In His

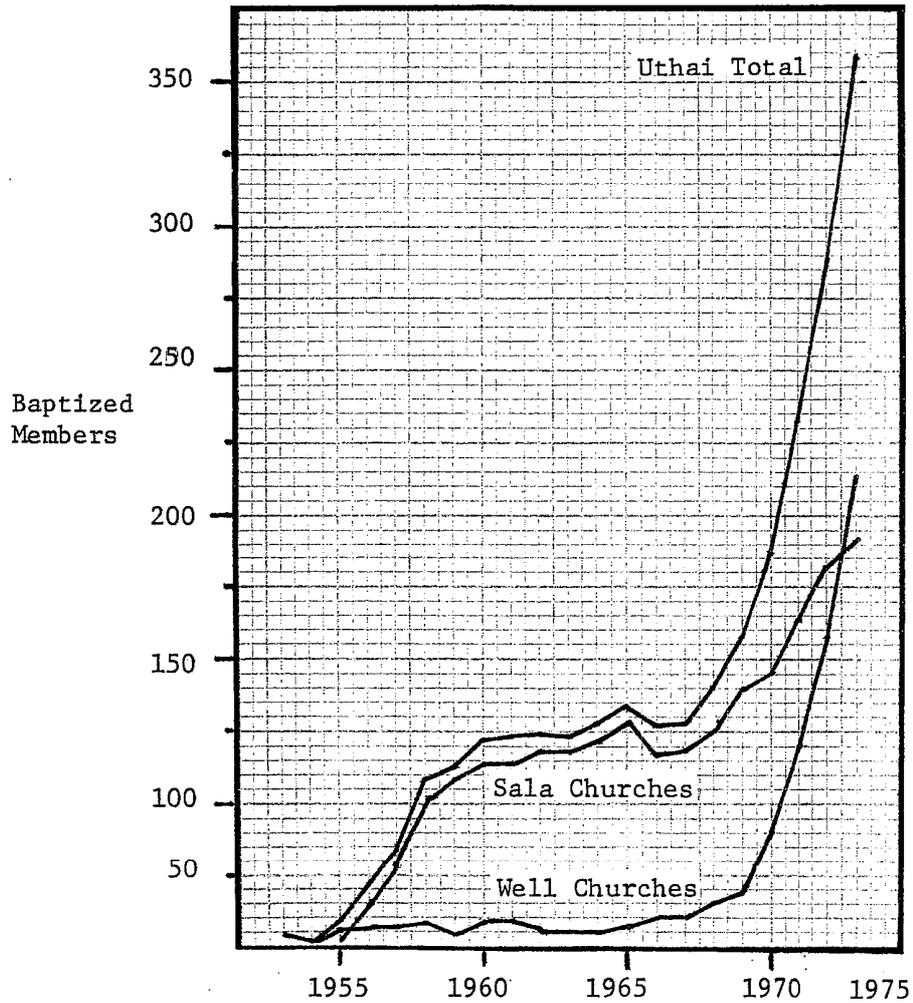
wisdom and by His power He prepares cultures and societies producing conditions conducive to the growth of His Church. He guides His servants who depend on Him in prayerful urgency and serve Him with evangelistic zeal. Thus, any meaningful study of the anatomy of Church growth recognizes what the Holy Spirit has done, how He has worked, and what methods and human vehicles He has chosen to use in planting His Church under those particular conditions in that specific culture. To look lightly on the divine process and overlook the means by which He works is as sacrilegious as to declare it is simply the work of men's hands alone. His redeemed servants are the agents He sends forth as His ambassadors. They are "labourers together with God," and their work will be evaluated accordingly (I Cor. 3). The following study is made in the light and with the attitude of this assumption. Hence, studying factors relating to the Church and ways the Holy Spirit is bringing it about, is a vital part of responsible stewardship.

Before proceeding, a clarification of the use of Uthaithani and Uthai is in order. In Thailand the name of the province and its administrative capital are the same. But this thesis when speaking of the capital town will use Uthaithani; when speaking of the province, Uthai. Since the names of districts and their administrative centers are also the same, the name of the local area will generally denote the district. On occasions when the district center is referred to in a particular sense, it will be distinguished by using "town" after it. e.g. Barnrai means district, Barnrai town its administrative center.

The graph of the net growth of baptized membership from the inception to date shows the various phases of the Church's emergence in Uthai. (see figure 10 on page 118). The graph of gains and losses indicate the dynamics of growth. (Figure 11 on page 119).

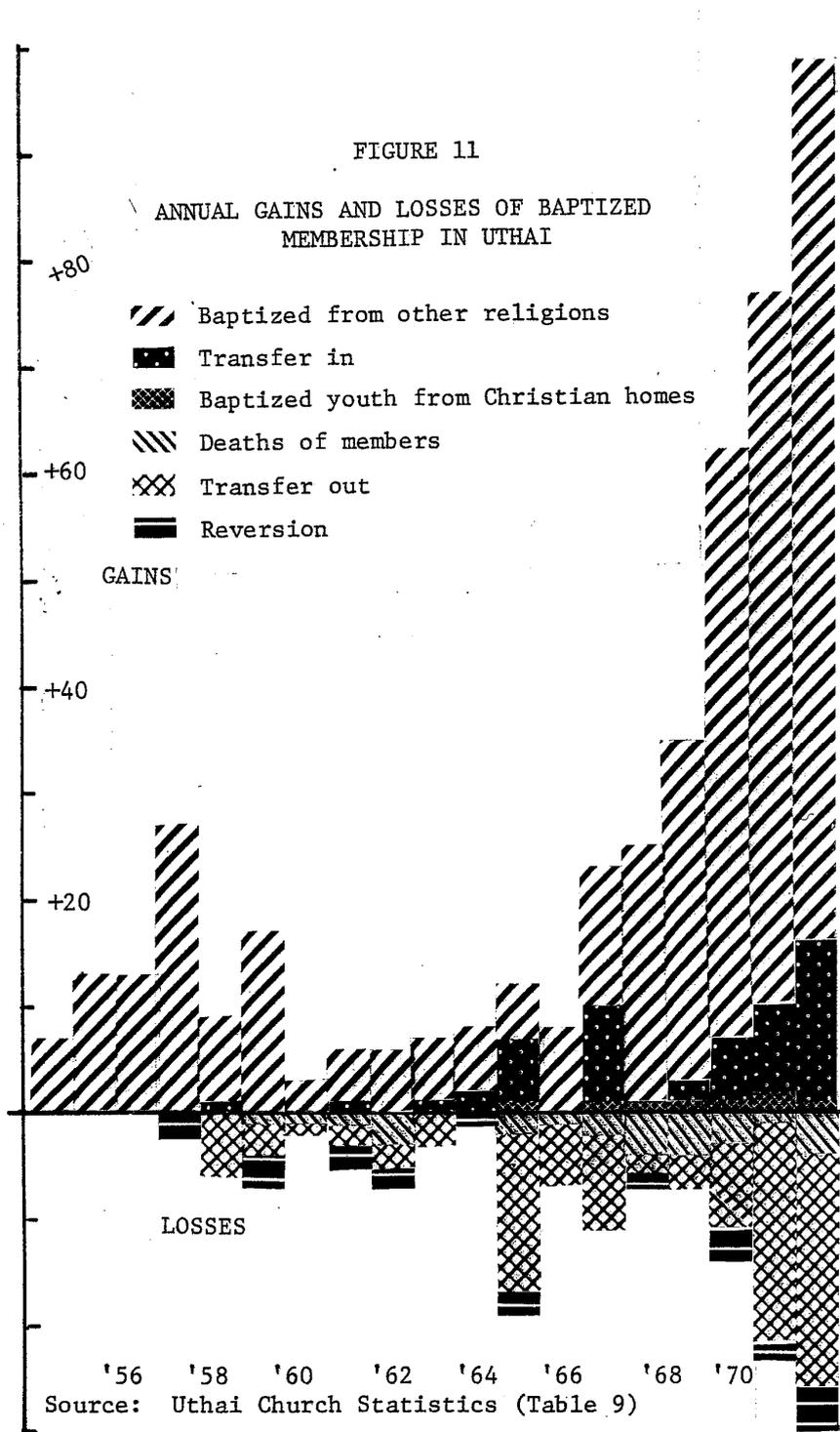
Four aspects of this graph comprise a sketch of the growth of the churches in Uthai. First is the period of beginning 1953-1955. Then came an apparent movement from 1955 to 1960, tapering off in the latter two years. In third place there followed a falling off period with decelerated growth between 1960 and 1968. Finally there is a strong growth movement from 1967 to 1974. These will be considered in turn.

Figure 10  
Net Growth Baptized Membership – Uthai Station



Source: Uthai Station Annual Statistics  
(Tables 4 & 8)

Figure 11  
Annual Gains and Losses of Baptized Membership in Uthai



## 2. The Beginnings of Church Planting

On November 20, 1953, former China missionaries, Miss Grace Harris and Miss Eileen Cann (later Mrs. Scott), opened Uthai station. Concerning strategy for going to Uthai Mrs. Scott wrote.

The strategy at that time was to occupy each of the 13 provincial capitals allotted to O.M.F. in Central Thailand by comity arrangement. I don't remember that there was any other particular leading. It was the fourth O.M.F. center to be opened (Private letter 1974).

a. *Setting.* Uthai is about 150 miles due north of Bangkok. Situated west of the great Chao Phraya River it extended across the lowland plains into the wooded mountains towards Burma. No bridges crossed the river, and the track to reach the main stream demanded labourious travel. Boats, via a small tributary, provided the most efficient access to Uthaithani.

At that time there were virtually no roads except for a few within the capital. Rutted buffalo cart trails criss-crossed the rural districts. In October 1954, Miss Harris wrote that the five district towns were "all difficult to get to and none can be visited in the day. You have to stay overnight." The closest of these was only about 10 kilometers (6 miles) away, the furthest 60 kilometers (38 miles), but the travel conditions were atrocious. Bicycles were the best mode of transport. Skill at riding on top of the narrow ridges dividing rice paddies was a prerequisite for missionaries.

It was difficult to rent a suitable house. After much searching a small house was found in the compound of a rice mill on the bank of the river. The house on stilts consisted of one long bedroom and a double level guest room-dining room, with a small kitchen at one end. There was no bathroom. The front entrance was a trap door. The house was in a central location and soon crowds of people visited these foreign women out of curiosity and interest. Miss Harris reported that during "the first few weeks the whole town was out to see us, - literally hundreds came every day, but gradually numbers have decreased and now on a normal day we have about 70 to 80" (Report Oct. 1954).

b. *The Church.* The speediest establishment of a church was a primary goal of these dedicated women. Miss Harris wrote:

Soon after coming to Uthai we found a Christian woman and her old mother and were able to have a little service in their home every Sunday morning, but after some months they left to return to Chiangmai. A few weeks later we found a Chinese Christian woman who had been converted while on a visit to China a few years ago. She comes to us each Sunday evening and we have a time of praise and fellowship together. We praise the Lord for many opportunities for witness in Uthai and for what He has been doing in the hearts of one and another. A number of school boys have made professions

of faith, and we believe that the Lord has begun a real work in the hearts of some of them, but we long to see a real growth in grace and a desire to meet together for fellowship and study of the Word. We believe that some of the younger children too who come to see us constantly have a real love for the Lord and have put their trust in Him as their Saviour, but as far as we know there are no adults yet who have come right out for Christ. P.S. After the above was written a language teacher, after reading John's Gospel, has professed to believe (Report Oct. 1954).

Here were missionaries dedicated to the goal of establishing His Church.

A small Roman Catholic Church met in a floating chapel near the mouth of the tributary, about five miles downstream from the provincial capital.

The members were mainly descendents of Vietnamese families who had migrated to Thailand years before. A visiting priest from the adjacent province crossed the river occasionally to minister to them. A few of these families lived in the market of Uthaitani. One of them had provided the Roman Catholic Church with a priest and two nuns from their children. Probably not more than thirty Catholic families were associated with this floating chapel in which attendance was small. Generally they did not seem concerned to propagate their faith. In 1968 they built a solid structure beside the road.

c. *Methods of evangelism.* In the early days of missions in Uthai, OMF missionaries exhibited an urgency to evangelize. Being forced out of China gave them a "life or death" commitment to proclaim Christ to all at once. They thought they might not be in Thailand long. Four practices marked their missionary endeavors:

First, they lived in close contact with the people.

We keep open house all day, except for a break in the middle of the day, and encourage the people to come in and out freely.... A larger proportion of our visitors are children from all over the town, but we also have a good number of high school boys and girls, country people, our neighbours.... (Harris 1954 Report).

Second, they seized opportunities by deliberately reaching out to where the people were.

The first Sunday in Uthai we had an open air meeting under a nearby tree and this has continued regularly ever since. About 60 or more children attend and a number of adults, some of whom are the parents of the children who live nearby. Many of the children are regulars and have hardly missed since we started. A little later on, an open air was started in another part of the town on Friday afternoons, and there are 100 or more who come to this, usually about 2/3rds children and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> adults. A small meeting is held weekly in a courtyard where we treat two leper patients. Then more recently another meeting has been started right at the other end of town, and we contact a different crowd here... (Harris 1954 Report).

Besides open air meetings, house visitation was a method adopted for systematically evangelizing Uthaitani for Christ. Furthermore, since hundreds of families lived in floating house boats along the river, boat excursions were made to distribute literature house to house. The fairs connected with Buddhist temple celebrations both in and out of the capital were also focal points of witness through tracts, Scriptures, and preaching.

Third, they conducted English classes. These seemed largely unsuccessful in terms of dynamic expansion of the Church.

When we first went to Uthai everybody wanted to learn English, so we started English bible classes for adults, boy and girls. They came for a while but gradually dropped off.... (Harris 1954 Report).

Classes in schools and with professionals (whether with or without Gospel content) produced almost no new members for the Church. They had value, however, in more contact with students.

Fourth, recognizing that the majority of their visitors were youngsters, that open air meetings drew largely the young, and that the youth filled the English classes, children's meetings became an early and prime focus of the work.

We chat, sing, tell Bible stories, use Gospel recordings. We also have books, magazines, scrap books, jigsaws, and crayons for the children to play with, and Scripture verses up on the walls for them to memorize, for which they can win prizes. For months a group of boys, anything between 10 to 50 of them, have come every morning for about 40 minutes before school for singing and a Bible story and some of them have been keen on learning the memory verses and have learnt as many as 30 (Harris 1954 Report).

This emphasis continued. The 1956 station log is mostly a record of activities concerning the children's classes for doctrine and English. It was hoped to influence homes by getting Christian literature into them via the children.

Despite the children's interest, the problems of this approach were soon apparent. Opposition from adult parents and elders arose.

Many are willing to listen to the Gospel and show a casual interest, but when this interest deepens and it seems that they are about to take the step and accept Christ as their Saviour, there is strong opposition from parents and teachers and others, and many count the cost and turn back (Harris 1954 Report).

Children who truly believe do not come to church at all regularly... the young believers among students and children are afraid to pray with others (Beugler 1956 Report).

Whether, in the minds of the missionaries, the primary audience in the open air was the children or the adults is difficult to establish, but that the social structure of authority largely frustrated the anticipation of the Lord's servants was soon clear.

Although some of the early believers were high schoolers, a further problem facing this strategy soon arose. These students had to go to Bangkok or elsewhere in order to further their education. Thus, they were not consistently resident in Uthai. Nevertheless, four of the first seven to be baptized in Uthai were students. Contact was kept as they returned to Uthai during vacations, but by 1959 all four baptized students had permanently left the province. With the work emphasis on youth, more professions of faith were recorded among them, but because of the above problems nearly all left the province within a few years. In pondering this dilemma, Miss Bennett reported with thoughtful insight that

Churches, however, are usually centered around a settled older population, not moving students, and it is our longing that more adults in the market or local people should be given to the Uthai Church (Bennett 1957 Annual Report).

A final observation indicates that this was in fact to be the trend that the Holy Spirit was to encourage in a surprising development discussed next. In His wisdom He had directed the missionaries' attention to the need of treating leprosy patients in Uthai. Their concern was spiritual as well as physical. The 1954 annual report stated that "A small meeting is held weekly in a courtyard where we treat two leper patients." These two Chinese brothers had first been noticed standing on the fringe of the children's meeting held there. They believed after several months, and were baptized together with the four Chinese students noted above and a young woman who taught Thai language to the missionaries. This woman was the only Thai baptized member of the Uthai Church in 1955. The other 7 were from Chinese families. Initially two separate churches met – one for the patients and the other for the unafflicted members. No doubt the hope of the missionaries was in these virile young students, but in God's wisdom the insignificant "leprosy outreach" became the vehicle by which the Church as to expand and multiply across Uthai.

The pioneer women not only evangelized, but nurtured the new believers. Their zeal in witness and spiritual nurture showed how seriously they took the Lord's mandate to make disciples of all humanity. More than 20 years later Miss Harris is still following up those initial student believers by letters, prayer, and where possible personal visits. Her example is worth of being emulated.

### 3. The Advance of the "Sala" Churches

a. *Leprosy treatment begins.* Leprosy is a contagious disease. The means and mode of transmission has not yet been absolutely determined. It is not, however, inherited genetically from parents. The germs causing it are similar to tuberculosis, but the disease

is much more difficult to contract. Doctors believe that only after repeated and long exposure does one become diseased.

There are basically two main types of leprosy – tuberculoid and lepromatous. It attacks the nervous system and finally anaesthetizes the infected area. This allows easy damage and infection to tissues and bones, resulting eventually in the well known deformities. Modern medicines virtually cure and certainly arrest leprosy. B663 is a “wonder drug”. Patients sometimes have reactions to these drugs, so regular control of treatment is essential. The sooner cases are detected and treated, the less likely will be residual defects. Those in close contact with patients, for example small children, can take prophylactics for the disease.

As God prepared the way, and made patients willing to seek treatment, this door to the Gospel was opened. The first to come for treatment were the best agents for convincing their friends with the disease to come for diagnosis and treatment. The new Christians were especially active.

It was no simple matter to get leprosy patients to begin attending clinics openly. In fact, they were extremely reluctant to do so. First, any who suspected they had “the dread disease” endeavoured to hide it, despite the fact that they were spreading it. Secondly, they were unsure that these foreign nurses could help in any way. After all, they were women, whereas most of their indigenous “doctors” were of the male sex. If their own practitioners using burning techniques, special potions, ancient medicines, magical rites or spirit chants failed to cure them, could these foreigners do better? Furthermore, they reasoned, who wants to expose his condition by going to a public clinic in an open-sided sala for all to see and know?

The small beginning through two brothers with leprosy who sold charcoal in town gradually grew, and more and more patients commenced treatment.

During 1956 a leprosy clinic was set up in Uthaithani to cater for the increased numbers. Once suspicion and fear were allayed, more and more came. Miss Ruth Adams reported that by 1958

...there have been over 1,000 people come for medicine from many out of the way places and have taken back tracts. These 1,000 represent families, so the numbers can be multiplied (1958 Annual Report).

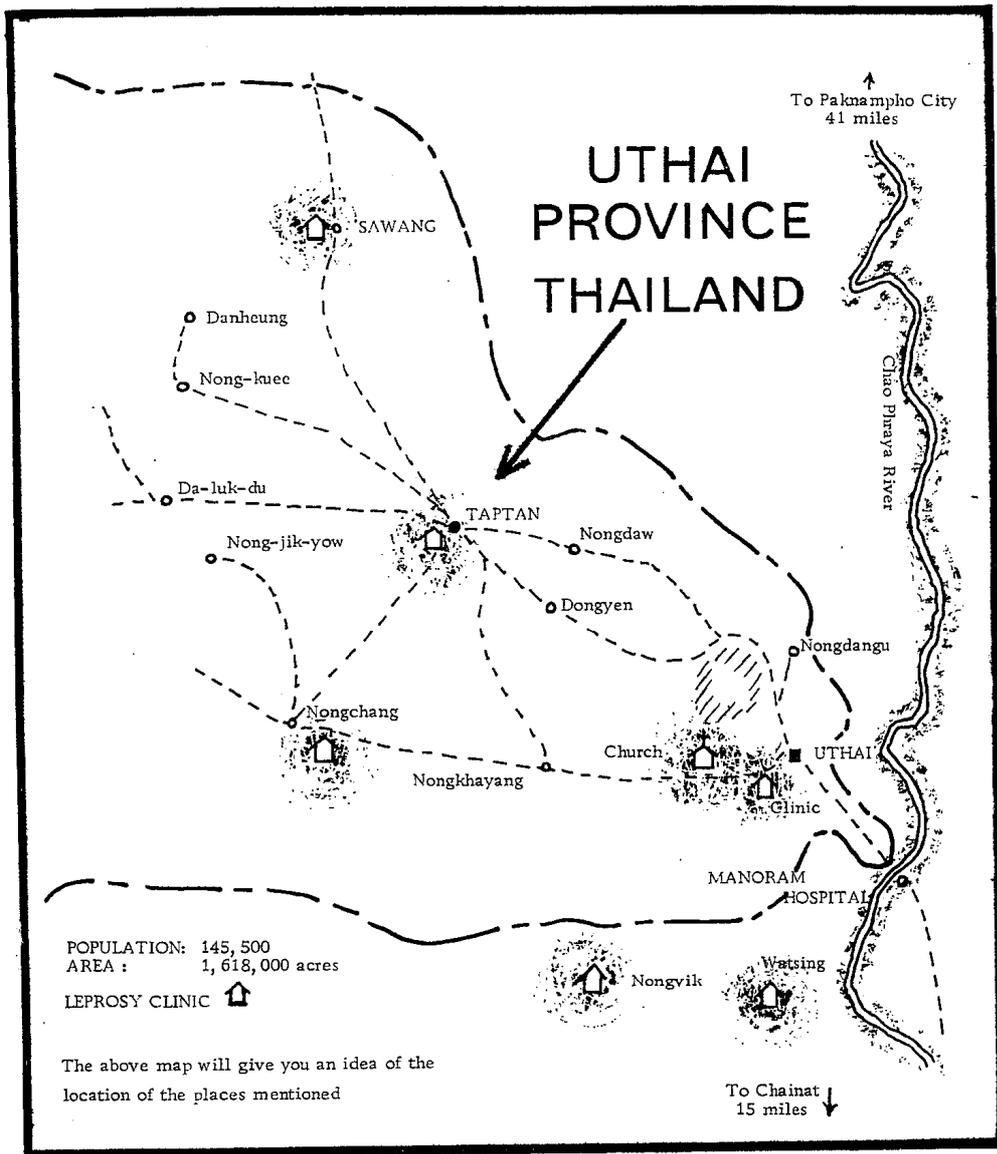
About the same time another clinic was opened in Nongjik, south of Uthaithani. In 1957 one at Sawang in the north of the province was commenced. In the years to come others were to follow in Watsing, Taptan, Nonchang, Talukdu, and elsewhere (see map on page 128). These clinics were run on scheduled days usually once every four weeks. Usually the two missionary nurses in Uthaithani traveled out to them. Many house calls were also made.

b. “*Salas*” built. Because of the nature of the disease “sala’s” were built. The term *sala* refers to a public rest house or shelter. Because of the tropical heat, these simple

shade structures are often built along public thoroughfares, especially beside well-traveled trails where shade may be scarce between villages. In many cases individuals build them, providing a public service and accumulating merit by their good deeds. Sometimes an urn of water is placed there for thirsty travelers. “Sala” is also used for the public meeting hall in Buddhist temples, where the common people gather to hear the priests chant their Buddhist sermons or seek counsel from the “enlightened.” Hence, sala has a spiritual connotation. Temple salas are used for public gatherings called by the village headman or officials. The term has carried over to the administrative center of the province which is called the *sala-klang* or “central town hall.” Sala is also used in various word combinations such as “alms house” and the “religious education house.”

The clinic salas, in keeping with the most common pattern, were (and still are) simply open-sided structures of a roof consisting of galvanized iron or thatch, built on top of six or eight solid posts, with a few rough seating benches around the sides. However, the concept of sala has taken on significant meanings for the Christians. The leprosy believers are known as “sala Christians”. Their initial church buildings are often called salas – rest houses for refreshment from God. Indeed in the light of the spiritual, as well as the physical rest God was to provide in these clinic salas, it is a most fitting term.

Figure 12  
Map of Eastern Uthai and Sala Churches Location



Source: East Asia Millions - (Australian Edition)  
March 1966

The sala is the place of Christian education, as well as that for treatment.

c. *The Church grows.* Through the ministry in these clinic salas the Church grew from 8 to 72 between 1955 – 1960. God was preparing a people of receptivity, and He gave His servants insight to recognize it.

While the church comprised of six students and believers free of leprosy remained static, and even floundered when the students were away in Bangkok, the sala churches flourished and expanded. Compare the graph of net growth of believers between the two churches for this period, as seen in figure 10. The sala churches increased from 2 to 64 in five years. Miss Beugler sums up the initial movement:

The Sala service is the brightest spot in my Thai missionary life. There is real fellowship and growth evident. Bible reading, prayer, and witness are a vital part of the Christians' lives, and the group has grown with whole families coming, and new leprosy patients, many of them friends of the earlier members. In August of this year eleven more of the patients were baptized in a quiet stream outside Uthai (1956 Annual Report).

The effects of the transformed lives in this family-people movement was evident in witness, concern, and motivation.

The Wednesday Sala Clinic has given the Christians opportunities for witness and service. A few of the illiterate women are already in the second Laubach primer and others are using the Heart of John's Gospel course. The family of beggars have found a new occupation, tending cattle. One earnest man who finds walking difficult likes to visit in the homes of patients to help them understand the Bible better. Three are able to lead the service and one is beginning to explain a passage. Attendance on Sunday is a 'must' in the eyes of the members of this group, and they tell ahead if they must be away. There is concern among them when one is weakening, but love rather than harsh criticism prevails. When a few weeks ago the matter of giving to the Lord was brought up by a Thai visitor, thirty baht was given that day and since then fifteen or more has been the amount given. These people are really poor. They like to sit around a table rather than in rows as the clinic benches stand. These developments have come naturally from their hearts' devotion to the Lord who loves them (1956 Report).

Recognizing the open door of potential responsiveness in Uthai, Miss Beugler plead in the same report for more missionaries to increase the small numbers of believers.

Wherever we have been there has been no opposition evident, although there may be hindrances for those who wish to believe. Students, teachers, and officials are open to a degree only and drop away after an initial period of real interest. However, the message is heard gladly. We are welcome in homes, and street meetings are often crowded... Since there is a dearth of Christians, I wish that a good staff of missionaries and Thai Christians could

concentrate on Uthai where there is such an open door. Later there should be believers to carry on. Follow-up work from hospital contacts and leprosy patients is most necessary and no one has time or strength for this. Please plan largely for Uthai, and God will work wonders, I feel (1956 Annual Report).

d. *Congregations multiply.* Within four years the sala church's strength was to quadruple. Thus the sala clinic became the springboard for evangelism and church multiplication. At first all the patients traveled into the Uthaithani Clinic. As the Gospel took root in hearts, the patients carried its life changing effects back into various districts churches were planted.

Often worship services preceded the clinic. In Sept. 1957 following his conversion at the Uthai Clinic, a Nong Chang patient asked for the missionaries to conduct a weekly meeting in his home. He had led his wife to Christ and declared, "I have taught the people around all I know: some are believing, some are interested. Won't you come and help us?" (1957 Annual Report). This was a pattern often to be repeated.

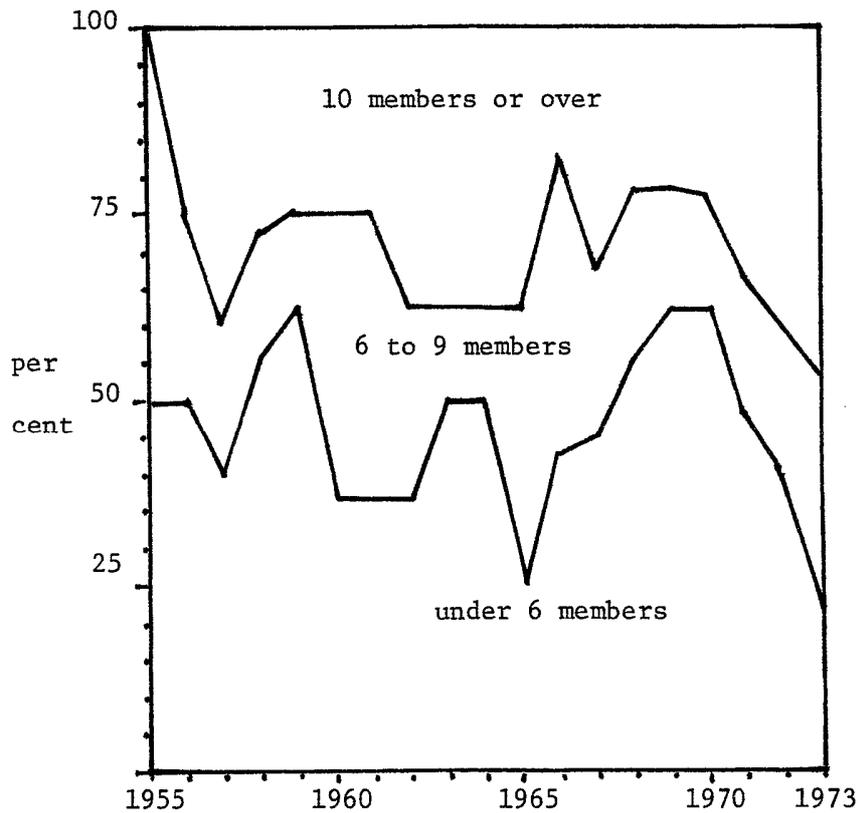
During 1957 churches commenced in Nongjik, Sawang (Aug.), Nong Chang (Sept.) (see map page 128). Meetings were also conducted in Nern Gwaw (Khrok Phra) and Watsing. Churches followed in Nong da Ngu (1960) and elsewhere. In time, satellite churches from some of these centers came into being. Taptan Sangop, Nong Kee, and Khlong Po from Sawang and so on. Thus was exhibited the amazing vitality not only of the believers themselves, but also of their congregations.

Most churches had small memberships. Through mobility to and from other areas – a common feature of many rural Thai peoples, by occasional but extended times of hospitalization for concentrated treatment, and with deaths of older patients, these sala congregations waxed and waned in numbers. The comparative percentage of congregation size can be seen in figure 13 on page 132. In September 1973 there were fifteen sala congregations, the average size of which was 9.5 members.

e. *Worship centers built.* Church meetings were often begun in a home of believers or interested inquirers. However, it was soon found that holding them in church salas which were located on neutral ground was better. The home seemed to stifle the congregation into stagnation, whereas the sala opened it more to the public view. In the house church, the Thai outside the family would be reticent to speak up on issues because they felt that the owner of the house had a right to control and direct the church in his house.

Salas became locations for worship services. These salas, in fact, belonged to the patients, both Christian and Buddhist. Although initially the capital was provided by medical funds, the structures were often built by the Christians or local craftsmen.

Figure 13  
Comparative Size of Baptized Membership in Uthai Congregations



Source: Uthai Station Statistics (Table 11)

Patients paid monthly a nominal fee to repay the cost and help with the maintenance. The strategy for establishing new clinics usually centered around the discussion by the missionary team of nurses and church workers on two focal points. First, was the logistics related to the physical needs of patients who had difficulty traveling any distance. Second, there was a strategy in terms of the existing sala believers in that area. In many instances these two concerned the same people. Hence the clinic salas often became the springboard for church locations of worship and fellowship. This was in keeping with the indigenous concept as noted above. Since each village has its

own Buddhist temple, and because of the physical handicaps of sala believers, church locations were multiplied as centers for the dissemination of the Gospel.

Out of this, the concept of proliferation of sala structures for local churches seemed to emerge. Church buildings, therefore, took the form of salas as they were built.

The first Uthai Church was initiated by the husband of one of the leprosy believers. Several of the new families converted in 1957-58 helped in its construction on his land. The structure was almost finished before the missionaries knew anything about it. Its location just out of Uthaitani was strategic since most of the believers lived within a quarter of a mile radius of it. The clinic sala was in town. As the believers multiplied, the church needed expanding. This was discussed following bible study after the leprosy clinic. Prayer was made for the necessary funds. The following Sunday one of the men gave an anonymous donation of 5,000 baht (US \$250.00) for this project. In the intervening time he had sold a piece of land and offered the proceeds to the Lord. In 1965 this church was moved to a nearby plot of land donated by one of the elders. The domestic troubles and noisy ducks wandering through the services on the former place, soon crystallized the decision of the believers to move. This rebuilt structure had to be extended year by year, and facilities added to cater for increased need for a conference center for Uthai and Central Thailand.

f. *Causes for growth.* Upon recognition of a growing potential through the leprosy work, a change of emphasis by the missionaries from 1956 onwards is markedly increased. Although children's work continued on as before, adult work soon became the focus. Christians thank God for the introduction of leprosy clinics in His divine strategy, for through these beginnings a greater reaching out to non-leprosy people was effected. Many "well" relatives, friends, and their children were gathered into the Church.

Church growth is a complex process with multiple variegated strains woven together by the Holy Spirit. Some of the major causes used by the Spirit to extend His Kingdom in Uthai give valuable insights for careful meditation concerning future strategy.

1. *Cultural compulsives.* The average leprosy patient had several felt needs which had been inadequately met in their cultural setting. One of these was their need for physical healing. Many spent all they had and went heavily into debt in order to obtain "cures" from quack doctors. The doctors trained in Western medicine generally preferred not to treat "lepers". The second element was the hopelessness which followed pseudo healings. These feelings of frustration drove them both to seek help on one hand, and to fear another failure on the other.

Those with leprosy in Thailand are generally spared the harsh treatment found in some other lands. Most are allowed to live with or near their families in the village. Even those located in towns carry on their regular business. Nevertheless, they are discriminated against. Social pressures curtail their activities. They are despised. They crave a deep sense of belonging and intimate fellowship which is not normally met under these circumstances.

Above all is a spiritual compulsive. Ostracized from the Buddhist temple, and often plagued by “spirits,” many long for satisfaction in the spiritual realm. Their condition, according to the general religious belief, is the result of bad deeds of past existences. Their desperate need presses them towards some adequate solution.

Through the sala clinics their quest for physical relief and healing is met, their intellectual and emotional needs are accommodated, and their search for social meaning is fulfilled. As like meets like they share common concerns. Furthermore, this sense of being acceptable in status and of social belonging within their peer group is enhanced by the influence of the Gospel. Their spiritual frustration is satisfied by Christ through whom they are incorporated into a living fellowship of the sala church. This “climate” suited to their needs combines with the cultural compulsives to cause their receptivity to the Gospel.

2. Witness of believers. When these patients became believers in Christ, the dynamic transformation that affected their whole life’s outlook as just described, was dramatic. Many became ardent propagators to their fellow unfortunates, encouraging them not only to come to the clinics for treatment, but also to receive Christ through faith. They became ardent team-members in witness for Christ despite the opposition that came to them.

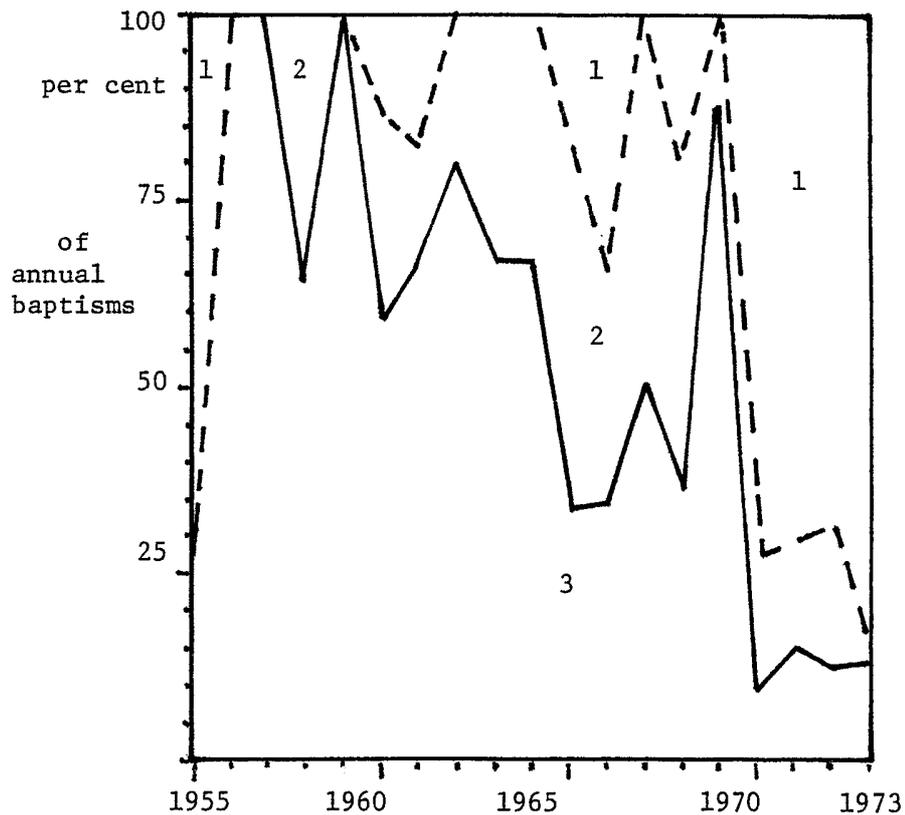
Herein was the wisdom of God revealed. The pressure of persecution on unafflicted people generally caused their interest in Christ to cool off. The leprous patients on the other hand, already knew the pressure of social displeasure. Even though the persecution came, because as Christians they were seen as “traitors” to their own Thai kith and kin, yet the fulfillment of the Gospel was so real that they boldly stood firm.

Many, of course, were not willing to pay this price, and their cultural religious prejudices precluded them from presently entering the kingdom.

If a patient did not believe within the first year of contact in the sala clinic, it might take him five or six years. Many never believed. These, of course, received the same medicine and the same care as did the believers.

During 1956 and 1957 those who believed and were baptized were nearly all patients. A dramatic gathering in of family members in 1958 showed the impact of their witness. A third of those baptized that year were non-leprous! In the years to follow these were to be an important bridge for the expansion of the Church in a hostile cultural environment. This bridge across the “well” society was not limited to family members, for as the sala Christians boldly witnessed for Christ in their villages, some friends and neighbours also received Christ and joined the sala churches. By 1956 28.6 per cent of the membership in Uthai were “well” Christians.

Figure 14  
Distribution of Evangelistic Influence  
Reflected in Annual Baptisms in Uthai



Source: Uthai Church Statistics (Table 8)

1. "Well" Christians won independently of leprosy believers.
2. "Well" Christians related to or influenced by leprosy believers.
3. Leprosy Christians only.

Figure 14 above shows a distribution of the annual baptisms and the evangelistic influence which the Christian patients had on the growth of the Church. Through 1970 they were the vital agents for the effective communication of Christ, along with the resident missionaries. Following this date, another factor was added resulting in the baptism of non-leprous members which will be discussed later in this chapter. The numbers of Christians are small, but compared with the almost total lack of growth all over Thailand are significant.

It is to be noted that, of the dozen non-leprous believers added independently of the patients between 1956 and 1969, three quarters of them were influenced by those already won by the leprous believers.

For example, Mr. Y was a seriously handicapped patient. When he became a Christian not long after commencing treatment, he was burdened for his other relatives. Through persistent witness for more than a year, he led his non-leprous sister A and brother-in-law B to Christ. Both were well off and respected in the community. About 18 months later this couple won another distant relative C and his wife D to the Lord. This new couple (C and D) then influenced their neighbours E and his wife F to become Christians. As time went on A and B kept witnessing to their framing neighbours G and H who eventually turned to the Lord. A and B also taught their won children and three of their daughters with their husbands were baptized. All of these were non-leprous and won independently of the leprosy believer, yet the basic cause of the chain reaction was Mr. Y whose faithful witness first won his sister and her husband.

3) Family webs. The emphasis on relatives turning to Christ from the witness of these patients has been acknowledged. The movement of many family members to Christ in 1958 gave a solid base upon which the Church could move forward functionally.

Husbands won wives and wives husbands about equally frequently. Parents led their teenage children into the church. The sala believers influenced their siblings to come to Christ. In some cases the older ones won aging mothers or fathers. So that in a short space of time family webs both in nuclear and extended form were found in the Church, thus consolidating its strength. Of course there were also individuals without Christian relatives who enlarged the congregation, but the core strength was structured on the family.

Recognizing this pattern the missionaries set about actively evangelizing husbands and wives. This helped speed the entrance of families into the Church and thus dealt a severe blow to internal tensions and persecutions, usually resultant in divided families. Among the seventy professions during 1962 seven couples prayed for salvation (Woodward 1962). By 1965 at least half of the members in the Uthai churches had relatives who were baptized. There were still only fifteen couples in the church. These "full families" comprised 35.7 per cent of the total membership of 92.

Families becoming Christians were a crucial factor in the growth and vitality of the church in Uthai. It indeed appears generally true that where family units have been gathered into the Church, especially in webs of extended families, there the church stands in solidarity. Where only unrelated, individual, scattered believers are found, the church generally struggles to survive.

At a field conference in Nov. 1972 Rowland Bell, a seasoned senior missionary, expressed his observation from a personal and prayerful evaluation of his seventeen years of work in various station. His energetic Bible teaching and preaching ministry usually

established ten to twenty cells in the center to which he was assigned each term. His consistent ministry each month saw these embryonic churches begun, but upon return from each furlough he found many of these cells had vanished. The ones that stood the test and flourished were those inevitably built around family relatedness. His observation changed his future strategy and he turned to following up the families and relatives of each believer, aiming to see the family webs won to Christ.

The potential for such family movements is greatest when the believer is a new Christian. His virile witness and firm stand in the face of opposition provides the best opportunity for a family movement within a couple of years. If left until he is firmly established in the faith and then encouraged to win the family, it is often too late. The relatives usually have settled back in to the old way by then, and the believers' fervor in witness has usually lost its cutting edge. There is no substitute for the dynamic testimony of the new believer, even if it is at times tactless and uninformed. Maturity of knowledge and approach will come through Christian nurture, but the bridges of communication to the unsaved relatives and friends do not remain open indefinitely.

4) The concept of a functional church. In the early days missionaries had no overall strategy in definitive terms, but there was a clear aim to establish a church in every center. As soon as converts were won they were taught to meet for worship as the Body of Christ. As congregations multiplied in other areas, they were taught to function as the church as soon as possible. They led their own services and held monthly communion. Sharing the word, praying for each other, and tithing, as well as fellowship, witness and outreach were encouraged in each congregation from the outset. Each Christian cell exercised the functions of a church.

The concept of the functional church produces a mindset in the missionaries that the goal is a church, not a preaching point. Too often missions are conducted in virgin areas with the idea that when there are 20 or more believers, only then can "a church" be started. The Gospel is constantly preached to the group repeatedly, and little thought of mature fruit arises until the numbers of believers reach the total required to organize a church. In some parts, like the concentrated large villages of North Thailand this may not be a problem, as sufficient numbers can be expected in a short time. However, in the central rural areas with many small villages where farmers work in fields using temporary accommodations, such a policy is unrealistic. In contrast the sala church approach calls each cell – no matter how small – a church. The speedy emergence of the sharing, worshipping, and witnessing congregation is of prime importance. Start with the church!

5) Local leadership. The church needed indigenous leaders. Although missionaries in these virgin fields were obviously the initiators in preaching the Gospel, establishing the churches, and directing their growth, the development of local leaders was a constant aim.

With the expansion of the church, the Lord provided those with adequate leadership gifts, men who took the initiative, made decisions acceptable to the members,

and depended upon God for spiritual strength. As early as mid 1956 three sala believers led the services. One gave simple Bible exposition. Among these was Mr. Y. In his first attempt at leading he prayed four times during the service. Ten years later he was sent by the church as its first missionary to the north of the province, where in time he established four congregations. A few women leaders also encouraged the church, especially in the outreach ministries. Some “well” leaders came to help the church occasionally from Manorom church across the river. This caused the church to be dependent on the “hospital church” for direction and decision. The missionaries prayed for the local leadership gifts to be exercised in independence of both missionaries and Thai Christians from Bangkok and the hospital (Adams 1958 Report). The problem of dependence on missionaries or on “outside” Thai Christians constantly faces the emerging congregations. The need of the churches for leaders was met exclusively from members of the Uthai churches. The Holy Spirit raised up mature men and women out of the local congregation. In 1960 these men went to Maranatha Bible School for leprosy Christians at Khonkaen in Northeast Thailand. The same year a woman leader studied at Chiangmai. In time such leaders of sala churches, not only in Uthai but throughout Central Thailand, were recognized as generally more mature than those from the “well” congregations. They exercised their gifts to establish and expand congregations.

6) Prayer concentration. Many lives were changed and problems solved in answer to specific prayer. Not a few Uthai missionaries suggest that one of the causes for growth was prayer. This element cannot be overlooked in the strategy for church growth.

Missionaries in all stations have times of prayer for the work. Answers to prayer are seen. In any spiritual battle only spiritual weapons can be used against the Satanic forces of darkness. Where genuine growth is experienced, there the devil will work to neutralize the advance.

Although prayer was already vital from the beginnings in Uthai, a new emphasis was added by the staff in the face of the expansion and multiplied opportunities.

In 1958 a very important meeting was commenced. One whole day a week was set aside for praying, when all contact (interested and uninterested) were prayed for by name according to districts (Adams 1972 Report).

This prayer time continues to this day, though shorter and in less fervor than in former days. It may be well for busy missionaries to set blocks of time aside to pour themselves out in prayer for specific individuals, families, and congregations. With the increasing demands of growing work, time is at a premium. The vital exercise of prayer tends to be reduced to drudgery as a duty to be performed, rather than the spontaneous essence and heart of the program.

At the same time, energies must follow prayer in personal contact and public ministry in order to see the Church grow. This is vividly portrayed by the Lord Himself. It is not a matter of “either/or” but of “both/and”.

7) Repeated contacts. One of the causes for multiplication of believers appears to be through repeated contacts, rather than casual acquaintance. Not many Thai come into the church without often repeated contact with the Gospel. Contact between patient and missionary in the monthly clinics, together with the teaching and witness for Christ accompanying it, was a vital ingredient in bringing many to decision.

Concentrating on these persons proved fruitful. Not only in the clinics, but also in follow-up house calls for both medical and spiritual purposes, repeated contact was sought. It often afforded wider contact with the family unit also.

Repeated contacts were time consuming, but valuable, as they often resulted in definite conversions and healthy growth. In recent years Christian radio beamed over Thai stations has supplemented literature and personal contact made by believers and missionaries. New Christians sometimes referred to multiple avenues of contact both in personnel and media prior to their actual conversion.

A similar facet of the leprosy program was used for spiritual growth. Because serious cases of the disease often required specialized and concentrated treatment, patients sometimes spent extended times in the OMF leprosy wing of the Manorom Christian Hospital. Sometimes patients reacted to the new drugs and were likewise hospitalized. When Dr. June Morgan began reconstructive surgery on twisted and deformed fingers, feet, and facial features, long periods of hospitalization were required. Later training in the Leprosy Rehabilitation Center connected to this leprosy wing also involved long periods of time.

While in the Leprosy Wing under these conditions, repeated contact with the Gospel through missionaries and national believers influenced dozens to turn to the Lord. More valuable still was the nurture new believers received in the hospital.

8) Nurture emphasis. The need for spiritual nurture was not left to chance, nor did it exclude the essential dependence of the believer on the Holy Spirit. Bible teaching in clinics, homes, and sala churches strengthened the faith and expanded the knowledge of the believers, resulting generally in change of behaviour and life style.

A meaningful concept of the Church was also demonstrated in the Christian fellowship of the inpatient believers and local sala congregation of the Leprosy Hospital.

Bible correspondence courses were studied by the score. In 1959 about 60 in Uthai were doing these courses. By 1963, 105 were enrolled. Problems were often discussed with the missionaries at the clinics. Because of inadequate postal services in the country areas, the nurse or evangelist often acted as the postman for those courses, collecting and returning them via the central post office.

9) Regional conferences. With a concern for fellowship among Christians and the problem of scattered believers across wide areas, believers conferences developed both in local and provincial scope. The first annual Leprosy Believers' Conference was

held in 1957. It became an annual event where leading Thai Bible teachers from other parts of Thailand came to minister for four or five days. The believers gathered in the Uthaitani Sala Church for the meetings and resided there for the whole time. This fellowship was repeated on other occasions usually in local areas at Christmas and Easter.

These conferences provided a sense of unity and entity to the small congregations and isolated Christians. They also provided functional substitutes for the Buddhist temple festivals.

The Sala Church Central Committee, appointed each year, also arranged weekend workshops for church leaders usually twice a year.

10) Church planting missionary team. Ample evidence attests the fact that the sala church development was a work of God accomplished in the face of great odds. One of the reasons for such growth was the attitude of the missionaries. Missionary nurses ministering in the leprosy clinics were a vital part of the church planting team in the area. Both evangelists and nurses worked closely together to plant churches.

The nurses evangelized, taught, and gave spiritual counsel as time permitted along with the missionary evangelist and teacher. At station meetings all aspects of the work were discussed and decisions made by the whole team. There was no dichotomy of purpose. Each worker was engaged in the mission of establishing the Church.

The burden of developing the churches in Uthai until late 1961 was upon the shoulders of the lady evangelists and nurses; they laboured under difficult conditions, doing more than “a man’s job.” Most of the arduous travel was by bicycle across rice paddies, sand trails in the dry season, and flooded paths in the wet season. Under the tropical sun frequent stops for drinks in country shops, or rests in salas, facilitated contact with people. This provided opportunity to proclaim Christ. It was their aim to give a Gospel tract to every person they met on the trail. In those days missionaries did not measure their journeys in kilometers or miles, but in hours of riding or the number of pepsi colas consumed! Villagers traveled either on foot, or bike, or by buffalo cart.

This completes the investigation of the early movement of the sala churches (1956 – 1960). Its impetus continues still today. However, before moving on one observation needs to be added. Between 1958 and 1959 there was a slight deflection of the movement. Besides a smaller number of new baptisms, one of the causes for this is found in the transfer of 6 members out to other provinces. Such transfers increased in the years to come and became one of the phenomenon that will be considered further in this chapter.

#### 4. Decelerated Growth 1960 – 1967

The one “well” church in Uthaitani continued to slump with small gains and losses as seen in figure 10 on page 118. Even then several of these members also attended the sala congregation. The leprosy churches decelerated in growth during this time, but

continued to gain slightly except for a drop in 1966. Some of the causes for this leveling off of the sala movement are pin pointed below.

a. *Loss through transfer.* Although the average rate of net growth for these seven years was only about 1 per cent per annum there was an annual growth for 1960-1965 of just over 3 per cent. The loss of members by transfer during these years largely neutralized the addition of new members. Seventeen members transferred out of the province in 1965-1967 alone, causing the sharp drop. 22 per cent of the 1965 membership transferred in to Uthai sala churches.

The reason for transfer mobility in these rural areas was usually economic. Most of the people were poor and existed on a subsistence diet, earning day by day enough for their family needs. When rice harvests failed or were poor through insufficient water, blight, or disease, the less fortunate farmers moved to other areas hoping for better fortunes. Most had little security and the alternatives facing them were either (1) borrow money at exorbitant rates of up to 30 per center per month which virtually enslaves them (rates over 100% per annum are common) or (2) move to greener pastures. Some were in constant motion moving yearly or even more frequently.

b. *Lack of local leadership.* Mobility often marked the virile leaders. Thus, efficient leaders developing strong congregations sometimes left for other areas to the detriment of the local congregations.

During 1960-67, the fact that four of the keenest leaders were away for lengthy periods in a resident Bible School added to the leadership void, especially in 1960-63.

The shortage of leadership was repeatedly noted as a concern of the missionaries during this period. However, though local congregations may flounder, they seldom died because other members took on the role of leadership. In 1960 six of the believers helped preach, and three women began teaching Sunday School in the Uthaithani Sala. Leadership deficiency may arrest a congregation, but was seldom the sole cause of its serious reduction.

c. *Spiritual conflict.* Although no diary records were logged for 1959 and 1960 gleanings from annual reports indicated a third major cause for the plateauing of the sala movement.

During and following 1959, spiritual conflict struck at the heart of the churches in various forms. A period of severe testing was to challenge the stamina of the Church.

1. Destruction of property. The faith of some was tried when buffalos died and crops were ruined. Others were disturbed by internal conflicts and domestic troubles. The new clinic sala at Taptan had to be moved six times because of opposition to its location. Once villagers burned it to the ground. Yet through all this the Christians survived, although expansion was slight. Unbelievers observing these things are not likely to quickly enter the Church except as they see the victorious faith of the believers in the midst of opposition.

2. Backsliding of members. A further element arose in the spiritual condition of the believers. While Christians rejoiced in rebuilding the church, the devil sought occasion to disrupt the unity of the Christians. The leader on whose property the church stood was accused of misappropriating building funds. This was the beginning of troubles.

The believers were so busy building the church they slackened in their spiritual devotion. Spiritual slump gave rise to defeated lives, and backsliding in the following years. Attendance at services dropped off. Active witness ground to a standstill except for a few faithful ones. Some began living in open sin. At one of the annual conferences a flare of ungodliness brought severe discipline from the leaders. Yet through these ups and downs many grew in spiritual maturity.

3. Death of leader. One of the most shocking blows came in April 1961 when one of the leaders, a gifted woman whose leprous husband had led her to Christ, died under tragic circumstances. She was an outstanding evangelist and was probably the most energetic worker the Church had. She cycled into many areas with missionaries and had, with her husband, established a daughter church in Taptan. The church was growing in numbers and in maturity when tragedy struck. During a short term Bible School for these two churches a spirit of jealousy entered this gifted woman. She became distraught. Her condition worsened and after a few days in the hospital she passed on. Her death shocked the local Christians to whom she was a leading light. Her husband was shattered. Even the missionaries were left utterly perplexed. Yet through the sorrow and severe temptation to tum back, these churches were delivered and strengthened.

These then were the major causes for the leveling off of the initial movement. The vitality of the Church to survive was evident as the sala churches recovered and moved forward to double their membership from 67 to 143 between 1966 and 1973. There was also an added stimulus in the growth of the “well” churches during this period which is the next point of our study.

## 5. Strong Growth Movement 1967 - 1974

It was after the initial movement among the sala churches and their battle to survive and grow that I arrived in Uthai with my family. This was April 1966 after we had completed our first year and a half of orientation and language study. We became eye-witnesses of the continued working of God’s Spirit though His sovereign grace amongst the churches of Uthai. Together with our fellow workers we participated in this most exciting development.

In figure 10 on page 118 a twin pronged advance of the Church is evident in parallel and simultaneous growth movements of the sala churches and the “well” congregations from 1967 on.

- a. *Expansion of sala churches.* The leprosy clinics and sala churches directed most of the energies of the missionaries toward medical, evangelistic, teaching, and

pastoral ministries. The multiplication of leprosy clinics and consequently sala congregations, produced a fifty per cent increase in the number of churches, and a doubling of the number of baptized Christians by the beginning of 1974. Congregations arose in Tung Sangop, Non Kee, and Talukdu (see map on page 128) with family solidarity. In December 1968 eighteen leprosy patients were baptized in eight congregations, making the largest ingathering of sala believers into the Church in this period. Usually believers were added drop by drop. However, there were times when God's Spirit brought groups of patients to simultaneous decision. Within a few days of May 26, 1971, my diary records that 23 patients accepted the Lord in five sala clinics. This was unusual. Most of the evangelism was consistent interaction until decisions were crystallized by the Spirit.

A changing composition within the sala churches resulted in growing *mixed* congregations. Few congregations made up entirely of leprosy patients exist in Uthai now. The change resulted from the incorporation of "well" relatives and friends into the Church. The effective witness of leprosy believers and missionaries introduced these "well" people to Christ. During 1967 – 1973 a ratio of approximately sixty leprosy to forty "well" believers were added to the Church by baptism. Thus, the composition of sala churches gradually changed from leprosy to mixed memberships. They are still growing healthily.

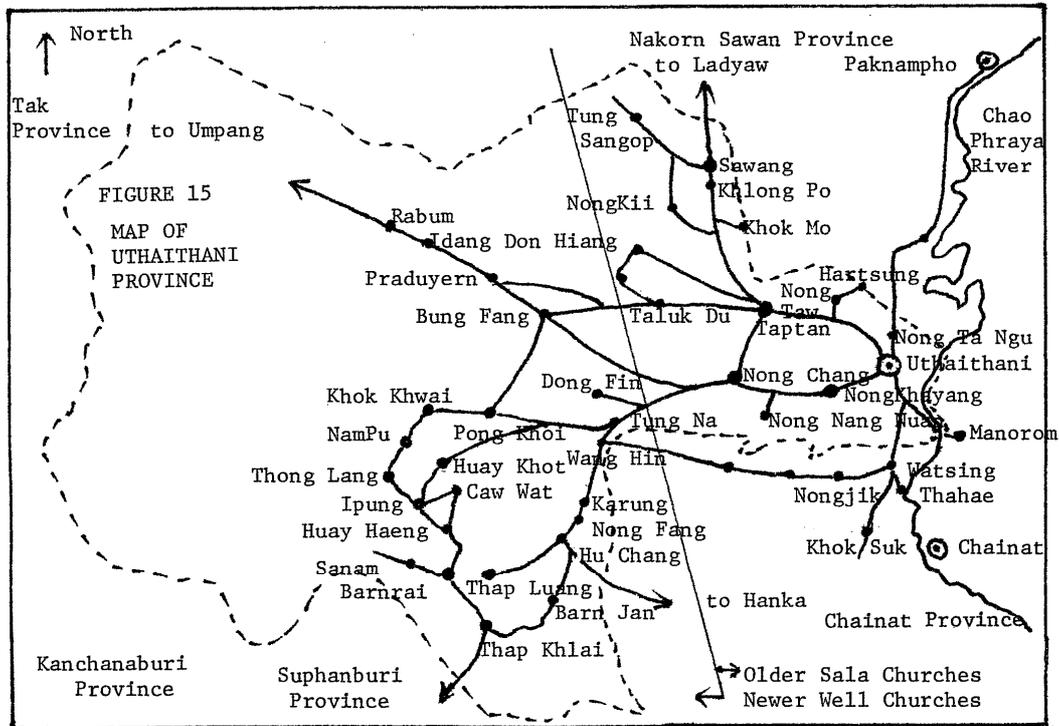
b. *Extension of Barnrai movement.* The Barnrai district occupied 83 per cent of the area of Uthai province (see map on 149). About half of it is forested and mountainous. In 1957 its population was approximately 15,900 (17,317 in Dec. 1960). The average size of its villages was 524.7 persons, 36 per cent larger than the average village in the other five districts of Uthai. Until 1958 no Christian missionaries had visited it.

1) Entrance into a virgin area (1958 – 1967). A burden for Barnrai had been the prayerful concern of several of the early missionaries, especially Miss Jessie Woodward (deceased), whose years of sacrifice and love in dedicated personal evangelism was to win many to Christ in eastern Uthai.

On January 17, 1958, a survey team of four missionaries and one Thai visited Barnrai in a Landrover, traversing extremely difficult "roads." It took two days to arrive at the district capital consisting of ten shops 50 miles away, a trip which now takes a little over an hour on a motorcycle. They distributed Christian literature and preached, but because of the inaccessibility, no immediate entrance was anticipated in this district. Over nine years passed before the next visit to the capital.

In 1965 Miss Woodward and Miss Mullin accompanied a Thai Christian on a visit to his brother who had moved out to Idang located in the northeast Barnrai beyond the Nong Chang district. It was an exhausting cycle ride, taking most of the day. In Idang there lived about ten Pwo Karen families. A year or so later the Thai brother, Prasert and Nit, moved with their families to Idang. This provided the first resident Christian influence in an area which was noted for its powerful vengeful spirits.

Map of Uthaithani Province



Within a few months of arriving in Thais in 1966, I became aware that the large western district of Barnrai had not one church in it. The ten tiny sala churches were all located in the eastern end of the province (see map above). Thus began a burden for the unevangelized Barnrai district.

The following year through the friendship of a Thai lawyer, I made a debut into Barnrai. This Buddhist friend was a former member or parliament for the province, and a current provincial representative for the Barnrai District. He invited me to go with him on a motorcycle tour of the southwestern villages and gave me his full consent to evangelize. I accepted with alacrity.

In April 1967 we traveled down by mountain trail, visited Barnrai Town and the important villages, and returned by the rough road (see map above). The villages were to become familiar to me in years to come as converts were won and churches began. The lawyer was highly respected and, introduced by him, I was immediately accepted without hesitation or suspicion. He called all the headmen and district leaders together in each area we stayed overnight. Then he invited me to share the Gospel with them. His sponsorship procured a lasting basis of reciprocal relationships for future ministries.

The people in the Barnrai area were mostly Thai from Lao stock. They spoke a Lao dialect. In fact, there were no less than four strains of Lao in Uthai-Lao Vieng, Lao

Ka, Lao Phruan, and Lao Khang. There were also fourteen villages of Pwo Karen as well as some Kha, Lawa, and Meo tribal groups in the Barnrai District. Thai and Chinese resided in the markets and were to enter Barnrai in increasing numbers as the district became more accessible.

On this trip, large villages such as Pak Kluay, Sanam, and Thapluang comprising up to 250 homes of Lao-Thai peoples, were located. Some were only a few kilometers from Barnrai Town. The earlier survey trip (1958) had not noticed these, simply because of their inaccessibility to vehicles. By my staying overnight in three of the major villages, personal ties with the local leaders were forged.

2) Small beginning of the churches (1968-70). A second trip with the lawyer was made in March 1968. Old contacts were renewed and new ones established through my friend's sponsorship.

The a surprising move was initiated by these leaders. They invited me to show Christian films at their annual fair for the district. This was an important event usually held at the Buddhist temple. I explained that as a Christian missionary my concern was to share God's Good News of redemption with all peoples. They assured me they would allow our team to propagate the Gospel. To avoid misunderstanding, I asked them to consider the situation carefully. Later they asked the lawyer to encourage me to come, and followed this with an official delegation at my house in Uthaithani.

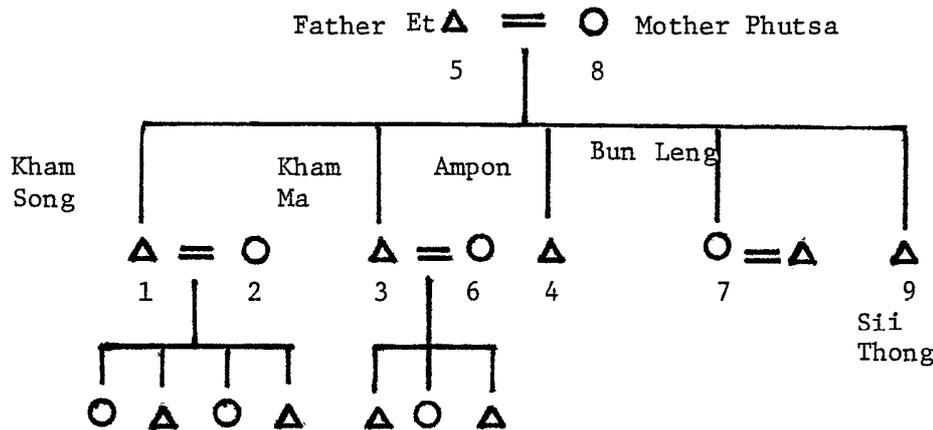
(a) Evangelistic opener: This sparked off a film evangelism trip April 8-12, 1968, to three villages which we had visited already. Previously we had stayed overnight with the headmen in two of them. The team consisted of two missionaries and one Thai elder from the sala church.

At the village of Thapluang the Lord had prepared the way before us. While the team preached in the little market before the evening Gospel films, two men showed deep interest. One had received tracts some time before and was seeking the truth. The Thai elder led him to Christ, and Mr. Kham Song became the first convert in Barnrai.

With the power of the Holy Spirit he began witnessing to his relatives. By July that year his wife and younger brother had believed. Continued study of the Bible strengthened the life and witness of these brothers, and the faith spread through his family. The brother's wife, their younger brother and sister, and both parents were baptized within a few years. A church centered around the family was established in their village.

Figure 16 (see below) illustrated the effect of Kham Song's witness. Other relatives in his extended family believed. These two brothers traveled to many villages witnessing to their relatives and friends.

Figure 16  
Kim Song's Influence on Family



- Order of conversion = 1, 2, 3 ---
- No. 7 recently married a Barnrai Pastor.
- Children of Kham Song and Kham Ma are all minors

During the next two nights at the Temple Fair in Huay Haeng probably 2,000 people viewed the Gospel films, listened to the preaching, and received Christian literature. To our surprise, the Buddhist abbot assigned us the best site, directly in front of the temple, rather than in an obscure corner, as we expected. Six of the saffron-robed priests sat in front of the Landrover intently watching and listening throughout the entire program.

The mystery of God's leading was revealed the following day. We visited a village about eight kilometers away to follow up the effects of this approach. As I explained a preaching poster on Christ's death, a man about thirty-five approached and listened intently. He said he wanted to accept Christ. He heard the message the night before at the films in the Temple Fair, and a dream has assured him good news was coming.

Weeks later I found him still believing and witnessing to his relatives and friends. During a subsequent film evangelism campaign in this village of Caw Wat others believed, including his brother, and a small church began in 1970. Some who had contact through the Christian hospital were added to this group.

A similar small beginning of churches developed in other villages. At Huchang it was commenced through two ladies. Within five years it had increased to nine.

(b) Transfer Christians plant churches: In the meanwhile the witness of the two Christian brothers (Prasert and Nit) in Idang resulted in a small group of believers, including some Pwo Karen. The pressure from evil spirits and sickness was great. Within three years several Christians died including Nit and a keen Karen father. One family reverted. By December 1972 there was only one baptized believer left.

At the beginning of 1968 another two Christians from Nong Kee moved with their families to Pong Khoi in the interior of Barnrai. Their testimony for Christ, supplemented by the film team, resulted in God's adding a dozen new members to the church within two years.

Mr. Sutin, a lone Christian, moved into the Barnrai area from another province. He was a bold servant for Christ and faced threats, persecution, and opposition from the local law officer. His faithfulness has an impact on the area, and a small meeting was commenced in his home at Nong Fang.

During the 1970 Landrover evangelistic trips to the Ipung area, an elderly man had believed. His wife, daughter and son-in-law also professed to follow Christ. His only prior contact with the Gospel was the remembrance decades before of his grandfather dying in Lampang, North Thailand, as a true Christian. This remained vivid in his heart, and prepared him to accept the Gospel with it came to him years later.

Several others decided to enter the church, but severe social pressure from certain men in authority in that region dissipated the church. Mr. Tong Kham remained true, however, destroyed his idols, trusted the Lord, and saw Him miraculously provide a second crop of corn without his replanting.

He influenced several families to turn to Christ in the sister village. A regular meeting was commenced, but under economic pressure, social ostracism, and threats by evil spirits, most withdrew from the fellowship and returned their Bibles. Almost six months later several of those families requested Bibles again and asked for teaching, declaring that in their hearts they had not recanted.

Other incidents of the joys of new converts turning to Christ, of their travail in testing, and in the birth pangs of the emerging congregations could be quoted. But a major movement awaits handling at this juncture.

All told, by 1970 six baptized believers had moved into Barnrai and twenty-four more had been baptized in five small congregations or cells.

3) The Barnrai breakthrough. This early work of God's Spirit in raising up scattered cells of believers, filled missionaries and Thai Christians with an expectant faith for an increased harvest of souls. Although two of the congregations, Idang and Prong Khoi, were started through leprosy believers transferring into those villages from the eastern end of Uthai, the other churches were entirely "well" people. Here was a new work of God, a new strategy, and a new potential for growth. At first, hardly any leprosy patients resided in Barnrai, but from 1970 onwards a few moved into the newly opened areas. In the early years the new Christian cells arose apart from any witness of Manorom Christian Hospital. Later, however, more opportunities were afforded for this as farmers from these interior woodlands came to the hospital.

We now turn specifically to the area around Karung and Nong Fang, only two kilometers apart, where the Lord was to plant His Church in a homesteading area.

(a) Divine preparation: God's sovereign grace working through the affairs and cultures of men, prepared the way for a small people movement, in three particular ways. He provided a new road, a receptive people, and a bold Christian witness.

When I first traveled to Bamrai in 1967 the rutted trail for motorcycles and buffalo carts was impossible for cars. The government, in keeping with the development plans, began building an all-weather road to Bamrai. This was completed just a couple of weeks prior to a major thrust of evangelism in February 1971. Thus a highway for the Gospel was opened in God's timing.

Prior to this, authorities opened large tracts of land along this highway for free settlement. The character of the area changed. It was tough work clearing the land, battling against malaria, and tilling the ground. Land sharks were also busy.

On my first trip through Karung in 1967, I saw only a little coffee shop and a gasoline salesman along the side of the road. My friend, the lawyer, took me off the side of the road and showed me some ruins in the jungle which had been those of the ancient fortified city of Karung. This 400 years ago had been a thriving center with gold and tin mining and pottery industries extending out across fertile fields and forests. The remains of the moat, and sections of the fallen wall which surrounded the city, were still visible. The town had been destroyed by Burmese armies and disease, and left to decay for centuries, until completely reclaimed by the jungle. The nearest village south was Huchang or "Elephant's Ear" which also had only a few houses.

Temporary dwelling in the interior and along the road sprouted by the score as more and more people moved into this frontier area. The land was reclaimed for corn and rice fields. The Karung market was rebuilt. Nong Fang expanded as a new village. Sideroads each kilometer cut into the interior both east and west of the trunk road. Through this God was increasing receptivity among the hundred of new settlers.

The third factor in preparation was a lone Gospel witness. Among the Thai and Lao that poured into this area was a fairly new Christian. Mr. Sutin had spurned the Gospel and the missionary who presented it in a neighboring province. Moving north, the Gospel again confronted him. Under conviction from the previous encounter, he soon accepted Christ. He was nurtured in the faith only a short time when he decided to move to Nong Fang during 1969. For the next two years he boldly witnessed for Christ here. Uthai missionaries visited him and encouraged him in the face of opposition. He became respected because of his clean life, and despised because he was a Christian. He asked us to show films of the life of Christ in the village to supplement his witness. That night seven New Testaments and a purse were stolen from the Landrover. His wife, however, became a Christian not long after, together with her sister. Later because strong opposition from her husband prevailed, the sister withdrew from the fellowship.

Nevertheless, sufficient interest, abounding opportunity in this frontier area, and the keenness of the Bamrai Christians convinced us God was preparing Bamrai to extend His Kingdom. We, therefore, planned a Church Planting Thrust into this district for February and March 1971—the dry season, immediately after the rice harvest.

(b) Team evangelistic thrust: Prior to the main campaign, a literature/visitation program by a team of Christians from various churches in Uthai saturated the area with tracts and Scriptures. Their aim was to locate responsive families, and continue their evangelization.

A cooperative effort in team evangelism drew a large number of Christians together in united, direct evangelism. The Church of Christ in Thailand (started by the American Presbyterians) accepted the invitation to send their Christian Service Training Center team from Chiangmai to help the local Uthai Christians and OMF missionaries. Principal Raimer and a missionary named Horn brought a group of the students down.

Two Thai students of the OMF Bible School at Phayao were already helping the local Christians in preparatory evangelism and teaching. They also joined the team.

Backed by prayers from many countries, the team energetically concentrated its evangelism on the Karung/Non Fang area for six days. In the evenings Gospel films, preaching, and dramatic plays on Scriptural themes were viewed by over 1000 people. In the day personal visitation in the houses was aimed at teaching, answering questions, and winning families to Christ.

The impact of many Thai Christians in the area made people aware of the unity and strength of the Church. Although the interest was great, those who committed themselves to Christ were as usual few in number.

The three nights in Suthin's village were followed by three nights in Karung. The Lord directed this change by several circumstances. Just prior to the team's arrival, one of the Phayao students found a Karung lad at the Manorom Hospital. He was so receptive to the Gospel that the student led him to Christ. He came to the program at Suthin's village and announced that his mother and brother wanted to believe. We visited them, and both turned to the Lord. Another young man under conviction followed us into their house and also asked to receive Christ.

That same night at the Karung program an aged Lao man repented and believed. He has served sentence for murder when younger, and had never been free of guilt until that night. A shop keeper whose leg had been amputated at the Christian hospital about ten years before also prayed for salvation. A teenage girl who was treated at the hospital for a serious kidney disease believed through the witness for the evangelist there. Thus, the Spirit laid the foundation for His Church.

(c) Nurture of the new congregation: After instruction, eight were baptized a week later. A church commenced in the Christian family's house opposite the Buddhist temple. This house became a center for inquirers.

The nurture of these believers followed. Two Bible School students, and American missionary John Casto, loaned from his station, remained in the area to care for them and other interested families as the team traveled to other villages. Many hours of house to house evangelism followed simultaneously with the nurture program and church services.

(d) New believers evangelized: The small congregation at Karung swelled as more families were added, largely through the witness of the new believers. Within the next six months 38 additional members were baptized as the Gospel spread from

Kilometer 7 (Karung) to Kilometer 8, 9 (Nong Fang), and 10. Whole families came into the church.

Seekers were delivered from the power of evil spirits that bound them in fear. One outstanding example was elderly Mrs. Boon Me, who was frequently possessed by a familiar and violent spirit since she was 17. Twice she had been in a mental hospital. For years she had tried everything to be free, spending years as a Buddhist nun in five different temples. At times when possessed by the spirits she had to be chained to the temple post or a tree because she became so violent. On contact with the Gospel she cursed the team members who visited her. Later a near relative believed and shared the Gospel with Mrs. Boon Me. One Sunday morning she came to the church service and asked how she could receive Christ. She was wonderfully freed by Christ from sin and spirits. Her testimony won many relatives. Later she started a congregation in her village.

Some who violently opposed at first became Christians later. Mr. Sanun, a former Buddhist priest, strongly rejected the Christian witness, but a month later was turned around in repentance under conviction by God's Spirit. His bold witness for Christ resulted in five of his relatives and friends turning to Christ within ten days of his conversion. Then as he moved to Kilometer 10 to plant fields, he won three families to Christ. This soon became another church in spite of Sanun's moving away in less than a year.

(e) Sister congregations multiply: In this way the Gospel spread and new congregations were established. Many were won by the new believers' witness, and within fifteen months there were four small congregations meeting in the Karung area. A church was built at Nong Fang by the believers on land purchased by contributions from the Uthai churches. Several new Christians developed in spiritual leadership, functioned in the local churches, and attended pastor training sessions in Uthaithani. This training Program will be discussed in Chapter 5.

A similar multiplication of churches occurred further north at Idang during 1973. On January 28 Mr. Prasert, the lone surviving baptized member there, declared he was praying for seven new members to recommence the church. His faithful witness in preceding years had laid a good foundation for expansion. A small evangelistic team entered along a new highway opened the previous week. By April, eight more were baptized, including the Karen headman and members of Prasert's family. The Christians were severely tested when Prasert barely survived a severe hemorrhage from a stomach ulcer. Prasert's miraculous recovery encouraged them to witness to their relatives and acquaintances. By September the church had grown to 34 baptized members, many belonging to an extended family web. One family donated land, and the whole membership built a church. Following worship serviced they went in groups to evangelize nearby villages. Soon four satellite churches emerged.

In the Barnrai District, between 1970 and 1973, ten new Christian cells were established, and a total of 145 were baptized and added to the Church.

(f) Causes of growth of village well congregations: Some of the reasons for the Barnrai movement and other village churches' development were:

1. There was an aggressive evangelistic program of cooperation between missionaries and nationals, sometimes with the help of Bible schoolers from other areas and missions.

2. A definite strategy was being developed as lessons were learned year by year.

3. The aim to locate the responsive was a foremost focus.

4. Training in and practice of family evangelism was stressed.

5. Much time was spent in evening evangelism when the people, including the manpower and leaders, were home in the villages.

6. Personal family to family visitation was an integral element in finding out the problems, answering the questions, and persuading the family concerning Christ.

7. Concentrated days of team evangelism were followed by speedy establishing of a congregation and its nurture.

8. Ways and means to effectively communicate the truth were sought and tested. Posters, films, drama and cassettes were used.

9. The new believers were instructed to evangelize and to plant daughter churches, and they did.

10. Frequently one lone faithful believer or his family became the catalyst for a church's emergence.

11. Local, unpaid pastors were trained.

12. Simple church structures were built by the believers. Congregations were self supporting from the start.

Further case studies could be summarized, but we must leave these small, but significant movements here. Some of the problems in the battle for survival are noted in the next chapter, while many of the lessons are applied in chapter V.

## **IV. CRUCIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL**

The task of missions is to communicate the Gospel of Christ to every ethnic group. In enlightening the mind and educating the heart, the Church's basic responsibility is essentially to communicate. The nations of the world form the area in which the process of transferring God's message to His wayward children occurs. Thus the missionary is inextricably committed to the cross cultural communication of Christ's Gospel to the people of the earth.

His every policy must aim at effective communication, and progress in mission work must be judged by the amount of progress made in communication (Luzbetak 1970:205).

Adequate criteria necessary for measuring that progress should include:

1. The testing of the audience's understanding of the Gospel.
2. The conversion of the hearers and the resultant change of behavioral life style,
3. The establishment of believers in functioning corporate fellowships,
4. The spiritual maturity of the members in Christian worship and ministry,
5. The reproduction of their witness in local church expansion, and
6. The multiplying of congregations in other unevangelized areas.

Only as such criteria are met can effective communication of God's will and purpose be claimed in the biblical sense of mission. This is the goal of Christian communication.

This process of communication is extremely complex, especially in the perspective of cross cultural interaction. a) The spirituality of the communicator is important in validating the Gospel message he proclaims. b) Understanding the influences and causes by which people accept or reject Christ must likewise be investigated. This chapter will limit itself to brief discussions on these two elements.

### **A. THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MESSENGERS**

Communication is the bridge over which the Gospel passes from culture to culture and from person to person. It does not occur in a vacuum, however, but depends on a communicator. Thus the Gospel messenger's spirituality is largely judged. The communicator reflects the reality, truth, and importance of the Gospel message.

## 1. Christian Life

The life of the advocate propagating the Gospel is often a key to effective communication. Many were influenced to turn to Christ in Uthai because of the changed lives of the communicators. The transformation of the converts was so evident that the genuineness of the message was difficult to reject even though rejection of it was the option frequently chosen by the hearers. The Christian's life style, their joyful simplicity, and their faith in the midst of adversity, supported the reality of the Gospel message.

The demonstration of love, fellowship, and concern among the Christian community, small though it be, made an impact on society at large. In Barnrai the new believer often gathered spontaneously in homes to pray unitedly for the needs of some seeker or new convert. This dynamism of the Gospel had a powerful impact on relatives and friends.

The Christian messenger is a living example, a walking epistle for God, by word and action. Believers filled with the Holy Spirit exhibit a vibrant faith.

Studying the Bible gives them confidence and boldness in the knowledge of God. Depending on Him through prayer provided a basis for security, expectancy and hope. These spiritual qualities produce a character which undergirds the authenticity of the Gospel message.

## 2. Aggressive Evangelism

The Christian life style alone generally lacks the dynamism to bring men to Christ. It must be coupled with positive proclamation. Evangelism includes the "foolishness of preaching." Where the force of attraction through the changed life, and the power of verbal testimony meet, there lies the potential for dynamic communication.

The fervent witness of new believers is not only contagious to the other members in the church, but also infectious to the unsaved community. Aggressive evangelism by the converts' testifying of Christ's power to friends and relatives is a powerful factor in the spread of the Gospel.

New Christians often lack tact when opposition arises. They are frequently immature and have little Christian experience. Nevertheless, they are a powerful force in bringing others to Christ.

Every member of the Church is responsible to share in frequent witness within his own spheres of influence. Evangelism is the life-line of the Church reaching out into all society in obedience to the Lord's command. Mission is the extension of that activity to persons in other cultures.

### 3. Retention of Contacts

Keeping intact close relationships with relatives, friends, and associates provided many opportunities for church growth, especially in the early days following conversion. Ties to acquaintances in the world become highways for the propagation of the Gospel. Transformation of converts produced fertile soil for additions to the Church. Relatives and close friends are focal points for witness.

Therefore, inquirers should be encouraged to share the Gospel message with relatives and friends even before they become Christians. By permeating the family web with the Gospel, new believers clarify their beliefs and learn to expound their faith. Because natural relationships are often the first bridges across which the Gospel passes, sharing it with intimates is a valuable strategy for potential church expansion.

The longer the time which elapses after conversion, the less likely it is that "old" contacts will remain close and open. On one hand the lone Christian is usually persecuted, if not expelled, by the group. On the other, he is drawn into a new circle of friends in the fellowship of the Church. This transition period is as crucial for growth through family evangelism as it is for the converts to be incorporated into the Church. Too long a time lapse will lose the advantage of open contacts.

## **B. THE PROFILE OF CONVERTS**

While on the field I conducted research into the convert profile among the Uthai Christians. This data, a summary of which is found in the appendix, is stored in the Archives of the School of World Missions Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

Careful choice of the research sample was needed to give a balanced picture of the Church, including both types of congregations, and a valid cross section of the Christians. This would enable us to understand the whole Church of 307 baptized members and 105 adherents distributed in the thirty local congregations throughout Uthai. Believing that the random sample procedure is valid, I shall make statements of the whole populations from this study.

The research procedure was developed anticipating a total sample of 20 per cent from the baptized members and adherents throughout Uthai. Sampling had to be done in a population with these characteristics:

1. Thirty small congregations scattered over a wide area.
2. Varying sizes of congregations, from a few to over thirty members.
3. Two kinds of churches
  - a. Sala churches in the east which were generally older, and
  - b. the newer "well" congregations in the west.

I therefore took a 3- percent random sample of all churches selecting 9 congregations from the lists of congregations a and b. The four well congregations

researched were: Idang, Nong Fang, Bamrai and Nong Nang Nuan. The five sala churches were: Tung Sangop, Talukdu, Non Chang, Nong Ta Ngu, and Uthaithani.

On the last two Sundays of June, 1974, missionaries supervised the completion of questionnaires by every person who attended the nine congregations selected by the random sample. The survey included baptized members, adherents, and visitors from other Uthai churches.

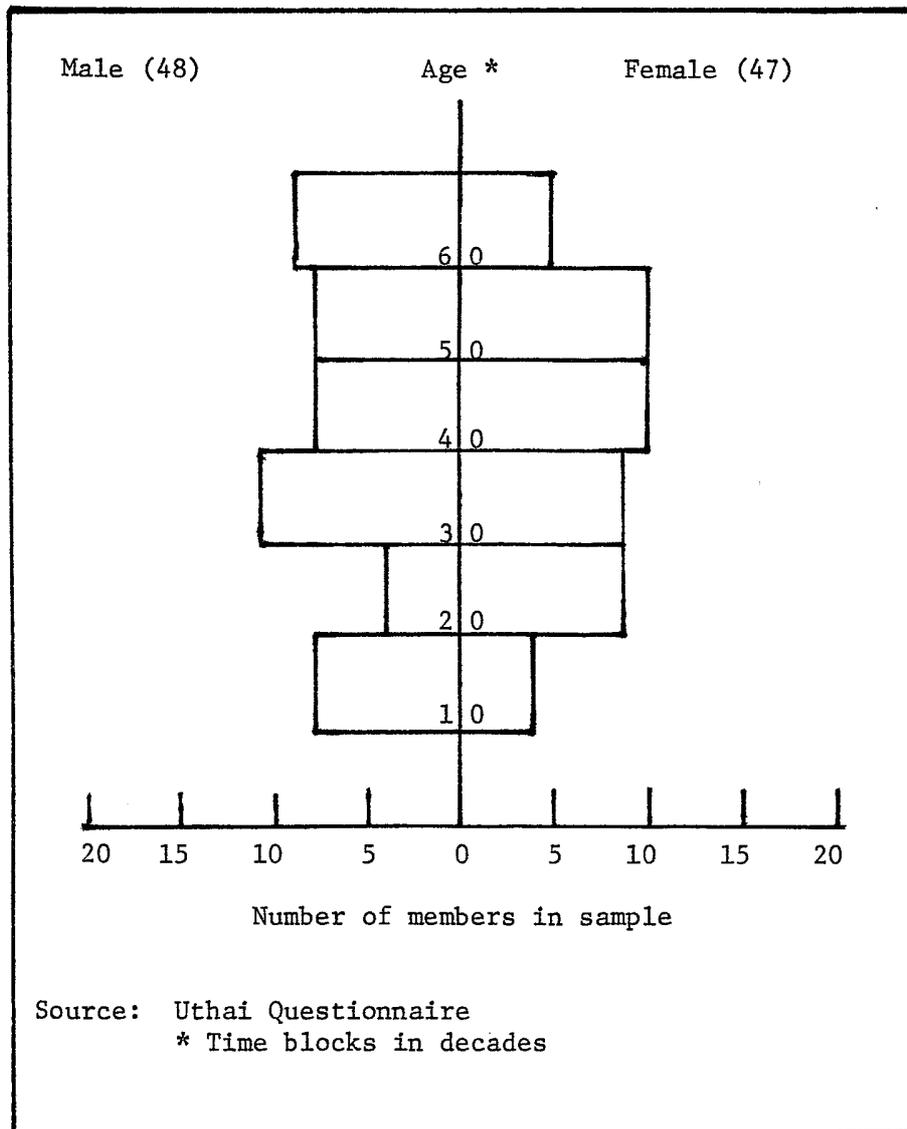
#### 1. Demographic Summary of Sample

Ninety-five questionnaires were answered by seventy-four baptized members and twenty-one adherents. These represented 24 per cent of the total baptized membership (307) of Uthai, and 20 per cent of the 105 adherents. (See appendix B).

*Religious background.* All accepted Christ in Uthai Province including those who moved in from other provinces. Except for one girl who was reared in the Christian family, all were Buddhist before their conversion. Two of them had also worshipped Chinese ancestors. (Over seventeen per cent added they had also worshipped spirits. Actually, most of the others followed animistic practices alongside Buddhism.)

*Occupation.* The majority were farmers, following the tradition of their forbearers. Most rented fields, and some changed fields every couple of years. Only one was a full time shopkeeper. Several spent part time selling food products door to door. A few worked on a temporary basis as hired laborers. The majority were satisfied in their present occupation.

Figure 17  
Comparative Ages by Sex in Sample



c. *Ethnic composition.* All but one claimed full Thai citizenship. Ethnically most (95.3 per cent) were Thai. Four were Chinese background and ten were Thai from Lao stock.. The Lao were nearly all located in Barnrai. This was a slightly higher percentage of Lao than in other churches of Central Thailand, since at least two full congregations of

Lao were located in Barnrai Town and Thaplugang. Most of the other congregations were mixed Thai and Lao.

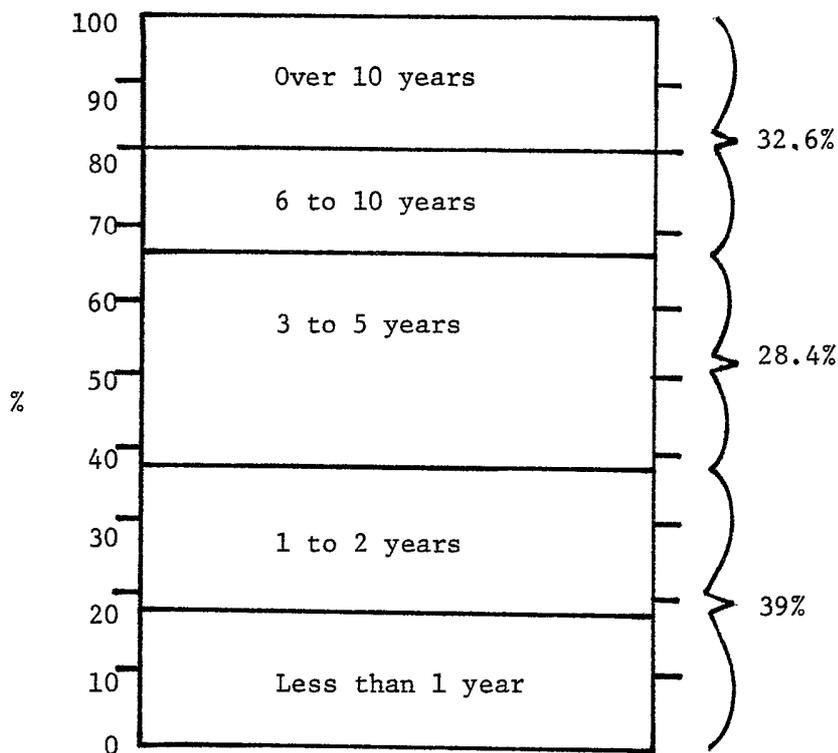
Since the largest population of churches are comprised of this type of rural people, the value of this study is significant. Its importance is notable since the future growth of the Church in Thailand is likely to be in these rural populations.

d. *Education.* As for formal education, almost all had grade four or less. Only three had studied above that. None had completed high school. General reading ability was poor. Some were illiterate. In all this, they fairly represent the peasant community in all of Thailand.

e. *Christian community's distribution.* The age and sex of those in the sample is illustrated in figure 17 on the previous page. The age groups in the well churches was well balanced, but many sala congregations were made up of older people.

f. *Length of residency.* The majority of "leprosy Christians" were long time residents of Uthai. However, in the Barnrai churches there was a larger proportion of people born in other provinces who subsequently entered Barnrai. Christians from long established Lao villages were exceptions, being long term residents. The population in the newer areas was divided equally between those who moved from other parts of Uthai and those from adjacent provinces. A survey of the Christians in the Nong Fang area indicated that at the time of the research the respondents' residence varied from one to ten years, the majority being between four and ten years.

Figure 18  
Comparison of Years of Christian Experience in Uthai Sample



Source: Uthai Questionnaire

## 2. Conversion Dynamics

In collating the data I divided the questionnaires into three groups according to age of Christian experience (1) less than two years, (2) three to five years and (3) six years of more. This provided some comparison and control to verify that the patterns and interpretation were reasonably consistent among all converts.

God uses various elements in conversion. These sometimes can be seen as models or patterns.

- a. *Conversion patterns.* Figure 18 on the following page indicated the proportion of Christians in the nine churches according to age of Christian life. This shows the

continued growth of the expanding church. Of the believers, 39 per cent were converted during the last two years.

People became Christians in three main patterns, whether in sala or well branches of the Church.

First, there were individual believers who broke from tradition and, often against family pressure, became Christians. Such individuals faced severe persecution, but were necessary in the beginnings of the church as initial witnesses and catalysts for the Gospel, like Mr. Kham Song, already mentioned.

Second, the family model was important and usually followed from the influence of the Christian catalyst on his nuclear family. This sometimes spread through the extended family. Married men with young families had considerable power to influence their elders and their siblings.

In both the “sala” and “well” congregations, the family movement to Christ helped stabilize and establish the Church. Although the initial converts in the Barnrai movements had no Christian relatives prior to conversion, the pattern of multi-individual accession to the faith occurred soon after. Eight out of ten believers turned to Christ simultaneously with relatives or friends.

The third pattern was that through friendship lines. As peers among close friendship groups considered the Gospel, they often entered the faith together.

b. *Time element.* Leprosy patients, who decided for Christ, usually did so within a year or two of coming for medical treatment at the sala. If the message was not accepted in the initial two years, it was often another five or six years before a definite decision was made. Of course there were exceptions. Some ardently continue to reject the Gospel, while others remain indifferent.

In the newly developing areas of Barnrai, people became Christians within one to six years of moving into the area. They were away from the ties of the old village, working hard to establish themselves in a new environment. This provided opportunity for innovation. The deep loyalty to animistic and other religious beliefs and practices can not easily be changed. Hence the strong opposition to the Gospel from many settlers. On the other hand, others during this time of transition felt their old belief systems were inadequate for ineffective, and so were open to change. The majority of those who became Christians in Barnrai were converted within two years of consistent exposure to the Gospel.

c. *Responsive units.* One of the crucial dynamics of conversion is receptivity. At times political, economic, and social conditions generate dissatisfaction. This leads to responsiveness, not only among individuals, but also among families, friendship groups, villages, and larger homogenous units of crafts or ethnic peoples.

In Uthai such units have been small but significant in the potential expansion of the Church. The Holy Spirit worked through the social structures of the family, primarily the nuclear unit and often the extended family.

### 3. Concurrent Elements Affecting Conversion

The sovereign Lord uses different people, circumstances and means in bringing different individuals to redemption. He speaks to the need of individual's hearts by varying elements of His eternal Gospel. In the combination of these factors, dynamic themes that He is using can often be recognized.

- a. *The influence of persons.* According to the researched data, many different categories of Christians influenced the unconverted to become Christians. Percentages are based on 91 responses of the total 95 in the sample.

Christian neighbors and friends ranked first in importance (23 per cent). Family members were next (21 per cent), with particular advantage from parents, husbands and uncles. All the sons, daughters, brothers or sisters who influenced the conversions of their relatives were mature adults. None were under twenty, so children's influence was insignificant. The influence of the clinic nurses on the sala patients is notable – 21 per cent. (*Note:* the Thai call all lady missionaries, and often male missionaries, too, by the term of “mau” or nurse/doctor. Thus “mau” includes the lady evangelists at the clinics, as well as medical nurses.) Local pastor/elders were also important (11 per cent), while Thai evangelists and missionaries accounted for another 13 per cent of the primary influence. The leprosy patients also indicated the Manorom Hospital Staff affected their decision (6.5 per cent), but only low incidents of well people responded to medical factors as significant in their conversion.

- b. *The influence of evangelistic tools.* Based on 87 respondents, reading the Bible was most effective in bringing men to face up to the Gospel. It was also the primary tool in converting them (27.6 per cent).

Church services and annual conferences were potent means of bringing sinners to repentance (12.6 per cent). Meetings in local congregations seemed about five times as effective as the conference in converting influence. Sala clinics were the agency used primarily in winning leprosy patients (11.5 per cent). Again the Manoram Hospital's dominant effect was on the people in the sala churches (5.7 per cent), little on the well.

The evangelistic team of missionaries and Bible students ranked next in importance (9.2 per cent) as a key tool for winning men into the Kingdom of God.

Christian books were also significant, especially in their influence on those who are now the church leaders and pastors in both branches of the church (8 per cent). Leprosy patients borrowed them through lending libraries at the clinics. The well people obtained them mainly through literature sales and distribution in evangelistic campaigns. (6.9 per cent).

Dreams were less common influences, but were significant factors in leading those who had them to Christ. Of ten people influenced by dreams, six recognize them as a primary cause of their conversion. Sometimes adverse dreams have caused a turning from the Gospel.

Indigenous Christian songs influenced a fifth of our respondents, but only in 5.7 per cent of these were the songs a primary cause of their conversion.

The mass media was a primary cause for only 6.9 per cent of the respondents, although half of them were drawn to Christ by the media. Evangelistic films were twice as effective as radio or Gospel tracts as primary means to conversion, though the casual responses for the latter two media were double those for films. Radio and literature were more widely distributed than the media of films, and had a general 23.9 per cent of response.

Christian Schools and English teachings were not primary causes for directing and of the respondents to Christ. None were swayed by English teaching, and only 2 of 92 respondents were influenced by the schools.

A third or more of all respondents were strongly impressed by the following evangelistic tools leading to their conversion – (1) Bible reading (2) church services and conferences (3) evangelistic team members and (4) leprosy medical clinics. The mass media followed fifth influencing about a quarter of the respondents.

- c. *Circumstances surrounding conversion.* Among the 84 who responded from the sample, the circumstances causing change and the motivation behind them varied.

One of the motives primarily affecting 22.6 per cent of the respondents was fear of going to hell. This is understandable on three counts. First, the concept of hell (*narok*) is a basic belief of the Thai. Buddhism teaches that they must pay for their accumulated demerits in hell before enjoying the benefits of their merit. Second, they have a strong belief and fear in the lord of the spirits and demons (*nai phi*) and the demon keeper of hell (*Yom Phra Baan*). Third, these elements have been brought into sharp focus in rural evangelism unwittingly through poster preaching.

Most village evangelism has centered around four posters used to explain the Gospel. There are two emphases in each, (1) the terror of hell and the devil, and (2) the sacrificial redemption in Christ. The “heart of man” series portrays the demons or spirits in the sinful human heart, showing how they can control man, and how the power of Christ can free him. The joy of acceptance into heaven and the terror of hell are vividly depicted. A character equivalent to Yom Phra Baan reads the judgment book to the dying sinner. The “two hands” poster showed the oppressing hand of the Devil menacing the world with evil, destruction and pain. This suffering is a foundational presupposition of the Thai. The Hand of Christ restores, redeems, and protects by His power over the Devil. In similar ways the “gulf bridged” poster pictures hell, and the “sinner’s dream” poster points out that judgment in hell is inescapable apart from Christ. Thus this has been a dominant theme in village evangelism. However, only 25 per cent of sala Christians felt this was a first cause of their conversion.

A second important circumstance opening people’s minds to the Gospel was a feeling of hopelessness and failure. It affected one in six.

A third circumstance was serious illness (16.6 per cent). It was followed closely by miraculous healing (13.1 per cent). Most of the leprosy Christians emphasized these, as 71.4 per cent of the primary responses for illness and 63.6 per cent of those for healing were from sala members.

Other contributing causes were dreams and visions, fear of evil spirits (apart from those related to the hell concept), loneliness, and poverty. Four of the five who claimed dreams of God or Christ as a primary circumstance through which they turned to the Lord were leprosy patients.

d. *Aspects of the message's appeal.* All 95 respondents indicated various influences of the Gospel message that effected their conversion. Significant elements contributing to their decision were Christ's love (53.3 per cent), His power to cleanse sinners (48.9 per cent), His power to give hope and happiness (47.8 per cent), His power to redeem (46.7 per cent), His substitutionary death (44.6 per cent), and His power over evil spirits (40.2 per cent).

Primary themes from 80 respondents indicated that Christ's love effected one in four. His power to redeem and to give hope and happiness both influenced one in seven to turn to Christ. One in eight, mostly leprosy patients, were moved by His power to heal.

Thus the Gospel met felt needs in various ways. Many multiple aspects contributed to their final conversion, but the power of Christ was uppermost in answering these needs and problems.

A God of love and personal concern was foreign to their religious system. The spirits were hateful and often vengeful. Buddhism had its high ethics, but was emotionless. The Buddha had no personal interest in anyone, nor could he help. Love was conceived as undesirable since all forms of desire were the cause of trouble and were therefore to be extinguished. In contrast, God's love, revealed in His personal involvement with man, met this need. In sickness, trouble and need God's love provided powerful resources for comfort and strength.

Animism failed to instruct the people on their apparent sinfulness. Buddhism did. Its philosophy of endless reincarnations through karma by sin (baab) produced in them a feeling of hopelessness. Salvation seemed impossible to them because the self effort required by Buddhism failed to be sufficient to escape and attain "nirvana" - a state of beingless and nothingness. No other saving power was offered in their religious beliefs. But Christ's redeeming power offered cleansing from sin through His substitutionary death. This met the need of those who recognized their hopeless futility to gain salvation from sin. It gave them a secure hope of deliverance from hell.

In preaching we had deliberately emphasized the power aspect of the Gospel as relevant to present needs of the Thai. However, no extreme "Pentecostal type" emphasis of miracles of healing had been practiced on the Uthai churches. A conservative approach assuring the power of the Lord to overcome evil spirits, to cure sickness, and to perform miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit had been affirmed and believed. Miraculous deliverances and healings occurred, usually through the prayers of the local Christians.

Gustafson argues for a power encounter approach to the rural Thai, who are preoccupied with the fears and frustrations of daily living.

These fears are basically materialized in the form of the 'phi' (spirits). Thus the message to proclaim is 'the power of Christ' over both the 'phi' and the daily circumstances (1970:245).

Frequently the power encounter was with the spirits. Nevertheless in almost all cases, a vital issue was the refusal to make merit by attending the Buddhist temple. Often this was the issue of confrontation, the fulcrum on which the lever of conversion rested.

The teaching of Christ primarily moved only one per cent of them to Christ. The ethics and prohibitions of Buddhist tenets were similar to biblical ones. The Thai apparently needed a dynamic message that met the deep practical needs facing them in the hostile environment of daily living.

#### 4. Counter Pressures Against Conversion

The Christian population is a tiny minority in Thailand. Therefore, the pressures from society at large pose barriers to those who would become Christians. Opposition and persecution inevitably follows those who truly step out in boldness as followers of Christ. Some of the main forces counteracting potential conversion were noted.

a. *Hindrances of endemic religion.* 94 per cent of the Thai are Buddhist. It was therefore to be expected that anyone who considered becoming a Christian faced a serious decision.

Legally, toleration of religion has been law since the edict of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) in 1878. All constitutions promulgated in Thailand since then have confirmed this basic concept of freedom of religion. Only the king is required to be a Buddhist.

However, in the minds of the people, especially in the rural areas where three quarters of the population resided, to be Thai meant to be Buddhist. Anyone changing from the Buddhist religion was looked upon as a traitor to his own nation. This concept strongly countered any move to Christ. Thus the potential convert's problem was how to remain truly Thai and thoroughly Christian.

The Thai being a "face-saving" or a shame based society, in comparison to a "guilt" society, confronted a difficult decision regarding merit making and attendance at the Buddhist temple. Some of the greatest pressure from society focused on these two issues. They became the focus of "power encounter" to use Tippett's term, for Christians made their open departure from reliance on merit at this point. The counter pressures to conversion on this matter came mostly from the people, rather than the priests. Many interested seekers stumbled at this point, unable to pay the costly price of social displeasure. Some tried to go both ways simultaneously, but did not progress in the Christian life until a decisive stand was taken.

Strangely those Buddhists who had not attended the temple for years, or who had neglected merit-making for long periods of time, were unmolested until they decided to become Christians. Then immediately they were pressured by the villagers to return and "make merit" at the temple.

b. *Opposition by demonic activity.* This could best be explained by actual cases which illustrate a common phenomena in Thailand. Where villagers were interested, evil spirits often opposed their becoming Christians. A "black" spirit (phi dam) appeared to one of the leading men at Ipung Noi where several families wanted to become Christians.

The "phi" warned him not to follow the Christian way. The son of a Nong Chang Christian was frightened several times by the appearance of a demon. Deliverance came through praying in Jesus' name in the family. Mrs. Boon Me was disturbed by a familiar violent spirit for several months after she decided for Christ. Complete victory was gained by prayer, and the laying on of hands by the elders.

In Barnrai town an interested couple whose daughter was delivered from grave illness through prayer by the evangelistic team members, rejected Christianity because a spirit kept disturbing them at night.

Mr. Suthin was faced with similar pressures in this same area. As a young Christian he refused to engage in the annual rite of appeasing the village spirits. The villagers threatened to drive him out of the village unless he joined them, since the village guardian spirits would be upset and cause retaliation to the village. He still refused. Later some sickness occurred. A lying spirit possessed a villager and claimed to be Suthin's spirit, declaring he caused the spread of this illness. Partially as a result of much pressure Suthin moved away from this village several months later. Eventually a church was planted in that place about two years later.

I personally experienced the opposition of evil spirits in the Karung area. While visiting Mrs. Saing, a new Christian whose family refused to give up their spirit worship, I was confronted with a spirit. Mrs. Saing had been severely troubled by this spirit for a couple of days, but the prayers of Christians had kept it at bay. While Suthin and I were counseling her, the spirit possessed her before our very eyes. Two hours of prayer followed before she was delivered. In the meantime the spirit (speaking through Mrs. Saing) disclosed its name and identified its medium. It threatened me and my family, cursed and mocked us, evaded answering to the name of Christ, and offered compromises that would bow to the indigenous spirit practices. The spirit complained that so many were becoming Christians in the area, it would soon have insufficient worshippers to feed it. It even prophesied that Christians would be in Kilometer 10. It was weeks later that the first families were converted. This encounter was an evident confrontation of the power of evil spirits with the power of the Gospel. Worn down by the name of Christ, the spirit left Mrs. Saing.

c. *Sanctions from society.* Social forces formed considerable pressures against conversion. Initially these centered in the opposition of family members. Rural young people were unable to remain in Christian fellowship unless members of their families were also Christian. Several teenagers who decided to become Christians were moved to other areas by their families, had their Bibles confiscated, and were put into the Buddhist priesthood. Wives opposed husbands, and husbands wives. Married children persecuted parents, and parents their children. Members of the extended family joined forces counter to the Gospel. Thus the family web while being ideal for expansion was also, at times, the force frustrating the Gospel's advance.

Friends and neighbors ridiculed seekers and new believers with sharp tongued criticism. This stirred up villagers in general to persecute those interested in Christianity, especially by socially unfriendly attitudes. Culturally such actions crushed and embarrassed the Thai recipient.

This led frequently to social and economic sanctions. Sometimes threats of withholding water for fields, refusals to trade, or termination of work contracts and obligations were made. Often pressures were put upon Christians to move out of the villages. Sometimes advantage was taken of these community feelings to steal and plunder the property of Christians.

Then subtler pressures were occasionally used by community officers. Where this occurred it was done unofficially and illegally, out of the prejudice of the individuals involved. However, these actions of leaders were seldom opposed by the villagers who already feared the authority of such men.

An example occurred at the village of "Quiet Fields" in Northern Uthai. Officials encouraged ruffians to shoot up the tents of the evangelistic team and one of the Christian homes. The mother was wounded slightly. Village officials and law officers sent some men to collect and burn Bibles and tracts given many families in the village who were open to the Gospel. They threatened these seekers also. The village Buddhist priest, a relative of the officials, broadcast derogatory remarks and slandered the Christians over the temple's public address system.

Usually such opposition subsides in a short time, after an approach is made courteously to higher officials. However, such attacks discourage those interested in becoming Christians. In "Quiet Fields" the little church stood firm and even grew some, but the potential for growth was drastically reduced.

d. *The tendency to syncretism.* Although most of the Thai are Buddhist, only about one in twenty sincerely follow classical Buddhism. Most practice folk Buddhism, highly seasoned with animism and Brahmanism. Practices such as astrology, vows at spirit shrines, and cultish practices related to agricultural cycle pervade religious beliefs. The ideal religion may be Buddhism, but the actual is a syncretistic mixture. Furthermore, this tendency to accommodate belief to fit the purpose or need poses a threat to the purity of biblical truth of the Christian. Many are prepared to integrate this religious system with a Christian varnish on existing Buddhism - a Christian veneer overlaying the core of animistic beliefs and practice. Herein lies another hindrance to conversion, for the Gospel of Christ stands in direct opposition to all syncretism. While being relevant to cultural forms, the truth of the Gospel core meanings must be untainted by other religions. Reverence for the status quo, so much in keeping with the Thai's non-committal character, tends to be the enemy of conversion. It is easy to adapt new beliefs into the existing system without any basic disruption of orientation or of life style.

This leads to an associated problem. Motivation for becoming Christian may be other than for deeply spiritual reasons. The human trait of forming relationships and alliances in order to advance status, economic gain or social standing can easily be used to become a church member. This is particularly a danger in institutional situations such as Christian hospitals and in commitments of house help or language teachers. "Rice

Christians" arise easily under such conditions. Similar motives are seen in those who think they will get free medicines or treatment at clinics or hospitals if they are Christians. The same goes for those seeking social help.

#### 5. Conserving Converts for Continuing Growth

Retaining those who become Christians is an essential responsibility of the Church. Two categories of people are important in such consideration for church growth. First are those who profess faith in Christ, and second those actually baptized. Leakage occurs from both categories. Some profess, but are never baptized. Some revert after baptism.

a. *Reversion and causes.* During the decade (1965-1974) 62 per cent of the total professions of faith in Uthai (733) were baptized members or adherents at the end of 1974. Thus 38 in each hundred professions (total 278) failed to follow through to baptism. The causes for such were varied, but insufficient detailed data was available to postulate.

Of those baptized, 7 1/2 per cent reverted. This was a fairly low reversion rate, but does not account for any reversions that took place subsequent to the transfer out of the province by baptized members. No data was available for this.

From past observations, experiences, and case studies, the main causes for reversion in both the above categories were as follows:

1) The problem of finding scattered believers. Often the expansion of the Church has been in rural areas where inaccessibility, unmarked trails through woods and across fields, and lack of communication have hindered the shepherding of new believers.

Sometimes people were led to Christ (but not baptized) in an area where they were temporarily working, but soon moved back to their homes and we lost track of them.

At times they gave inaccurate addresses, or incomplete or incorrect names. Since the Thai often used two or three different names, it was confusing, especially in the areas where names were often not well known. On occasions unbaptized seekers used confusing names to cover up any contacts with former creditors. Debts are large problems for rural Thai, hence Thai often hesitate to give their right names, except to well-known acquaintances.

We often asked them to name the Buddhist temple closest to their home, the number of the village, and the name of the headman. Houses were often scattered across the fields and throughout the wooded areas, making additional difficulties in finding them.

2) Failure of adequate follow-up. It was easy for missionaries and nationals to be discouraged in trying to find those who professed to believe or were interested, including contacts made at the hospitals. Furthermore, the small missionary and church force was stretched to its limit trying to cope with the large numbers of such persons, especially in Barnrai where long distances, difficult terrain, and scattered believers were obstacles to efficient follow-up.

Even where the location of the house was known, getting there took hours of searching and travel. When we finally arrived the believer was sometimes away from home. Staying in the homes of believers overnight was often necessary. Some missionaries and nationals refused to do this. National believers with their own responsibilities for their families claimed it was usually impossible to be away from home at night. Traveling at night was dangerous, as well as difficult.

Floods and swollen streams cut off areas from September to December. During the harvest season (January February) believers moved from field to field with their friends in cooperative reciprocal labor, often resulting in their not being at home.

3) Persecution from society. Inability to find some believers, and spasmodic contact with others for limited times, retarded growth and opened the way for reversion especially when those interested faced intense opposition from the community.

Villagers and even family members often refused to direct us to the right house. They sometimes denied knowing the person, gave wrong directions, or simply refused to answer. Once the mother of a young man I was seeking emphatically denied she knew the person or his whereabouts, when in fact he was actually in that very house with her.

Family pressures cut off contact with the Christians. In several cases young men who believed were moved to other areas by their parents and forced into the Buddhist priesthood. One wife was moved by her opposing husband into a distant village where her brother was the abbot of the Buddhist temple, so that she would lose contact with the Christians. In Barn Jan a promising Christian wife was severely beaten by her husband for attending the local meeting. Under threat of his killing her if he caught her in the meetings, she withdrew.

Community persecution was sometimes backed by the priest. In a distant village of Barn Jan the Buddhist priest from a neighboring village organized an aggressive and concerted effort to disband the new small church. He brought constant pressure on the elderly Christian women to go into the temple as Buddhist nuns. One succumbed for a brief time. Threats and community pressure of such intense dimensions are one of the main causes for reversion.

4) Weaknesses in the Thai personality. The Thai is more a diplomat than a confrontationist. Fortified by a lifetime of Buddhist philosophy, he is an escapist by nature, desiring peace at all costs, and prepared to flee or move rather than face the issue confronting him. All men everywhere have such traits in more or less measure. Thus,

when open opposition comes to new believers because they have deviated from the traditional way, a crisis arises testing the ideals of his "Thai-ness." Where Christians are alone or few in any given community, the pressure to revert is greater. It was surprising that under such pressure more did not revert. Only by their dependence on the Holy Spirit and through maturity growth in Christ, were new believers able to resist such temptation. The reality of Christ's power was their fortress. A few reverted to the escape mechanism in drink, particularly prevalent in Lao villages.

One of the largest problems in the evangelism of all men including the Thai is bringing them from a state of noncommitment to one of commitment. They identify baptism as a crucial identification with Christianity, as well as regular attendance at church services. Thus some who progress and begin on the Christian path are reticent to be baptized openly. If they have not so counted the cost of their commitment, reversion or backsliding usually results.

Nevertheless, I am convinced after nine years evangelizing rural Thai, that they need courteous persuasion, and do not interpret this as being forced into such a decision against their will. For example, elderly ladies frequently wait for the bus by the side of the road with their baskets of wares and goods. Of course, they want to travel on to the next town, but as the bus stops they just stand there. Bus boys encourage and persuade them to get on. They want to go, but expect to be persuaded.

- 5) Harrassment of evil spirits. In the early months new believers sometimes became the target for opposition of spirits. This came in the form of demons appearing to a member of the family, or by inauspicious dreams,, or through sickness. In Idang two baptized brothers tell how their unbaptized brother saw them and their children fall seriously ill with fevers, attributed by the villagers to evil spirits. Although he was a Christian believer, when his own family was threatened by the spirits, he reverted, built a spirit house, and returned to spirit worship. Later he was possessed by a spirit, preached about Jesus while under its influence, brandished a machete knife in a threatening way, was involved in stealing a neighbor's buffalo and imprisoned.

Another man, Mr. Jundee, was prepared for baptism following a year of belief as a Christian. During the baptismal service he refused to be baptized because he feared the spirits and declared he could not leave the spirits that protected the fields of his forefathers. Weeks later he testified he was tripped in his field by a spirit who entered his leg and caused a serious debilitating disease which left him emaciated. This led him to death ten months later. Others, of course, have reverted to spirits without such dramatic effects.

b. *Backsliding and causes.* Although the forces causing reversion sometimes resulted in backsliding, the basic causes for spiritual backsliding were lack of worship, fellowship, or witness. Where believers absented themselves from regular worship services, spiritual decay set in and the pressures of the world in this weakened condition overwhelmed them. Where fellowship with the believers was neglected, and friendship

with old companions was fostered, backsliding inevitably resulted. Drinking often followed.

As Christians overcame the persecution from the external opposition, it seemed Satan directed his tactics to internal dissension. The internal conflicts between believers were a major cause for backsliding. Grudges, an unforgiving spirit, and even feelings of revenge lurking behind pleasant faces needed to be dealt with drastically and speedily, or backsliding developed. The scriptural teaching and practice of forgiving one another was essential.

Preoccupation with getting money often led to backsliding. Leprosy Christians who continued or returned to begging practices seldom exhibited a victorious spiritual growth.

Indifference to worship, Bible study, and prayer and lack of positive witness contributed to a decline of spiritual fervor. Where Christians witnessed boldly and aggressively in the hostile community, they maintained a Christian vitality in their own lives.

c. *Mobility.* The mobility common to rural Thailand was and is a serious problem. First, the growing population has caused a tremendous fragmentation of land. As land was divided by the parents among the children of each generation, plots became too small. Hence the peasants moved constantly to greener fields hoping to obtain land that -produced rich harvests quickly.

The second cause is related to financial indebtedness. Few rural Thai are free of debt. Many are hopelessly in debt with exorbitant interest rates multiplying the principle so fast, that they have little hope of release. Many have lost lands, property, and crops to unscrupulous money lenders. In order to pay off debts, they often sought "pots of gold" by moving to new fields. Some moved back and forth on a yearly basis.

Third, some move to areas around the capital where industries and factories are developing.

Often the keen leaders of the little congregations moved away. Where the strong members move, the weaker ones often succumb to backsliding or reversion under community pressure.

The crux of this chapter has been the effective communication of the Gospel. This requires messengers whose lives exhibit the authenticity of the Gospel they proclaim. It also utilizes the dynamics of conversion which, though varying from individual to individual, can often be classified into patterns or emphases. These should be used in modes of evangelistic focus. Furthermore, if converts are to be retained in the fellowship of the church, many counter-pressures to making disciples must be handled realistically.

Now for the final chapter I will formulate an overall strategy to multiply churches. The investigations so far in this thesis will be drawn together in this next and concluding chapter.

## **V. STRATEGY FOR EFFECTIVE CHURCH PLANTING**

In the campaign for the salvation of the nations, three things combine to produce success in mission spirituality, stewardship, and strategy. Spirituality refers to God's activity and the Church's relation to it as recipients of the grace and power of God. Stewardship speaks of the Christian community's delegated responsibility under which the Church faithfully utilizes its personnel and resources through the spiritual energies endowed by God. Strategy means the application of that stewardship in a way that accomplishes God's goals and purposes. It therefore relates to methods and activities designed to make disciples of all nations.

### **A. PRELIMINARY FOUNDATIONS FOR ESTABLISHING STRATEGY**

#### **1. The Role of the Church in Mission**

Church growth is intensely spiritual. It is the activity of God through His Church. It employs the spiritual dynamics of prayer, revealing the dependence of the human agent on the Almighty God. The Word of God provides the life giving message and the food for spiritual nourishment. The Holy Spirit provides the energy of divine will flowing through the Church. He conditions people to receive the Gospel. He sends forth the Christians to win the lost to Christ. He gives wisdom and discernment to His servants concerning plans, methods and strategy to use in multiplying His Church. Thus the Church is primarily the transmitter of the Gospel to the world through the power of the

Holy Spirit. It is the "light" pointing the way of salvation in the midst of darkness. Here is the evangelistic dimension announcing the Word, and calling men to repentance and faith. As "salt" the Church is preserving and purifying society as an outworking of its presence and transforming power in all cultures.

The Church must carefully relate its goals and plans to the redemptive purposes of God for all peoples. This is defined in the biblical mandate of mission. Under a sovereign God the chosen instrument of the Church of Jesus Christ must accept responsibility to fulfill its stewardship faithfully and to complete its explicit duty to make disciples of all the ethnic peoples of the earth. This requires sacrificially communicating the Gospel to all peoples, so that the intelligent option of accepting or rejecting Christ as Lord and Savior is theirs. It demands the planting of functioning churches whereby the converts can be incorporated into the fellowship of believers, be taught in the Word, and be trained in spiritual exercises of worship, witness, and service. This is the primary role of the Church. It is one of the basic reasons for its existence.

The flexibility of culturally relevant method and approach is needed in cross cultural evangelism, but the core message of the true Gospel must remain unchanged and undiluted in

all its purity and authority. This, too, is the responsibility of the Church, because the regeneration of fallen creation through obedience to the Word of God in repentance and faith through Jesus Christ is God's only way of salvation for mankind.

## 2. The Necessity of Goal Orientation

As the Church in general and every member in particular sees the God-given commission to reach the whole world with this glorious Gospel, so will the vision and burden of God's purpose become the dominant directing force of all Christian activities.

In every area the local churches must realistically appraise the dimension of the task before them, and define the present opportunities for potential church proliferation.

Specific goals must prayerfully be set in realistic faith. Tentative steps toward reaching those goals need to be carefully developed for each of the various elements necessary in the emergence of churches through the Holy Spirit under the present conditions. These provide guidelines for programs and evaluation and may at times necessitate changes on the basis of researched assessments of progress.

The two elements of discipline are evangelism and Christian education. In recent decades there has been pressure to divide these two into separate departments. However, from the emphasis in Matt. 28:19, 20 these are not so much two separate entities as two integral parts of the one responsibility, viz. "to make disciples." As two inseparable links in the same chain, they are indivisible and interdependent in the same discipline ministry. Our evangelism must also involve teaching the Scriptures. Our Christian education must likewise involve the emphasis of evangelistic witness throughout. It is not so much one followed by the other, as two simultaneous activities working hand in glove. Some programs of evangelism have fallen short of "making disciples." In such programs Christians work hard without planting churches. On the other hand, some theological teaching also falls short of producing expanding church growth.

In discipline we do not aim for merely quantitative expansion or for merely qualitative depth. We aim at both. We should neither stop our evangelism in order to consolidate, nor drive ahead without sufficient pastoral grounding. Wagner cautions,

Instructing new believers is absolutely necessary, of course.  
The sheep need pastoral care if the wolves are not to snatch them away. But pastoral care is not intended to replace evangelism; it is intended to supplement it (Wagner 1971:170).

Thus, the consolidated aim of both evangelism and Christian education must be to make disciples; and more precisely, disciples working in harmonious local units as the full expression of Christ's body, utilizing the gifts of the Spirit in dynamic witness to the non-Christians around. In Michael Green's apt definition - "Evangelism in the strict sense is proclaiming the Good News of salvation to men and women with a view to their conversion to Christ and incorporation in His Church" (1970:7). Exactly this is the goal of mission.

### 3. Matching Resources to the Task

These goals of world evangelization and church multiplication become the targets for hard work and determined application by all the members of the Church. This is an integral part of stewardship. Responsible stewardship demands the most effective use of all resources, personnel, funds and time for the speediest evangelization of the world's billions.

Speaking of the efficient and proper use of resources in relation to goal orientation, Olan Hendrix writes:

Everything that is done (task) must strategically, importantly, contribute to the stated goal. Goal orientation is utterly obsessed with definitive objectives, and causes everything else to be subservient to that objective. This is the hardest thing to maintain (1970:21).

The deployment of personnel should not only be according to the gifts available, but also in consideration of the growth potential of receptive peoples. McGavran suggests that personnel should be concentrated in responsive populations without abandoning the resistant (1955:80, 109, 125; 1970:229-30).

In similar vein, funds should be allocated to develop the "growing points" of mission (McGavran 1955:112). The cutting edges of evangelism and areas where significant advance into non-Christian territories is occurring should be so financed that discipling continues flout to the fringes."

Church planting goals should govern programs and time schedules as well as resources, and not vice versa. Only as the Church efficiently matches all its resources to the task of proclaiming the Gospel, winning converts, and planting churches can she be declared faithful and responsible in her stewardship. The balance of distribution between home churches and pioneer extension and between nurture and church planting evangelism is a critical one.

### 4. Qualities of Good Church Planters

A personal knowledge of Christ and the Gospel, as well as adequate scriptural training are basic, but without an evangelistic dimension concerned to expand the Church of Jesus Christ, the potential church planter is under equipped. Other qualities are almost as essential for good missionaries. An ability to discern the state of the Church and field, sum up the problems, and determine the causes are highly desirable traits. Then the successful church planter should be a good problem-solver. He is going to tackle problems in cross cultural situations that will require adaption and testing. He is going to find ways of overcoming problems blocking the outreach of the Gospel. Thus, he needs to be an innovator who is resilient and versatile and uses alternative approaches and solutions. Furthermore, much of his ministry will be of a catalytic nature, injecting processes and ideas for the indigenous church to select for implementation. He encourages the churches to plan their own programs.

Foster gives some valuable insights into the qualifications of cross-cultural technicians and change agents. These are applicable to missionaries (1973:252-255). Successful change agents have clear goals and know how they relate to them. They know their own world view assumptions and the premises of their profession. They also exhibit an eagerness to understand the culture of the people among whom they work, seek to appreciate its good elements, and look for possible indigenous solutions to some of the practical problems. They recognize the complexity of cross cultural communication and therefore begin their work cautiously, feel their way, and establish local bearings before undertaking major activities. They learn why things are done as they are, before attempting to change them. They know the sociocultural system of the people they serve. They work through their national colleagues and help them solve their problems. A good church planter will also be well grounded in cultural anthropological insights. This should be a part of his training.

Furthermore the missionary's equipment must include a thorough grounding in church growth principles. He must know all facets of the expansion of the Church, and the dynamics of growth especially relevant to his situation. Research and evaluation will be valuable tools in his hands. He will learn from the experience of others through the study of growth and non-growth of churches, the methods employed, and the difficulties encountered.

## **B. EVALUATING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF EARLIER MISSIONARIES**

One of the foundations helping towards future growth is the clear and unbiased lessons learned from the experience of others. Factors in the growth and non-growth of the Church should be studied. A wealth of valuable information can be obtained by analyzing the ministries of past church planters in one's own and other missions or churches. The methods employed, the difficulties encountered, and the fruit of churches produced are replete with lessons for the church planter. Consider the Thailand situation:

### **1. The Keynote of Evangelism**

In Central Thailand the early missionaries worked against great odds, handicapped by poor language, and intensely concerned for winning the Thai. Their zeal excites the present church planter who works under more favorable conditions, to fulfill his responsibility. Evangelism was a keynote in the exploratory phases of church planting in Thailand. The Overseas Missionary Fellowship had a goal to plant a church in every community and thus spread the Gospel to every creature. Despite this clear goal, evangelism was seldom adequately focused on establishing churches. The real practice did not always exemplify the ideal. No specific strategy was followed to plant functioning churches.

### **2. Policy of Widespread Evangelism**

"Broadcast" type evangelism using filmstrips and preaching by evangelistic river boats, like the "Santisuk", and by the Landrover film unit, spread the Gospel to dozens of villages in the central plains. Such programs were usually one night stands, "passing shots"- by which seeds were sown for the hopeful later conversion of scattered individuals. Wide distribution of Gospel literature was also practiced as the bread of life was "cast upon the waters." Although these methods lacked a concentration of effort to plant churches, they did reach out to the people with the Gospel. Some villagers exposed to the Gospel became Christians later. In some cases missionaries worked with the few existing Christians in the area.

### 3. The Campaign Approach

A second type of evangelism aimed at adding converts was the campaign held in rented buildings, usually theaters. This was largely a Western approach inviting people to come in to hear the Gospel. Foreign musicians, Chinese Bible School bands, and Thai speakers were used. While many attended such campaigns in Paknampho, Lopburi, Chainat, and Sanburi, the response was small and few converts were integrated into churches. It seemed that too much foreignness pervaded this approach. Genuine converts were scarce.

A variation of this was outdoor village presentations. Intensified evangelism of a few days in a village utilized a similar pattern to the above campaign. Although foreigners were predominant, more time was spent with the people in their natural surroundings. It is surprising that such campaigns produced few Christians, especially in the Hanka area. I conclude that one of the main drawbacks was the foreign predominance of personnel which reinforced the concept in the Thai mind that Christianity was the foreigner's religion. False though this be, the Thai commonly believe that missionaries are the paid agents of foreign governments. Furthermore, the Moody Science films used were technically and scientifically too complicated for the village peoples whose general education was grade 4 or under.

Nevertheless, it was the adoption of this method which proved to be a key strategy for village church planting several years later. By increasing national Christian participation, and adding indigenous elements, an effective strategy for planting churches evolved.

### 4. Youth Approach

From the start, children's work was a focus of missionary energy. It was easy to get a group of children together, especially since many wanted help in their English. They seemed to believe more readily than adults, but the social structure precluded their continuation against parental pressure. Furthermore as already noted, their mobility was inconducive to strong church development.

Nevertheless, many missionaries spent a good part of their time teaching English in schools (often with a gospel witness), selling literature at schools, and holding children's meetings. After twenty years only a few Christians won in this way remain in the Church. This approach has failed to add significantly to church growth.

A shifting emphasis to work through the Church and the children of Christians was a healthier approach. Youth camps for these have been valuable in confirming decisions for Christ. The student church recently started in Bangkok is the exception in church planting through emphasis on youth. Nevertheless, in this church mobility is high, accounting for 40 per cent of the increase and 60 per cent of the decreases of this church.

## 5. Medical Approach

In difficult fields it is generally the practice to move towards institutional ministries. The initial approaches of medical missions were in clinics, both general and leprosy. As hospitals were planned and built the general clinics were closed, and the personnel transferred to the hospital, except for the rural leprosy nurses. The general clinic at Nongbua was expanded into a small hospital and has seen small growth in a couple of satellite cells of Christians. Like Manorom Hospital it also has a local congregation comprised largely of hospital employees.

As noted already, the sala clinics were vital as a church planting agency among leprosy peoples and their families. The leprosy wing of the hospital also had a significant effect on the growth of these Christians.

Whereas the general hospital provided a wide base of good will and was a means of broadcasting evangelism to the outpatients who attended, it had only a minor influence in planting churches. Some individuals have been won to Christ in the hospitals and others following their hospitalization. Nevertheless, in comparison to the personnel and cost involved, the results in church planting terms were meager and the hospital church weak.

This situation may be corrected if the balance of medical and church planting personnel was dramatically altered, or if medicals gave more time to church planting evangelism and teaching, both within the hospital, and especially in the surrounding villages the hospital serves. A definite plan is needed to follow up and establish those new believers won in the hospitals. Those who reside in areas not supervised by missionaries require the ministry of a specialized team connected to the hospital. The responsibility of such a team of medicals and church workers would be to plant churches around such new convert families in areas beyond the scope of station missionaries. The principles of family web expansion should be employed.

With the pressure of medical work, and goals basically divergent from making disciples rather than directed by the Great Commission, it is not likely that the hospital approach will become a vital church planting agency without such dramatic shift in emphasis. Nevertheless, some progress is being seen in coordinated efforts by some of the staff. The smaller the hospital, the more effective such a plan is likely to be since the balance of personnel and emphasis is usually closer than that in larger institutions.

## 6. Overall Administration

More than half the field force was related to medical ministries. Most of these were concentrated in two centers. Furthermore, a generally unresponsive field raised formidable barriers to church planting. Administration, therefore, faced a difficult task in this new mission to rural Central Thailand. Superintendents and directors confronted frequent dilemmas.

Until recent years there appeared to be little positive overall strategy for the field. Thus the total program insufficiently integrated. Each station worked as an independent unit on the local missionaries' initiative, with only a few guidelines, such as form of government and mode of baptism.

Missionaries were often moved too frequently and seldom returned to the same station after furlough except for medical workers. Two Thai elders spoke to me on this problem. Since the Thai are slow to put confidence in an outsider, sometimes taking three or four years to do so, they suggested that such changes were detrimental and un conducive to strong development.

The administration's basic philosophy was to occupy everywhere equally and distribute budgets likewise. In the exploratory phases this was necessary, but needed to be questioned seriously as a continuing policy, especially when some areas like Uthai and Chainat indicated considerable receptivity as indicated by the graphs in figure 9.

Allowing small congregations of scattered believers to remain dependent on the missionary for most of the spiritual ministry and church planting developed a syndrome difficult to overcome. Moves to correct this in recent years are encouraging.

Unfortunately little research was endorsed by administrators to discover causes of unresponsiveness, to locate responsive pockets, or to solve problems of communicating the Gospel to the Thai, relevant to their cultural context. Researching and evaluating past ministries, with realism and with sympathy, teaches us valuable lessons to be applied to future strategies.

During the first decade many of these obstacles seemed astronomical to those facing general resistance. No doubt administrators and heads of stations responded as best they could in those circumstances. However, as suggested in this study, when opportunities for greater growth increase, administrators should adjust their strategies to capitalize on the new openness.

### **C. PROPOSED STRATEGY FOR CHURCH PLANTING**

Developing a comprehensive strategy for continued multiplication of churches and the evangelization of an area is a highly complex process. Such a strategy must be based on biblical foundations, practical experience from historical case studies of the area, together with estimates of current potential for the growth of the churches. The findings of this study will now be drawn together in a seven point integrated holistic strategy basic to church planting in rural Thailand.

This is based on the goal of establishing local fully functioning churches. The strategy is one whole. No single section should be isolated or extracted. The danger to avoid

is a piecemeal approach to church planting such as doing just evangelism, or merely a program of nurture.

These seven basic principles apply to church planting in general, especially in extension growth or multiplying churches. However, the details for each case may vary and be adapted within each basic element. Therefore church planters should carefully study the principles and suggestions offered here. They should apply them to each church planting situation before implementing the strategy with suitable plans and program.

The elements of the proposed strategy are:

1. Explore for responsive widely
2. Evangelize the receptive intensely
3. Establish churches immediately
4. Edify members constantly
5. Evolve local pastors speedily
6. Extend new churches persistently
7. Evaluate the program continually

#### 1. Explore Widely for Responsive

The Church faces an evangelistic command encompassing the whole earth. It includes all peoples, of all lands, and in all ages. How then are disciples to be made and churches planted? Where does the Church start? What is the focus of its initial strategy?

a. *Aiming to reach all.* The comprehensiveness of God's desire for all is clear for "He will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). His patient longsuffering is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). He made provision for this in Christ "who died for all" for "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (II Cor. 5:14, 19). Truly in giving His Son God's love extends to all the world, to all men. Yet the phrase "whosoever believes" narrows the redeemed population to those who receive eternal life through faith in Christ, and indicates that those who refuse remain condemned (John 3:16-18). Hence Paul's burden that the Gospel be clearly proclaimed to all (Romans 10:8-15).

The ultimate and desirable goal of mission is to reach all with the Gospel of Christ. Everyone everywhere is to hear, to comprehend intelligently the essence of God's love in Christ's sacrifice, and to have an opportunity to accept or reject the Lord Jesus. Only when the Gospel has been so communicated can it be said that a person or the world has been reached.

Dr. Oswald J. Smith questions, "Why should anyone hear the Gospel twice before everyone has heard it once?" This burden to give the saving news to all, is right. The practical outworking of simply proclaiming the Gospel so that everyone hears, however,

could be disastrous without an adequate strategy to make disciples and incorporate them into worshipping and witnessing fellowships. Smith would heartily agree.

Care must be taken to avoid what Dr. McGavran calls "search theology" which is so preoccupied with seeking it does not determine to find. It proclaims, but does not persuade, sows the Gospel seed, but does not harvest. It often degenerates into raising the social standards of the people while neglecting reconciling men to God" (1970:34-40). In difficult fields it is easy to withdraw behind such a theology, blaming God for the results or rather the lack of them.

Misunderstanding of the Church Growth School's emphasis on majoring on the responsive may cause critics to object that the unresponsive should also hear. Indeed that is the burden of Church Growth, McGavran responds,

Since the Gospel is to be preached to all creation, no Christian will doubt but that both the receptive and the resistant should hear it. And since Gospel acceptors have an inherently higher priority than Gospel rejectors, no one should doubt that whenever it comes to a choice between reaping ripe fields or seeding others, the former is commanded by God (1970:256).

b. *The priority of the responsive.* The sovereignty of God is active in producing church growth by the Holy Spirit, and in preparing people, clans, castes, and families to be receptive and open to change. In the light of Jesus' teaching, and the apostles' practice already discussed in chapter I, these God-given opportunities must be grasped. Ripe fields must be harvested. The responsive are to be the focus for priority in the church's evangelism. The church that concerns itself with the responsive segments of society is surely following God's will. The church that is blind to or neglects such God-given ripeness must surely be accountable to the Judge of all heaven and earth.

Church growth advocates recognize "that ripe fields must be harvested and not all harvesters are Christian" (Tippett 1973:25). There are other aggressive forces keen to harvest. Some of these competitors are - Communism, Islam, Buddhism, nativistic cults, and so on. Thus, today's harvest of souls is urgent. The responsive multitude in the valley of decision, are going somewhere. In many places they are ripe for change, and ready for a new allegiance. The most powerful organism to meet that need is that empowered by the Holy Spirit - the Church. There has never been a clearer clarion call, a dire urgency, nor a Church with so many resources to win the responsive population as in this age.

Most Christians rightly believe they are to work for God. However, it is even more important to work with God. A strategy concerned for the responsive means that the Church is to find out where God's Spirit is at work and get in line with Him. In order to know God's will each member of the Church is to walk closely with God, as Enoch and the other patriarchs. This sensitivity to God's Spirit at work in populations around the world and in lives close by is the biblical warrant for majoring on the responsive. Hence prayer for God to lead to the receptive prepared peoples is vital. Seamands writes,

We must work where the Holy Spirit is working. We must go to peoples whose hearts have been prepared by the Spirit for

the preaching of the Word. We must harvest fields that have been ripened by Him (Tippett 1973a:106).

C. *Identifying the responsive.* The problem facing the Church is that it is impossible to reach all the world's peoples simultaneously. Nor does everyone want to be reached for Christ, though they urgently need Him. Some because of impossible barriers, such as political, linguistic, etc. may be presently beyond the reach of all normal endeavors. This then points to the need for a strategy based on the principle of receptivity, and of sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

"Winning the winnable" is the directing purpose of evangelism. Thus, locating the winnable is an essential element of strategy (McGavran 1970:58, 256).

In virgin areas, resistant fields, or complacent populations responsive segments may not be apparent at first. Soil testing should be carried out constantly to measure changes in the receptive pulse of such peoples.

Recognizing the problem of the determined resistance to the Gospel among some major populations, Dwight says that the bulwarks of Buddhism Mohammedanism, and such like, face the Church as "great hostile fortresses all along the line of her advance." His keen insight suggests looking for cracks in the resistant walls or flaws in the stubborn stronghold as "strategic points for effective advances." These strategic points are subsidiary objectives rather than the central citadel of organized opposition. By locating smaller units of responsiveness (often inconspicuous among the dominant populations) missionaries avoid striking in force at a main center before its time is come. Strategic points thus opened to view by the Providential march of events are ones effectively to be used (Dwight 1905:82-83).

A good illustration of this strategy was already discussed in chapter III. Whereas a frontal confrontation with Buddhism in Central Thailand met strong resistance, evangelistic emphasis among responsive leprosy peoples gave the vital impetus to church growth.

In contrast, where large populations are responsive, the ability of the Church to cope adequately in evangelizing, gathering into the Church, and nurturing the believers is often stretched. It is here that help from all branches of the Church is needed so that God's prepared harvest is not lost or spoiled.

In the light of this, the duty of all the activities of the Church outside of worship and adoration to the Lord is to find the responsive and to win them to Christ. This requires a radical readjustment of goals and maybe a traumatic shift of emphasis in many good activities which, as handmaidens to the Church, have a declared or implied evangelistic dimension. These agencies seldom, if ever, produce converts or churches, casually nor automatically. They must be directed to that purpose, and one of the greatest values of many mission "works" and church agencies in education, medicine, and teaching can be in locating responsive peoples. The haphazard approach must be replaced by a deliberate strategy geared directly towards church planting.

d. *Practical application.* Since God is concerned to find the lost, and to reap the ripened harvests among responsive peoples, all agencies of every church department should have as one of their primary goals the identifying of responsive families, clans, tribes and communities.

All methods of evangelism and activities of the Church are means to identify receptive populations rather than ends in themselves. The philosophy of "broadcast" evangelism scattering the Gospel seed by literature, radio, preaching, and such like, needs redefining. Without denying the value and need of this, harnessing such activity purposefully to pinpoint receptive pockets is highly desired. Sharpening these tools deliberately to do so enhances their value. By all means the Church is to spread the Gospel widely, but while exploring she is to identify the responsive. Failure to do so is irresponsible and poor stewardship.

The goal of literature distribution to place the Gospel in every home is commendable. But to do merely this, without a definite objective to find out which homes are genuinely interested and open to the Gospel, is an inadequate strategy. A definite plan to find the responsive by literature and Bible sales and distribution, and to follow them up with consistent evangelism and nurture is the most important part of such a campaign. Distributors fill out cards on the spot when they come across an interested family.

Capitalize on responses from Christian radio programs and Bible Correspondence Courses. Collate the data of the individual responses and categorize the patterns of age, locality, and ethnic group units. A co-operative effort to evangelize and plant churches among these responsive units can then be implemented. Christian mass media strategy should include this.

In a similar way, Christian hospitals and clinics can systemize criteria measuring the spiritual hunger and response of patients who come from far and near. By careful coding and collation, the responsive families and villagers will be identified if consistency is maintained conscientiously. Changes of response will be observable. This is one key for discovering where the most receptive are located. Evangelistic teams concentrating on such peoples usually result in increased church growth and more efficient deployment of evangelistic personnel.

*All* forms of evangelism, especially approaches to the masses, need built-in goals and processes to discover the receptive units for further intensive discipline. This may be termed "probing evangelism." It includes literature thrusts, evangelism by river launches, village film evangelism, and similar methods. The value of this approach is twofold. First is the proclamation to as many people as possible. Second, and more important, is the identifying of responsive areas, pockets and families. This requires a determined policy and program to discover the receptive for further follow up.

In the social and cultural ministries of the Church, a primary element must be evangelism, for without spiritual regeneration a transformed social order is unlikely. The command of Christ calls the Church to "make disciples." The result in view is a transformed society. Without evangelism and conversion it is possible to see outward material advancement and the alleviation of poor social conditions, but only the Gospel can truly liberate society. Failure to proclaim Christ, while preoccupied with the cultural and social ministries, produces a danger of fighting against the Lord Himself. Often God in His

sovereignty allowed such conditions to arise preparing those peoples to respond to His redemptive message.

The social ministries must also be concerned to identify the responsive and win them into the Kingdom. "Service is good, but it must never be substituted for finding" (McGavran 1970:32).

In summary, all ministries have a vital role to play in identifying the responsive. All preparation phases for expanding the Church and multiplying congregations is to be dominated by this objective. The Church is to spread the Gospel widely, deliberately exploring for responsive peoples.

## 2. Evangelize the Receptive Intensely

a. *Concentration of witness.* Having isolated those pockets or units of receptive peoples, it is important to reach them effectively within a reasonable time. In the meantime, saturation of witness, evangelism, and teaching continues. The more repeated contact with the Gospel the responsive receive, the better informed and responsible is their decision for Christ likely to be.

A concentrated evangelistic campaign forms the center of phase 2. By this is meant, evangelism concentrated on the responsive area for a consecutive number of four to seven or more days. The evangelists will be resident during this time and proclamation with persuasion is the emphasis.

As many Christians as possible in the nearby area should supplement the members of the evangelistic team who may come from more distant provinces. Co-operative efforts using many with the gifts of evangelism is possible and desired in such campaigns, for reaping is expected among the receptive.

The goal of such thrusts is more than evangelism. Its aim is church planting. Thus all evangelistic activities, be they large meetings, witness, or personal visitation, have the clear objective to win the receptive in families in order to incorporate them into a church in that locality. In most cases this means planting new churches.

b. *Value of the evangelistic team.* The teams I have used have been both small and large. Small teams usually number about six or seven, large teams up to thirty. Their composition consists of Christians in the local province, others who volunteer from other areas, local missionaries and pastors, and Bible school students sometimes with their missionary or national teachers. The resources of several Bible schools, colleges, or seminaries can be drawn on in the summer months. Volunteer unpaid evangelists form the bulk of the team.

In a village where there are no Christians, or very few, a strong impact is made when a large number of Christians converges on an area for several days. The power of the transformed Christian life is lived in view of the whole community. The bold witness of many Christians strengthens the interested seekers to follow Christ. Even villagers with little interest are impressed as these Christians openly proclaim the Gospel during the evening

programs. Thus, the impact of a large team of Christians in intensified evangelism on a village is usually quite phenomenal. In receptive areas it can be dramatic.

The Gospel becomes the center of conversation, discussion, and debate in homes, coffee shops, the market, and throughout the village. Even those who oppose are brought into dialogue with the Christian message. Those whose hearts are aroused are confronted with a living demonstration as well as the spoken witness.

c. *The question of timing.* The suitability of timing for such campaigns is important.

In general the majority of evangelism in Thailand is done either in meetings held in churches, or in the villages during the day. The major drawback of this daytime approach is that the man power, the workers, and the family heads are usually away in their fields, or in the forests from early morning to dusk. The sick, the old, the infirmed, the lazy, the children, and the priests constitute the main body of people left in the villages during the day. Hence daytime evangelism has certain apparent weaknesses in terms of strong church planting.

Thus the team's approach to nighttime evangelism, as well as resident daytime witness, provides a better opportunity for reaching those in the responsive area.

The timing of campaigns is also affected by the seasons and the agricultural cycle. In Central Thailand the most appropriate time is the summer months particularly February through April. This follows the harvest of December and January, and is in the dry season. The impossibility of traveling in the flood season is replaced by universal accessibility. Most of the people are freer after harvests and tend to spend more time around their villages, getting equipment ready for the next planting season when the rains come in May or June. There is, of course, a mobile population to consider.

Another problem of timing is encountered. During these summer months the annual Buddhist temple fairs are held in the villages. Any planned campaign should avoid proximity to such fairs for obvious reasons.

d. *Effective tools for reaping.* The key to public evangelism in Thai villages is in consecutive evening programs. These should consist of the best indigenous means of communicating the Gospel. (1) Since film units are commonly used by medicine sellers and battery companies traveling from village to village, film evangelism units fit the local scene. As many people are semi-literate and some are illiterate, the use of biblically based films with Thai sound tracks are helpful in communication. (2) Dramas in the form of plays, as well as classical dances, are vital expressions of Thai culture. These are used increasingly as modes of evangelism for Bible stories and skits on salvation. (3) Indigenous music and song provide a further avenue to speak to the Thai heart. Preaching from posters symbolizing the redemptive story adds a further dimension.

A larger team makes such presentations feasible. Themes for different nights can enhance the Gospel focus. However, the danger of seeing the program as the major end must be avoided. It is a valuable contribution towards the goal of church planting and provides the most public dissemination of saturating the general population with the Gospel. But the goal is planting churches.

The whole family generally attends the evening program, except for one member who watches the house. Even he is able to hear the program over the loud speakers resounding throughout the village. The program starts about 7:30 PM or later. Preliminaries of children's meetings may precede this, using the microphone with interjected invitations for all to attend. Thus the manpower, leadership, and family heads usually see much of the Gospel presentation.

The strength of the evangelistic concentration,, however, lies in the personal encounters of the team members with the people based on the exposure of the evening presentations. Counseling and witness continues after the close of the program and often carries on for hours in the local homes. Much effective evangelism and teaching is accomplished around the smokey crude oil lamp with the family squatting around it. Early next morning further house visitation and discussion in the market are resumed. Some seekers come to talk to team members. Some accept Christ. During the day follow-up continues, aiming to answer questions, clarify communication, teach, and persuade seekers.

Thus, the evangelistic teams' concentration is basically a twenty-four hour commitment while they are in the village.

In practice, personal evangelism must clarify the cost of discipleship, the expectations in Christian stewardship, and responsibility required of those who follow Christ wholeheartedly. Its objective is to keep families in tact as far as possible, calling whole families to decide together for the Lord Jesus Christ. This gives the potential for solidarity and strength in the virgin church. Even before receptive individuals are converted they should be encouraged to discuss the Gospel with their own family and relatives.

If in the final analysis the whole family is unprepared to follow Christ, those members who are should be accepted since the Thai adult is free to decide, but it will mean inevitable pressure and opposition from the family and community. Majoring on the family approach usually gains some whole families within a short time, as well as some divided ones. These initial converts form the nucleus of new churches.

### 3. Establish Churches Immediately

Since making disciples is the responsibility of evangelists, the new converts' nurture commences while the team is still in the village. As the team moves on, they are committed to the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, provision is made for their spiritual oversight.

a. *Principles underlying church philosophy.* It is important for the church planting evangelist to have a clear concept of the church, especially the functioning church discussed in chapter I. Furthermore, by starting with the church in mind rather than preaching points, the correct objective is more likely to be reached, particularly in receptive areas.

In cases where only a couple of converts are made, a church philosophy is necessary so that their being isolated believers will be avoided. Initially where only scattered individual believers are found, the church unit should be conceived as the whole area or

province. Practical issues to see the church functioning will need to be overcome in such cases.

As churches develop around each scattered believer or small cell, the Church takes on local form. Congregations emerge. Churches organized in the area are autonomous under God, but our philosophy suggests that until such times as local congregations are proliferated, scattered believers will become the responsibility of the nearest local church. Every believer is to be connected to some congregation.

Besides this, as new believers are won, no matter where their locality, they are to be thought of as related to the closest congregation whose members accept responsibility for their nurture.

Another element of church philosophy relates to the concept of the embryonic church. As God calls a number of believers in a particular locality to Himself, He provides all the gifts necessary for the Church's full function in that embryonic form. They may be latent and undeveloped, but they are there, and the Holy Spirit will use them.

b. *Initiating new functioning churches.* When converts are made it is important to start the functioning church as soon as possible including those in virgin areas. Where several families of believers are won during campaigns, the team immediately teaches them their responsibility to the church. The initial instruction of salvation and its implication in terms of the Body of Christ requires a functioning form for worship and fellowship.

Meeting with the new believers daily while the team is resident gives opportunity to exhibit the basic functions of worship, prayer, praise, and instruction from the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Often one or two members of the team can remain behind for a few weeks to teach and train such new disciples and to win other interested families to Christ. Sometimes team members can return to encourage the new church for several Sundays after the campaign if they are within reasonable distance.

During this phase the new believers are baptized after being examined. This is the sign of the beginning of the Christian life, not its completion. The Thai tend to think of religion in terms of study courses, learning religious teachings and precepts. The more one knows, the higher the level he attains. After long pre-baptismal catechisms culminating in baptism, the Thai frequently withdraw from regular fellowship. Some consider they had arrived or "attained". Some churchmen disagree with early baptism. However, I believe it is appropriate, following declared intention to follow Christ through repentance and faith with wholehearted obedience. Roland Allen states,

We have tried to discover what teaching St. Paul gave to his converts. This teaching followed, it did not precede baptism. For baptism, apparently very little knowledge of Christian truth is required as an indispensable condition...apparently anyone who was prepared to confess his sins and acknowledge Jesus as Lord might be baptized (1962:95, 96).

Each believer must be encouraged to accept his vital place in the functioning church. The biblical church is constituted by function rather than by a certain number of members.

The integral elements of worship, fellowship, and witness by the members sharing in prayer, ministry of the Word, testimony and singing must be taught to the new disciples from the outset. Indeed in these they are to function week by week whether or not missionaries or pastors are present. To this is added local leadership, discipline, and the keeping of the sacraments, to give the church its distinctive entity as the Body of Christ. In the Barnrai area where this approach has been tested, new churches have been planted from the start. They are not dependent on missionaries, but on the Holy Spirit functioning through the believers and local leaders.

c. Instruction and nurture. Following conversion, constant nurture is essential. Evangelists are not only spiritual mid-wives, they must also carry on post natal nurture in the spiritual realm if the believers are to mature.

The team members give initial instruction and teaching, followed later by those who act as "temporary" pastors, and by missionaries and local pastors who visit frequently, especially in the months immediately following the campaign.

Instruction should be geared to the felt needs of the new believers, grounding them in the faith, helping them meet their spiritual problems, and strengthening them in Christian growth. New converts in Thailand need instruction in meeting opposition that inevitably comes from relatives and the community, and attacks that come from the dark world of the spirits from which they have been redeemed. One problem that seems to worry new converts is the question of death, and how their bodies are to be cared for in that event. Special teaching is needed promptly on this subject. Confession of sin and failure in the Christian life, restoration of fellowship with God and fellow man must be included in early teaching.

Training in prayer and in receiving spiritual nourishment from reading and studying the Bible are required to help the converts in these difficulties. Cassettes as well as literature help in this instruction, giving repeated opportunity to absorb more spiritual truth and to share it with others.

Instruction in sharing with fellow-believers, especially in praying for each other's problems and supporting one another in fellowship is essential. In these early stages of Christian growth, teaching on worship in the home and in small groups is important. Bold witness to family and friends should be encouraged. Simple directions on winning family members to Christ through personal testimony is needed. Witness in daily life gives foundation to the spontaneous joy and enthusiasm of new converts.

Incorporating new believers into a functioning local church and nurturing them in the rudiments of worship, witness, and sharing provides a solid base for survival, growth, and expansion. Tardiness in such action or failure to do so greatly jeopardizes the potential for spontaneous growth.

#### 4. Edify Members Continually

The initial nurture just described is to flow into a long term program for spiritual development. The objective of such edification is what might be called three dimensional Christians, that is mature Christians whose life's behavior is exemplified by (1) knowledge

and practice of biblical truth, (2) prayerful dependence on God through faith, and (3) bold consistent witness to those outside of Christ.

a. *Maturity in spiritual growth.* Meaningful worship is one expression of depth in spiritual experience. Every effort is to be made to enrich worship to the true and living God. The living experience with Christ is to generate genuine worship in spirit and truth. This becomes a primary but difficult task of continued edification. It calls for a solid grounding in the Word of-God and its practical application in committed Christian living and holiness.

Various avenues to help deepen such knowledge are available, such as good Bible Correspondence courses, Scripture Union Bible Reading, Cassette Bible School courses, and mature Christian radio programs. Where such materials are geared to Christian growth they are inestimable tools for edification. The ministry of God's Word and expository preaching enhance these methods. Believers should interact among themselves, sharing lessons from the Scripture in church services. This encourages virilient growth.

b. Encouragement through prayer cells. As God speaks to the Christians' hearts through His Word, so prayer provides the way by which Christians speak to God. Prayer is a vital link of communication with God, providing the means of manes communion with the Lord. The dire needs of the soul can be brought to God through intercession. It should be taught and exhibited in the growing church.

Voluntary prayer cells are a valuable aspect of strategy for church growth and mission. Small cells are preferred over large ones, though united congregational prayer is needed. The regular members of each prayer cell pray for their own spiritual needs, for effectiveness in witness, and for specific relatives or friends who need the Lord's salvation. Simple manuals for instruction on commencing cells and using them encourage spiritual exercise and growth.

Stress the need of intercession for foreign missions and the unreached peoples of the world. Vision is thereby enlarged as well as spiritual burden and practical measure to reach the lost world for Christ. Through this peasants receive a new education of peoples and cultures broadening their educational horizons and their spiritual perspective.

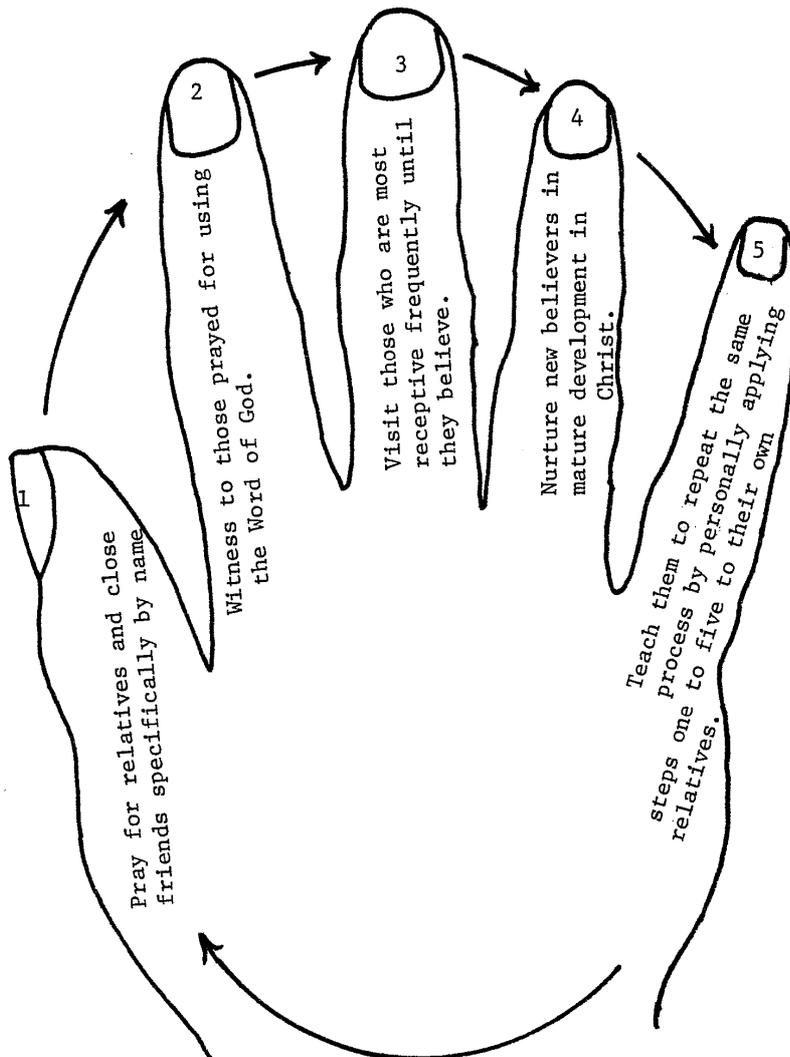
c. *Training for evangelism and church growth.* All members of the Church are to be mobilized for witness. In order to prepare them better for continued expansion they need training in evangelism and the principles of church growth.

Emphasis on defining the true Gospel, communicating it, preparing the lay witnesses., leading souls to Christ, and initial nurture of new believers point to the need for adequate manuals and training. The value and practice of evangelism in the family context demands special and careful explanation. I wrote a manual on "Church Growth through Prayer Cell Evangelism" especially for this purpose. Others like Russell Self and Malcolm Bradshaw provided valuable help in this development. It attempted to communicate these principles in the Thai cultural setting. Two central concepts were the five finger evangelistic pattern, and the continuous spiral for multiplying churches. Here only the five finger evangelistic pattern is noted. This approach is oriented to the individual evangelist, the group, team or church, aiming for the conversion of individuals, families, or other homogeneous units. The five

progressive steps cohere in an overall strategy. To arrest the progression at any one point is to seriously impair the effectiveness of evangelism and nurture. Here is a translation of the Thai five fingers evangelism strategy seen in figure 19.

1. Pray for relatives and close friends specifically by name.
2. Witness to those prayed for using the Word of God.
3. Visit those who are most receptive frequently until they believe.
4. Nurture new believers in mature development in Christ.
5. Teach them to repeat the same process by personally applying steps one to five to their own relatives.

Figure 19  
Five Finger Personal Evangelism Strategy



The problem of evangelism being too superficial without sufficient consistency and depth must be overcome. Adhering to this five point strategy helps to do that. As specific prayer is made for certain relatives and friends, God prepares both the believer's heart and that of the non-Christian. As witness progresses, based on God's Word, observation will show some more receptive than others. These will become the objects of repeated and frequent visits, discussion, and witness. In the process of prayer, witness, and increased exposure to the responsive seekers, it is likely they will believe in due time. Immediate nurture must follow. The praying Christian who already has the confidence of the seeker is the one who should teach him as much as he knows of Christian growth and the Bible. He should introduce the new believer to church worship, and help him in his burdens and problems. Furthermore, his is the responsibility to encourage the new believer to witness, teaching him the five basic elements.

d. *Unity through conferences.* The fellowship of Christians and churches engenders unity and a feeling of entity. Isolated Christians and small congregations facing opposition in a spiritually hostile community tend to be discouraged. Holding regular conferences of several of these churches in a local region boosts the morale of the members, and gives opportunity for a deeper expression of worship and teaching.

Quarterly or semi-annual conferences on a wider area basis also enhance this oneness. A wider vision and understanding is fostered. Through much interaction individual problems are often recognized as common to many other believers, rather than unique. Mutual encouragement, co-operation, and sharing result in renewed vigor in the local church.

Annual church conferences for several days build on the local and area conferences. This gives possibility for a wider base of sharing especially concerning future plans for church multiplication and similar projects. Easter and Christmas seasons are often suitable events for regional, provincial, or national conferences.

Such conferences in rural Thailand are valuable functional substitutes for the Buddhist festivals and temple fairs. They not only cater for spiritual needs, but also give outlets for mutual enjoyment of fellow Christians at conference meals, singing, drama, and instruction.

e. *Strengthening by seminars.* Workshops and seminars aimed at specific tasks, responsibilities, and functions of the church provided added incentive to pastors, elders, and lay leaders.

Workshops have a most valuable impact when held in the local church, involving the whole congregation in ministry to the surrounding community. This overcomes the superficial aspects of training seminars in unfamiliar territories where application in practice is required. Locals contacting their own intimates in familiar surroundings is superior.

Seminars on larger regional or national levels are important in training selected personnel, especially if they return to their own congregations to train the members to implement the principles learned. Workshops on church growth, training leaders, evangelism and such like, provide important opportunities for cross fertilization of ideas and experiences

especially in nation wide seminars with inter-church representation. This can result in co-operative projects of evangelism, training, and church extension.

f. *Using church buildings.* Strategy concerning church buildings varies from situation to situation. I believe it is best to allow the national believers to decide on such matters themselves. Missionaries may suggest several alternative solutions, but the decision should be the national Church's. Furthermore, like structure and organization, development should be according to the need of the situation, rather than tradition or jealous competition with other churches. Flexibility is the key word.

Churches may meet in houses initially, but usually they expand causing existing premises to be inadequate. In Asia there is also the reticence of believers to speak freely if the church remains in a certain person's home.

They often feel it is his church, because it is in his house. Therefore, some location on common ground is often better. Freer discussion and sharing is thereby encouraged. This may be rented premises or property owned by the church. Fellowship in house groups may continue during the week, but united worship and ministry should be focused at the church center. This was the pattern in Acts. The church met from house to house and in the temple, or in synagogues (e.g. Acts 2:46).

g. *Handling the mobility problem.* Mobility among rural farmers is a growing problem. Converts from among this "fluid" population must be established in the Bible and linked to the Church. Strategies to cope with the problem of nurturing Christians who move to other areas where no churches are, must be developed.

Where a Christian moves into areas of other churches, co-operative communications are needed to inform the transferring member of the church closest to him, and the churches of his arrival and address. The problem is often compounded. Such moves are often made with little prior notice and frequently without any definite new address. Relatives are usually informed weeks later of the final destination.

In many cases it is necessary for someone from the old church to visit the member who transferred out after he has resettled. Encouragement and help can be given, and where possible personal introduction to some member of the nearest church made. The difficulty of travel and finding the correct house has already been discussed.

Another common problem is the distance from the nearest church in the new area which makes it impractical to attend regularly, or for the church members to visit the new transferee. To this is added the lack of concern of many churches to follow up such persons consistently.

Mobility adequately handled has great potential for church multiplication, particularly through Christian leaders who move. Where the member has moved to an unchurched area, as is often the case, the strategy should include occasional personal visits from the former church members, and encouragement for the transferring member to witness and establish a church in the new area.

This emphasizes the urgency and value of adequately training new Christians early in the nurture program to use their spiritual gifts, to evangelize their relatives and friends, and to

apply church growth principles in church multiplication. Should they move away, they will then have a set of tools to use with confidence.

#### 5. Evolve Local Pastors Speedily

A fifth essential aspect of successful church planting is the training and appointment of indigenous leaders to each local congregation. They are the life-line in spiritual nurture, leadership, and stability. The training of these pastor-elders is a vital element in church growth strategy.

a. *Priority for sound expansion.* The Scripture declares we are to teach faithful men that they may teach others (II Tim. 2:2). Developing biblical church leadership is vital to the ongoing growth of the Church. As the Church expands, adequate pastoring of the new congregations is essential for healthy development and survival. Thus, pastoral leadership training is an integral and necessary priority for the continual multiplication of churches by extension growth. Winter says, "the care and feeding of a small congregation is more important than any other single problem"(1969:335). McGavran writes that one of the four characteristics of a well nurtured movement to the Christian faith requires that

leaders from among the new converts are trained so that at the earliest possible moment the new congregations are assembled under their own deacons, elders and teachers (1970:313).

He also suggests that most multiplication of church growth occurs in and through small churches; thus, leaders in the small churches should be a focal point of our training program. Many of these will be unpaid local pastors; some will be partly paid leaders. They claim priority for training in order to effectively use their gifts in leading and pastoring. Weld observes that

In most areas of the world the advance of the Church ' has depended on the laity or an unpaid ministry. There are never enough pastors to go around (1973:18).

b. *Principles for cultural relevance.* Where are such leaders to be found? Who should be trained? How are they to be developed? By which process is the teaching best accomplished? These and other serious questions must be answered if the right and acceptable leadership in an indigenous situation is to be fulfilled.

If the emerging congregations are to be indigenous or rooted in the local community, the missionary must be culturally sensitive to the people. Careful discernment is needed lest the Western orientation be imposed upon the leadership patterns, church government, and theology which is supra-cultural and consequently unchangeable. This must never be syncretised nor compromised. However, there are also areas of the biblical record which are culturally oriented models, since the Bible is a multi-cultural Book. In such fringe areas the Scriptures are the unchanging data base, upon which the national church should be allowed autonomy of the theological, structural, and leadership development appropriate to their natural cultural patterns.

The cross cultural problem is particularly acute in the areas of propagation, communication, teaching, training and administration, since the missionary's viewpoint is largely foreign to the indigenous cultural patterns and World View. Reyburn states that

the missionary carries Western culture with him and communicates it whether he wants to or not. This is so even if the communication of Western thought forms comes across as nonsense and confusion to the native (Smalley 1974:264).

Thus in planting churches, in training their leaders, and in preparing texts and manuals for teaching, adequate research into the indigenous forms and cultural patterns should be undertaken early. The indigenous modes and processes are likely to be more effective vehicles for leadership and government in the new churches than the imported patterns of the missionary.

c. *Patterns of Leadership.* Cultures differ in their mode of leadership. They range from the individual dictator type to the "democratic" unanimity of the whole lineage, caste, or tribe. Age also may be significant for leadership in certain cultures. In many cultures, such as those of Asia, maturity of age is generally a requirement for accepted leadership. The social dynamics of relationships must be carefully considered, especially in the selection of right leadership. Weld notes "In the third world youth is less prestigious. Maturity is more important culturally" (1973:15).

A further problem highlighted in some Asian societies is the fact that a paid pastor of a local congregation is often thought of as the hireling or servant of that church. Since the members pay his salary, he should obey them and do their will. This is not true everywhere, but has proven to be a weakness in Thai churches.

Then there is the difficulty of "figure-head" leadership as opposed to "opinion" leadership. True leadership must be seen primarily as a function, not as a position, although it often carries that connotation as well. Too often a prominent person who becomes a Christian is put too quickly into leadership in the church, often both by nationals and missionaries. When he is not truly a spiritual leader there is no need to imagine the havoc this causes. Sometimes the problem relates to the method of appointing or selecting elders. Be careful and prayerful in selecting truly spiritual leaders that will influence the opinion making patterns of the society.

The indigenous process at grass roots level forms the basis on which to direct a relevant leadership training program. Luzbetak advises missionaries to:

seek out true native leadership...the type of leadership that is meaningful not so much in the missionaries' home country, but in the particular sociocultural situation in which he finds himself (1970:16).

d. *Problem in training.* Seminaries and Bible Schools have an important part in training church leaders, especially for city churches and top leadership positions. One of the problems of training men to fill leadership functions especially in rural churches is the fact that institutions are mainly training young men and women whereas Thai culture demands the maturity of age to fulfill these responsibilities. On the other hand, the educational

requirements required by training institutes generally cannot be met by the older generation. A further hindrance occurs when men are trained in Western orientated institutes, as they often have difficulty in communicating at the grass roots level in terms and concepts easily understood by the semi-literate, following higher education.

Weld points out another facet of this problem:

An equally significant cultural change may occur in the student who comes from a rural church to study in an urban residence program. After becoming accustomed to a higher standard of living, it is very hard to adjust to the more primitive conditions from which he came (1973:12).

Furthermore, curriculum should be scrutinized critically. It is easy to set up academic subjects to form a curriculum. Most Bible Schools on the field are merely Western transplants in this respect. Truly indigenous schools are hard to find. However, the training of acceptable leaders for any situation must be based on a curriculum that is determined not so much by a list of academic subjects, as on specific criteria expected of the pastor in the performance of his functional role, and on the need of that particular situation. The effectiveness of leadership training will depend on the diligent application of these principles to the curriculum. Weld suggests "Courses should be geared more directly to the needs of the students. This requires flexibility in the curriculum" (1973:63). Of course a balance of biblical data must be included to protect from cultish error. The whole counsel of God is to be taught to leaders.

Since answers to leadership problems will vary for different situations, I will explain the model used in Uthai thani as an experimental pilot project for rural Thailand.

e. *Pilot project.* The setting and development of the Uthai Churches has been described in chapter III. The lack of adequate indigenous leadership and pastoral care was always a pressing problem.

Since 1960's some attempts at lay leadership training included Short Term Bible School, (STBS) held in the local areas (extension), Central Night Bible Schools, and Leadership Workshops and Seminars. A few nationals went to resident Bible Schools in North or Northeast Thailand. Although these various means encouraged the impetus of developing local leaders they were inadequate for the long term local leadership needs. In Uthai during 1968/69 an attempt at an adaption of Nevius's system in regular monthly four-hour teaching sessions stirred some interest.

A syndrome of dependence on the missionary had developed in Uthai over the years, much to the missionaries' frustration. When any decision on work or program was raised, the inevitable reply of the Thai believers was "*Laew tae Acharn*" "It depends on the missionary. It's up to him!" Thus, missionary dependence was a serious problem as most teaching, pastoring, organization, and evangelism rested on the shoulders of the missionary.

During 1970 a program of psychologically preparing the churches and their leaders for a shift of responsibilities was under way. They were faced with two facts. On one hand was the increasing responsiveness and development of new churches taking more of the missionary's time in extension. On the other hand was the reduction of missionary personnel

in Uthai. A dilemma for local leadership was certain. Action was both desirable and needed for survival.

In February 1971 I suggested an unpaid pastors' training program based on principles similar to T.E.E. (Theological Education by Extension) be considered. After discussion by both nationals and missionaries, the following proposal was prepared on May 11, 1971:

1) Lay Pastoral Training School.

(a) Aim: To establish lay pastors who can teach the Word to others, and meet the local and immediate pastoral needs of the congregation. The foreigner's role must change in favor of local national leadership. The missionary will become the supervisor and teacher of lay pastors, instead of the pastor to each of these churches.

(b) Principles: We are aware of the tremendous value of our Bible Schools. They play an important role. The proposed school is not aimed at doing away with the Bible School, but rather of supplementing it at an intermediate level of need which our local churches have. The premises on which this school is initially begun are:

[1] -- The training of lay leaders and pastors should relate to the local situations and not be divorced from the dynamics of the local society.

[2] -- The time away from the local situations will be kept at a minimum as opposed to the normal Bible School concept of leaving home for 9 or 10 months at a time.

[3] -- The local laymen usually understand the inner workings, conflicts, problems and reactions of his fellow villagers much better than the missionary or visiting national pastor or Bible School student.

[4] -- The training given is to be put into practice week by week, instead of being "stored" for future use. The "student" at the training session becomes the "teacher" to his local group.

[5] -- The cost of travel to and from the training center and the cost of food at the center for about 30 lay pastors will be considerably less than it would cost to send them to a long-term Bible School. Most church groups here could not afford to send a representative to our full-time Bible Schools, reasonable though the cost may be.

(c) Proposal: That a lay pastors' training school be set up in Uthai under the following conditions:

[1] -- The local believers of each group select the ones most suitable according to the Scriptures to come for instruction as teachers.

[2] -- The local believers promise to stand behind their local pastor and help in his travel expenses to the center. They agree to support him by prayer and their co-operation in the local group. They agree to come regularly to the worship service.

[3] -- The chosen lay pastor agrees to willingly sacrifice the time each month to come regularly for instruction. He understands that this ministry is voluntary and that he does not receive a salary from the church for it. Travel expenses related to this training is not his personal responsibility, but that of the church.

[4] -- The lay pastor will carry on his regular work in the fields, etc. during the week, but will faithfully minister to the local group on Sundays. Where urgent calls for visitation or spiritual counsel are asked for, he will be willing to sacrifice the time to help in these cases.

[5] -- The centrally located Uthai Church, with its sleeping and eating facilities, has been offered by the Christians for the initial center. It is envisaged that because of distance a subsidiary center may be set up in Barnrai in the future as the need arises.

[6] -- The lay pastor school will commence June 2/3, 1971 from noon to noon over two days so as to accommodate the travel conditions to and from Uthai according to the bus schedules. The school will be held once a fortnight in the initial period. It is hoped that a one week resident school will be held, possibly each six months.

[7] -- National pastors such as Mr. Bun Mee and Mr. Yu (Bible School graduates) are to be involved in teaching in the school from the outset, and may also develop into assistant supervisors to the missionaries in relation to these churches.

[8] -- The cost of food for the school in session will be met through the local churches' offerings.

[9] -- The initial curriculum for the school will focus on the four major emphases of Bible Knowledge, Evangelism, Pastoral Care, and Leadership.

[10] -- Preparation of Bible messages will be done during the training sessions, for teaching in the local church. Simulated practice teaching sessions and discussion will be integral parts of the program.

2) Implementation of proposal. The proposal was accepted by both nationals and the missionary team. On June 2/3, 1971, 14 attended the first Lay Pastors Training Session. They represented ten churches. The enthusiasm for this program spread, and the following sessions 21 attended from 15 churches. The motivation and mutual encouragement has continued since, averaging over 20. Those who came for training were the mature adults, recognized by and generally functioning in some way in their local congregations. Both men and women attended.

(a) Curriculum: The curriculum at first was based directly on need and majored in biblical themes on questions and particular problems of the believers, e.g. death, persecution, victory over sin, power over evil spirits. Also included were the practical aspects of church accounts, conducting baptisms, serving communion, handling formal ceremonies, etc. A further emphasis was in the area of evangelism and church growth. The "Prayer Cell Evangelism" manual was basis for much of this. Practical use of preaching posters was included.

(b) Home study: The lay pastors were observed in action at their local congregations by the missionaries and supervising pastors. Thus, feedback for further teaching to those needs was obtained. As time progressed pertinent doctrinal themes and certain biblical books entered the curriculum. At this time home study was still on a correspondence course basis, as well as personal Bible study. In early 1973 a new approach

to home study was made, aiming to make it more dynamically relevant to the cultures and problems of the pastors. The study program devised included assignments of (1) study the Scripture text, (2) read a simple Bible commentary on assigned Scriptures, (3) listen to drama cassette of that biblical section (22 leaders had access to playback cassette phones, most of which were the mission property on loan to congregations for additional biblical input), (4) memorize texts summarizing the biblical theme, (5) answer questions in writing on guided study of the above materials, including personal applications to the local situation.

(c) Seminar sessions: These assignments were completed and brought to the seminar sessions. Further discussion, teaching, practice preaching, testing and problem solving sessions became integral parts of the program. The group dynamics seemed a vital key. This led to a natural decision making pattern being developed by the church leaders - namely at the seminar sessions on problem solving and discussion. In the evening films and audiovisuals related to the sections under study were often used. This enhanced both understanding and review. Summaries of the lessons were also duplicated and distributed for further study before pastors taught lessons selected by them to their congregations. A lending library was set up so that the pastors would have access to Christian books and texts.

Five day retreats for lay pastors and leaders have been held in 1973 and 1974. Additional teaching, fellowship and discussion in residence situations proved valuable in binding the churches and their leaders together. Regional, provincial, and annual church conferences also added to building this feeling of unity and entity.

During 1974 subsidiary centers at Idang and Bamrai were begun.

3) Evaluation of training. The process and method outlined above seems superior to the materials presently available. However, the following indicate some problems that need further action in this Uthai program.

(a) More research is needed in the area of indigenous educational process, and communication system.

(b) The home study materials at present lack an immediate verification of progress though this is possibly helped by the multi-media approach.

(c) The educational levels are still below grade 4 generally and could be upgraded.

(d) More time in apprenticeship type situations is needed between missionary and pastors in field experience.

(e) A revised evaluation of pastors behavioral requirements is needed and its grading regularized.

(f) Better teaching methods and study helps need to be explored.

(g) As progress in training advances, pastors could study T.E.E. texts at more advanced levels apart from the above program. In all, this pilot project has resulted in much cause for encouragement as a program for training rural pastors.

1. Increased Thai initiative and outreach has resulted.

2. More national evangelism and church planting has been accomplished.

3. Group dynamics have been giving solidarity to the pastors.
4. A natural decision-making pattern for the churches has evolved. Problems are shared and discussed. Solutions are suggested and decisions made in the training group sessions.
5. The area of discipline has been sharpened and activated by the nationals.
6. The dependence syndrome has been reduced drastically.
7. Sharing for prayer resulted.
8. Financial independence and sufficiency is a reality.
9. The older leaders have been revitalized by the zealous new leaders.
10. The newer leaders have been helped to maturity by the older ones.

The progress of this program amazed us before the Lord. A year after its commencement, the national pastors and elders ran this training for three consecutive sessions without the presence of the missionary. In July 1974 the churches officially recognized and ordained 17 of these leaders in the churches. It is in the hands of such men that the hope for the future growth of the Church rests in these days of potential church explosion across the populated plains of Thailand.

Leaders, pastors, or elders must function in the local churches for two basic reasons. First is to lead Christians into spiritual maturity and to care for their spiritual needs. Second is to train the congregation to expand the Church and to mobilize the members to evangelize the community.

This second reason forms the next aspect of the overall strategy. The training of lay evangelists to become church planters is vital. Some evangelists will be trained in the elder/pastor training program. The more the better. Others will be trained in similar short term workshops and seminars. As many members as possible should be enlisted to expand the local church and to extend it beyond its community.

#### 6. Extend Churches Persistently

The key to survival is reproduction. The evidence of an organism's health and vigor is its reproduction. God's will for His people is that they be fruit-producing (John 15:1-8). The Church is not to be sterile and static, but self-perpetuating and dynamic. God wills church multiplication.

Winter defined three significant types of church growth - (1) expansion, (2) extension, and (3) bridging (1974:17-20). Before explaining these productive mechanisms of increasing the Church, a potential problem needs clarification.

a. *Setting goals for reproduction.* The Scriptures demand personal and group spiritual development. Christian nurture, holiness, and maturity are important. However, they must never become ends in themselves. Nothing blunts the sharp edge of witness, evangelism, and mission more than introverted "perfection growth." Where this becomes the goal in itself, reproduction in terms of church growth is usually lessened. As essential as

nurture and service are, they must not be substituted for reproducing disciples and churches. The goals of reaching all, making disciples, and planting churches are paramount. They must govern the whole church program. All else should prepare members to fulfill the Great Commission.

Similarly leadership training is not to be its own objective. It has a biblical purpose. God gives missionary apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers for one fundamental purpose. They are to equip the regular church members to do His will and minister to the world so that His people will be fully gathered in and functionally trained to His glory (Eph. 4:11-12).

Each church should therefore set goals prayerfully in the light of God's purpose. They must reflect the Church's mission to the unconverted world and their understanding of the present opportunities for spiritual reproduction.

Ideally these goals should reflect maturity growth (discussed under phase 5) plus expansion, extension, and bridging growth.

b. *Expansion growth.* The increasing of members in the local congregation is expansion growth. This is produced in three ways.

First, near neighbor evangelism brings converts into the Church. Personal witness, family outreach, and prayer cell evangelism are means of expanding the local church in the community.

Second, as children of Christians personally receive Christ and become responsible members of the congregation the Church expands. Biological growth supplements conversion growth in increasing the Church in the surrounding society.

Third, as members of other churches transfer in, the church expands. This is valid expansion. It is vital that transferring members from other areas be anchored to local churches and not left to drift on the currents of the world.

Each local church should have definite strategies, goals and plans for expansion growth reaching into its own society to make disciples.

c. *Extension growth.* Another way of increasing the witness of the Gospel is by extending the Church into other nearby areas. This differs from expansion growth which "fattens" the local congregations with new members. By extension of the Church is meant church planting. The local church now reaches beyond itself by establishing new congregations independent of itself though often closely associated with it.

Such church multiplication was a phenomena of the early Church. The proliferation of congregations through dynamic evangelism is a mark of a healthy church. Reproduction of churches in areas where the light of the Gospel can shine to unchurched communities is one significant means of evangelizing the world.

In Thailand rice is sown initially in small seed plots. The new rice plants grow closely together. Left like this, however, little fruit will be produced. Only as farmers pull up the rice seedlings, and transplant them in prepared fields, is abundant harvest expected.

Similarly the extension of the Church by a couple of members or a few church families moving to other areas often produces new churches. This is particularly true where such extension is deliberately planned among responsive peoples.

Each congregation should have goals and plans to plant a new church in a specific area accessible to their church. This should be the target of their prayers and the focus of their evangelistic energies.

Members should evangelize and teach consistently until new disciples are gathered and a new church is established. Then they should branch out to plant another congregation and so on. Church planting is a continuous process which demands the churches' energies in extension of the Gospel, in deliberately multiplying churches. The new congregations likewise are to engage in church planting, extending beyond themselves. Special evangelistic teams should be encouraged and home missions organized.

d. *Bridging growth.* The command of Christ to make disciples is modeled on an ever expanding spiral. He told His disciples to witness in ever widening circles from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria unto the ends of the earth.

This model for the growth of the Church reached a new dimension at Samaria, for here a cultural barrier was to be overcome.

Bridging growth is the communication of the Gospel and the planting of churches across cultural barriers. It builds bridges of inter-cultural communication to proclaim Christ and persuade disciples to follow Christ and establish churches in their own culture.

The Samaritans were geographically close to the Jews. They could communicate linguistically with each other, but both were antagonistic to the other. They were culturally similar, yet sufficiently different.

The Church is to break through such barriers of hate, race, and culture with the Gospel of Christ. Christians of any race are not to impose their cultural forms on the despised minority within its reach, but to encourage them to worship the true God in their own language and culture in their own churches.

In Thailand, as in most of Asia, are peoples who have a "double identity" culturally similar to the Samaritans. Both the Chinese-Thai and the Lao-Thai are peoples whose cultural differences and similarities produce tension and friction between themselves and the "pure" Thai. Each consider themselves superior and the others inferior. The Church must humbly bridge these barriers to plant churches and evangelize the culturally despised close to them.

The barriers of class and caste, while generally hostile to each other in the stratification of society, provide a means of inter-communication. The functions of such bridging provide the Church with means to evangelize those with close cultural differences, comparable to the Jews and Samaritans. In some cases the hostility is too close for this extended neighbor evangelism.

e. *Cross cultural mission.* As cultural distance widens, so the effective communication of the Gospel becomes more difficult. The barriers are larger and harder to

surmount. This calls for a more specialized approach. It requires cross cultural mission. For the Thai Church to reach the Sea Gypsies of the South, or the Akha tribes of the North, cross cultural missions is necessary, even though geographically they are reasonably accessible.

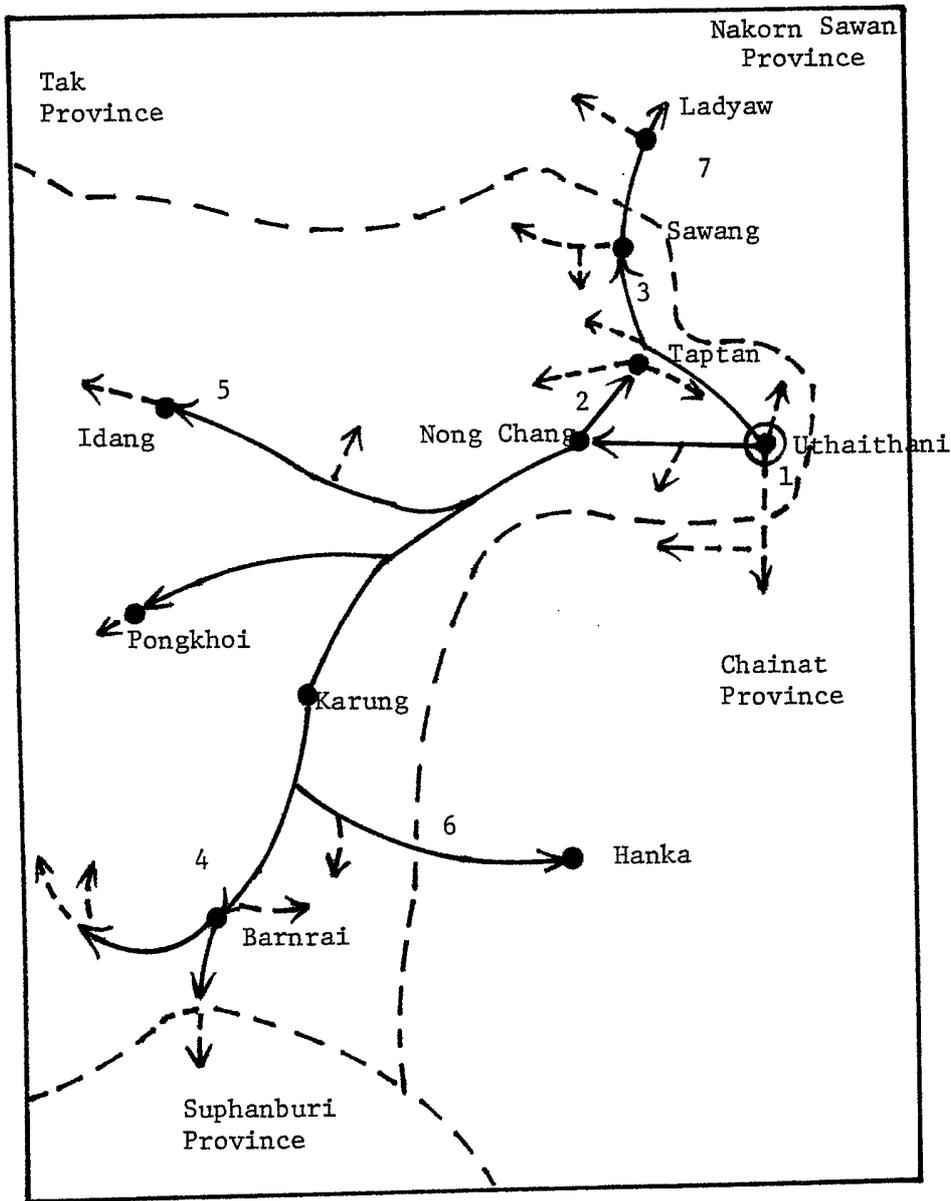
Winter's study indicates that most of the unevangelized world has so much cultural distance from the preponderance of Christian peoples that cross cultural missions are essential if the world is to be evangelized in our generation. Winter emphasizes that cross cultural evangelism is the highest priority of the Church. Only by it will at least 87 per cent of the unreached world be effectively evangelized (Douglas 1975:230). Large numbers of nominal Christians can be reached by near neighbor evangelism, but not those with vast cultural barriers.

The day of missions has not passed. The Church must therefore have a vision, set goals, and plan for cross cultural mission beyond its cultural boundaries. In both the Western world and the nations of the third world, churches live under the shadow of billions who need the Gospel. The Lord's command to mission obligates these churches to send forth cross cultural missionaries, men called and anointed by God from local congregations, denominations, and national missionary societies across the world.

Western missionaries have succeeded in planting the Church in the soils of many cultures, but frequently they have failed to infuse a missionary burden for the world in some of these churches. They have produced many fine churchmen, but few missionaries. They have established innumerable seminaries, but few missionary training schools. Strategy demands a change here. Some schools for mission are now being established in the third world, for example in the Philippines and Korea. Missions and church growth should have a larger emphasis in curriculums of seminaries. New structures, voluntary associations for missions, are needed in the strategy of church multiplication in cross cultural situations. The third world churches are sending and will continue to send their own missionaries under their own mission societies.

The key to cross cultural mission lies in the prayer burden of indigenous churches for the world, particularly by a small number of national Christians dedicated to mission through biblical vision and concern. Such men of vision should set up functionally independent mission organizations to facilitate the processing of missionary candidates and their placement in ripened harvest fields.

Figure 20  
Extension Growth of Uthai Churches



To illustrate these types of extension growth figure 20 shows the extension vision and action of the Uthai churches and missionaries. The lined arrows indicate major thrusts in

church multiplying extension. The dotted arrows show additional extension. The progress of extension types is recorded by numbers on the map.

#1. The Uthaihani Church expanded by winning families in the community to the Lord mainly through the local leprosy clinics.

#2. The extension started by planting churches in places like Nong Chang. Members from nearby churches in Uthai joined local believers to establish new congregations. Small churches multiplied in the districts often branching off existing congregations.

#3. In December 1964 the Uthaihani Church sent Pastor Yu to the inaccessible Northern district of Sawang as their home missionary to establish churches.

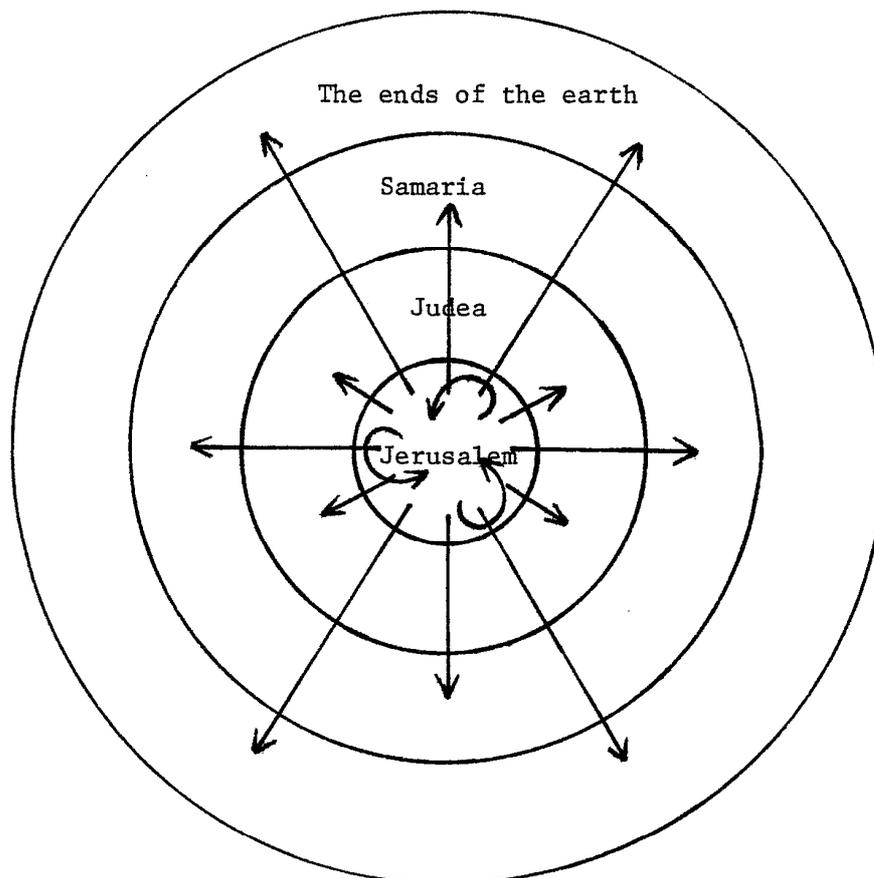
#4. Bridging growth of the Samaritan model of closely related cultural people began with the 1967 thrust into Barnrai District. This was among Lao peoples, and Thai Christians from Uthaihani evangelized with the missionaries in this venture.

#5. Uthai Christians moving out into Idang (Barnrai) started a congregation and won Karen tribal people to Christ. Basically this was a cross cultural mission situation. A Karen man who knew Thai helped communicate. Subsequently a blind Lao girl who spoke-Thai, Lao, and Karen fluently aided in its expansion.

#6. Further extension into the adjoining district of Hanka was made as Lao Christians reached their relatives there.

#7. From Sawang a thrust was made to plant churches in the Ladyaw area where responsiveness was expected. This expectation came from probing evangelism by the Landrover film team, and reports from the Manorom Hospital that patients from Ladyaw were receptive to the Gospel.

Figure 21  
Extension by "Acts 1:8 Increase"



Jerusalem = expansion growth  
 Judea = extension growth  
 Samaria = bridging growth  
 ends of the earth = cross cultural mission

The size of these congregations was small, but the principles of extension significant. Adequate nurture and persistent church planting sustains the balanced health of a church.

God's will is for churches to develop "Acts 1:8 increase" diagramed in figure 21 on page 234. Jerusalem speaks to the expansion of the local church in the community. Judea indicated the planting of new churches in the adjacent areas of their own culture. Samaria points to church planting evangelism among the cultural minorities and dispersed peoples found close at hand. "The ends of the earth" requires bridging growth, extension by cross

cultural mission to those who are culturally diverse. Mission is a vital link in strategy to make disciples and multiply churches to all ethnic peoples of the earth.

One final point remains in the overall strategy. By its progress towards the biblical goal is measured.

#### 7. Evaluate the Program Constantly

Valuable goals are those which can be measured. Planning sets direction towards those goals and purposes. Evaluation is the process and means to check the direction of a program or activity. Whether consciously or unconsciously man is always evaluating and checking his progress.

a. *Purpose of evaluating.* Evaluation is vital in most areas of life. Every time a person looks at his watch, glances at his car's speedometer, or checks his bank account he is evaluating. Failing to evaluate leads to trouble.

A pilot is keenly aware of the necessity of evaluation. He takes off, sets course towards his objective, and spends the rest of the flight evaluating. He checks the wind velocity and its effect on his direction. He determines the exact position regularly. He often has to make mid-course corrections in order to reach his correct destination.

One purpose of evaluation is to check whether or not one is moving in the right direction towards his goal. The church planter has biblical goals set before him. During his evangelism and church planting work he needs to evaluate and check that he is moving in the direction of God's goals. Sometimes evaluation reveals deviation from "making disciples" and side tracks away from the direction of planting the Church. Corrections are often necessary to get back on course.

A second purpose of evaluation is to check progress. During the flight the pilot checks to determine his progress towards his destination. Changes in wind speed or other factors may affect his estimated time of arrival. An unexpected headwind may reduce the safety level of his fuel and a technical stop or other changes may be necessary. Evaluation determines his progress.

The church planter should regularly check his progress towards the biblical goal of making disciples. Many barriers, hindrances, and unexpected circumstances are common in multiplying churches. Accurate evaluation reveals true progress. Sometimes advance is faster than anticipated. In such cases stepping up the plans and program are necessary to care for spiritual nurture and church planting. Wise is the church planter who frequently evaluates the progress of his mission.

b. *Tools for evaluating.* Tools are important for any craftsman or professional worker, including the missionary. They must, however, be suitable and efficient. Church growth evaluative tools must be simple, reasonably accurate, and manageable. To ignore such tools is poor stewardship. To use them for evaluating direction and progress towards God's goals is responsible stewardship.

The science of Church Growth uses research tools, records, and graphs for evaluation. To determine which peoples are most responsive, tools are being developed to research data that can be plotted on a resistance receptivity axis. Records such as individual cards for

seekers and members, a church roll of baptized believers, statistical records of gains and losses in membership and their causes, weekly attendance and offering charts, financial accounts, and annual church growth statistical forms are some of these vital tools. The church planter uses them to evaluate the strength, weaknesses, and progress of the church and the spiritual growth of the members (for models see Smith 1973:67-80). These simple but basic tools should be kept up to date and employed in the evaluation process. Great elaboration is unnecessary. Accuracy is desired. Consistency is necessary.

Responsible reporting is a second type of tool for church growth evaluation. Where plans and programs related to strategy are assigned or delegated to specific personnel for action, responsibility is also required of those persons. Careful reporting must be an integral part of the evaluative process.

Such reports should be submitted on a regular schedule. Progress reports should be prepared, and informative accurate synthesis should be sent to prayer supporters. They are one of the most valuable resources in the spiritual conflict encountered in church multiplication.

Data gathered by the tools of records and reports are to be carefully evaluated.

c. *The recycling of lessons learned.* Raw data, informative reports, and personal impressions are valuable only as they are researched and evaluated in the light of the goals of a project.

It is necessary to analyze reports and records and to collate the findings for discerning consideration. The aim of evaluation is to learn lessons that will keep the program moving in the direction of the goal and speed it towards accomplishing the objective.

Both positive and negative lessons need consideration. Honest evaluation and unbiased criticism guide programs to reach their goals. Discovering causes for non-growth can be as valuable as those for growth when corrections are made to bring them into line.

Positive action on precise evaluation leads to a self-correcting mechanism in the program. As lessons are learned they are recycled for future action. Unprofitable actions are discarded. Fruitful ones are fostered. Thus, evaluation feeds into the existing process to function as an upgrader to performance and progression towards the objective of church planting.

Thus, evaluation is to operate at every level and in each phase of church growth strategy. All elements of the strategy, the plans, and the working program are to come under the constant scrutiny of the evaluative process. The means of seeking responsive areas, evangelizing, training leaders, or nurturing the Christians are to be evaluated. The whole program and overall strategy are to be checked regularly so that no vital element is neglected and the criteria of planting new churches is met. No plan should be minutely followed without evaluation. Plans set direction, but evaluation guides their outworking to reach the goal.

d. *Continued post evaluation.* Evaluation should continue after the initial program is complete and new churches are functioning. Honest reporting of follow through checks, of problems encountered, and of victories won is recommended.

Careful church growth studies in the post campaign years are also important to know that the churches planted are continuing on the right course. If the strategy to extend the Church and multiply congregations is adhered to, this will give adequate opportunity for further evaluation. The reader should refer to "Aids for Diagnostic Church Growth Research" (Gerber 1973:41ff).

Graphs of growth, comparative studies, and additional research determines future growth potential and the new directions for additional movements in church multiplication.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Our search for an effective strategy to multiply rural churches is now complete. Our pilgrimage started with God, His purposes for redemption, and His strategy to reconcile sinners. His command to "make disciples of all nations" led us to observe the Thai Church's struggle to emerge and survive. From the lessons learned in the growth of the rural churches of Central Thailand, a seven-fold comprehensive strategy unfolded. Each of the elements stand as inseparable links in one vital chain joined to the goal of making disciples and multiplying churches.

The need for specific goals to plant the church and to have definite plans to accomplish it still requires a dogged determination to find receptive peoples. In dependence on God it demands much labor in evangelism to start new churches. The care and nurture of the believers, and the training of local pastors and church leaders calls for perseverance. Beyond that is the extension of the witness of Christ by planting other churches until Christ returns. In the meantime, constant evaluation guides and directs the multiplication of functioning churches to God's glory in every community of every ethnic people until we hear our Lord's "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).

## APPENDIX A

### STATISTICAL TABLES

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**TABLE 1****SELECTED STATISTICS OF THE C.C.T.**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Organized Churches</u>	<u>Ordained Ministers</u>	<u>Communicant Members</u>
1912	35	7	6,084
1915			7,646
1920	49	10	8,038
1925	51	25	8,289
1927	52	26	8,935
1930	53	25	8,584
1935	60	29	9,124
1940	68	28	9,712
1945	(approximate members at end of war)		8,000 (1)
1950			13,422 (2)
1955	109	58	15,816
1960	125	51	17,634
1965	127	52	18,275 (3)
1970	159	33 (4)	22,345
1971	159	54	22,410
1972	164	59	22,800
1973	166	65	24,225
1974	(to June)		26,691

Source: (1) W.R. Wheeler *The Crisis Decade* 1950:128  
C.C.T. Office, Bangkok  
(2) International Missionary Atlas (1952)  
(3) This is the Fourth year this same figure is reported.  
(4) This is probably a misprint from C.C.T. office and should be read 53.

**TABLE 2****C.C.T. MEMBERSHIP BY DISTRICTS**

	<u>C.C.T.</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1974*</u>	<u>% increase</u> <u>1970-1974</u>
1.	Chiengmai	5426	7400	36
2.	Chiengrai	4748	6125	29
3.	Lampang	1105	1325	20
4.	Prae	1891	(1855)	
5.	Nan	1590	(1934)	
6.	Bangkok-Udom	1747	2554	46
7.	Chinese	1779	1883	6
8.	Petchburi-Surat	422	506	20
9.	Nakorn Sritamarat	208	304	46
10.	Karen tribes	950	1095	15
11.	Nakorn Pathom	532	666	25
12.	Chinese Baptist	<u>924</u>	<u>1044</u>	<u>13</u>
		21,322	26,691	25

Source: Office of the C.C.T. Bangkok

\* Minutes of General Council Meeting of C.C.T.  
July 10-12, 1974

**TABLE 3****FOREIGN MISSIONS IN THAILAND**

PROTESTANT MISSIONS: *	Personnel in 1973
Affiliated with the Church of Christ in Thailand	
American Baptist Mission	38
American Churches of Christ Mission to Thailand	10
Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions	2
Church of South India	2
Evangelical Covenant Church in U.S.A.	2
Korean International Mission	2
Marburger Mission	24
Presbyterian Church of Formosa	2
United Christian Missionary Society (Disciples)	11
United Church of Christ in Japan	2
United Presbyterian Church of U.S. A.	<u>36</u>
	131
Affiliated with the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand	
American Assemblies of God	9
Christian and Missionary Alliance	60
Christian Literature Crusade	4
Christian National Evangelical Commission	-
Far East Broadcasting Company	1
New Tribes Mission	23
Overseas Missionary Fellowship	245
Philippine Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, Inc.	8
Scandinavian Pentecostal Mission (Swedish Free Mission & Norwegian Free Christian Mission)	29
Worldwide Evangelization Crusade	38
Japan Christian Missions to Thailand	7
Voice of Peace	-
Youth with a Mission	?
World Outreach (formerly Slavic and Oriental Mission)	<u>1</u>
	418

TABLE 3 (Cont.)

<u>Non-Affiliated and Independent</u>	<u>Personnel in 1973</u>
Bible Society in Thailand and Laos	2
Campus Crusade	-
Christian Brethren	14
Church of Christ (American)	28
Finnish Free Foreign Mission	35
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada	12
Seventh Day Adventist Churches of Thailand	79
Thailand Southern Baptist Mission	57
Thailand Child Evangelism Fellowship	3
World Vision Foundation of Thailand	1
Independent Missionaries	<u>3</u>
	234
<b>TOTAL PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES</b>	<b>783</b>
<b>Roman Catholic Foreign Missions in Thailand</b>	
Brothers of St. Gabriel – Thailand	31
Camillian Fathers and Brothers	16
Society of Jesus in Thailand (Jesuits)	14
LaSalle Brothers	13
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate	7
Paris Foreign Mission Society	69
Priests of the Sacred Heart of Betharam	23
Redemptorist Fathers	36
Salesian Fathers and Brothers	71
Societas Auxiliarium Missionum	6
Stigmatine Fathers	<u>3</u>
	289
Catholic Nuns from 14 orders	<u>129**</u>
<b>Total Catholic Missionaries</b>	<b><u>418</u></b>

Source: 1972 Christian Directory to Thailand

\*\* 1968 Thailand Official Year Book

Note: \* Includes missionary wives; generally includes furloughing missionaries.

**TABLE 4**  
**ANNUAL BAPTIZED MEMBERSHIP OF CENTRAL THAILAND (O.M.F.)**

	Stations		1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963		
Saraburi	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	5	6	6	
Lopburi	1	3	1	9	9	15	15	12	12	12	12	12	12	16	
Angthong	-	-	-	2	1	1	5	8	8	8	7	7	7		
Singburi	-	-	-	1	3	4	4	12	11	11	11	13			
Chainat		2	6	16	13	17	21	21	23	27	41				
Manorom				4	8	18	26	31	33	33	56				
Uthai	3	1	8	21	34	59	62	72	73	74	73				
Ladyaw	3	1	8	21	34	59	62	72	73	74	73				
Peknampho	-	3	6	13	11	10	11	10	8	9	10				
Chumsaeng			1	1	3	10	18	23	26	29	27				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>251</b>				

	Stations		1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974		
Saraburi	6	8	8	11	11	11	11	12	11	9	13	17			
Lopburi	15	22	21	21	24	31	42	51	48	51	57				
Angthong	7	11	11	10	11	14	15	14	13	13	15				
Singburi	13	13	13	13	13	11	18	21	21	26	37				
Chainat	44	48	56	61	67	77	86	103	108	132	156				
Manorom	76	63	67	68	68	68	676	3	71	68	66				
Uthai	77	84	77	78	90	108	136	184	238	307	306				
Ladyaw	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	10	10	17				
Paknampho	5	6	7	8	22	31	24	31	29	49	43				
Nongbua	2	4	4	10	16	20	18	36	44	42	46				
Chumsaeng	27	21	19	22	24	24	24	14	14	13	14				
Bangkok									4	19	39	47			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>624</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>821</b>				

**TABLE 5****ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF CHURCHES IN THAILAND**

<u>Church/Mission</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>AAGR</u>	<u>1970-1973</u>	<u>AAGR</u>
C.C.T.	17,634	22,345	2.25 %	24,226	3.5 %
Am. Bapt.	2,481	4,589	6.5 %	5,441	8 %
C. & M.A.	1,310	1,636	2.5 %	1,785	4.7 %
S.D.A.	616	1,787	11 %	1,686	-
Sth. Bapt.	299	925	12 %	1,219	10 %
O.M.F. (Cent.)	<u>190</u>	<u>445</u>	<u>8.5</u>	<u>763</u>	<u>20 %</u>
	22,530	31,727	3.5 %	35,120	3.5 %
Pentecostal	* 620	* 3,000	16 %	5,540	20 %
Others	448	1,122		2,410	
Total	<u>23,598</u>	<u>35,849</u>	<u>4 %</u>	<u>42,980</u>	<u>6.5%</u>

Sources: Church-Mission Statistics, Correspondence, and Questionnaires

\*Based on verbal estimates

Roman Catholic Community	109,133 (1959) (1)	152,112 (2)	3.25 % (2)	167,194	5 % p.a.
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Source: (1) 1967 Catholic Directory of Thailand

(2) Father Boland Arch Bishop's Office, Bangkok

**TABLE 6****UTHAI PROFESSION OF FAITH 1964-1974**

	Years Not Station Recorded	Professions Recorded	Baptism 1965-74	Unbaptized Adherents 30/9/74	Adj. % Loss all Causes
Angthong	3	21	12	8	26
Singburi	2	35	31	2	22
Chainat (1)	-	116	147	2	-
Monorom	2	106	52	35	32
Uthai	-	733	326	129	38
Ladyaw (2)	-	24	14	9	5
Paknampho	1	148	67	19	47
Nongbua	1	107	55	5	49
Chumsaeng	2	29	12	7	46
	11	1319	716	216	
Adjusted (minus Chainat)		1203	664	181	34

Note: (1) Not all professions accurately recorded.  
(2) A new station in the last 3 years.

Source: O.M.F. Central Thailand Station statistics – Superintendent's Office.

TABLE 7

## CONSOLODATED STATISTICS FOR CHURCHES IN CENTRAL THAILAND (1954-1974)

	Percentage	Total	Saraburo	Lopburi	Angthong	Singburi	Chainat	Manorom	Uthai	Ladyaw	Paknampho	Nongbua	Chumsaeng	Bangkok
Total Baptisms	82.5	1202	20	84	23	48	226	127	431	14	89	57	43	40
Transfer in	17	245	1	5	8	7	34	72	65	3	10	9	4	27
Restorations	.5	7	1	-	-	1	1	3	-	-	1	-	-	-
Sub Total	100	1454	22	89	31	56	261	202	496	17	100	66	47	67
Deaths	(4)	59	-	3	3	2	10	2	30	-	1	3	5	-
Transfer Out	(32)	463	4	21	9	15	82	111	126	-	46	13	24	12
Reversions	(7)	102	1	4	4	2	13	20	33	-	9	4	4	8
Excommunication	(.5)	9	-	4	-	-	-	3	1	-	1	-	-	-
Net Baptized														
Members Sept. 1974	(56.5)	821	17	57	15	37	156	66	306	17	43	46	14	47

Source: O.M.F. Station Statistics

**TABLE 8****DISTRIBUTION OF ANNUAL BAPTISMS AND MEMBERSHIP IN UTHAI**

Year	Annual Baptisms	Lepers Included	Related non-Lepers	Unrelated to Lepers	Well Members	Sala Members
1953	-	-	-	-	3	-
1954	-	-	-	-	1	-
1955	7	2	-	5	6	2
1956	13	13	-	-	6	15
1957	13	13	-	-	6	28
1958	27	17	10	-	8	51
1959	8	8	-	-	4	58
1960	17	10	2	5	8	64
1961	3	2	-	1	8	65
1962	5	4	1	-	6	68
1963	6	4	2	-	5	68
1964	6	4	2	-	5	72
1965	6	2	3	1	6	78
1966	6	2	1	2	10	67
1967	8	4	5	-	10	68
1968	14	5	6	3	15	75
1969	24	21	3	-	18	90
1970	33	3	6	24	41	95
1971	56	8	8	40	70	114
1972	69	8	13	48	107	131
1973	<u>84</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>72</u>	164	143
	405	140	64	201		

Source: Uthai Station lists of Annual Reports

TABLE 9

## UTHAI ANNUAL CHURCH STATISTICS

	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
Baptized Membership (Oct. previous year)	-	3	1	8	21	34	57	62	72	73	74	73
Baptized from other Religions	-	-	7	13	13	27	8	17	3	5	6	6
Baptized from Christian Families	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transfers in External	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Internal	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-
Sub Total	3	3	8	21	34	61	68	79	75	79	80	80
Deaths of Baptized	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	3	-
Transfer out External	2	-	-	-	-	-	5	3	1	1	2	3
Internal	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-
Reversions	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	3	-	2	2	-
Excommunication	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Baptized Membership At September 30	3	1	8	21	34	59	62	72	73	74	73	77

Source: Uthai Station Records

TABLE 9

## UTHAI ANNUAL CHURCH STATISTICS

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	
Baptized Membership (Oct. previous year)	77	84	77	78	90	108	136	184	238	307	
Baptized from other Religions	6	5	8	13	24	32	55	67	83	25	
Baptized from Christian Families	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	2	1	1	
Transfers in External	2	1	-	-	1	-	-	2	8	5	
Internal	-	5	-	9	-	2	6	6	7	5	
Sub Total	85	96	85	101	115	143	198	261	337	343	
Deaths of Baptized	-	2	1	2	4	4	3	1	4	3	
Transfer out External	-	11	3	-	2	1	2	15	15	16	
Internal	-	4	3	9	1	2	6	6	7	15	
Reversions	-	4	3	9	-	2	6	6	7	15	
Excommunication	1	2	-	-	1	-	3	1	4	13	
Total Baptized Membership At September 30	30	84	77	78	90	108	136	184	238	307	306

Source: Uthai Station Records

**TABLE 10**  
**AREA AND POPULATION OF OMF'S EIGHT**  
**CENTRAL THAILAND PROVINCES**

	<u>Area (Sq. Km)<sup>1</sup></u>	<u>1970<sup>2</sup></u>
Saraburi	2963	342,000
Lopburi	6588	433,000
Singburi	842	162,000
Angthong	981	217,000
Chainat	2636	256,000
Uthaithani	6472	177,000
Nakorn Sawan	9677	758,000
Pichit	<u>4530</u>	<u>440,000</u>
	<u>33,929</u>	<u>2,785,000</u>

Sources: National Statistical Office – Office of the Prime Minister

1. *Some Important Statistics of Thailand* (1968-1969).  
Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior.
2. *Statistical Summary of Thailand July 1973*. Preliminary Report of the 1970  
Population and Housing Census.

TABLE 11

**ANNUAL BAPTIZED MEMBERSHIP OF UTHAI  
CONGREGATIONS  
AS AT 30TH SEPTEMBER EACH YEAR**

Church '55	'56	'57	'58	'59	'60	'61	'62	'63	'64	'65	
Uthaithani	6	6	6	8	4	8	8	6	5	5	6
Uthai Sala	2	13	13	26	26	24	24	23	22	27	27
Nong Jik		1	13	13	13	15	17	17	12	11	11
Watsing/Thahae		1	1	1	6	3	3	3	3	3	-
Nong Chang			1	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	7
Sawang				4	5	8	8	8	8	8	9
Nong Ta Ngu				2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Taptan					1	7	7	10	16	17	17
Don Hiang											1
Nong Taw											
Tung Sangop											
Khlong Po											
Nong Kii											
Taluk Du											
Bung Fang											
Pong Khoi											
Nong Fang											
Hu Chang											
Thap Kuang											
Barnrai											
Thap Khlai											
Caw Wat											
Karung											
Barn Jan											
Idang/Rabum											1
Tung Na											
	8	21	34	59	62	72	73	74	73	77	81

Source: Uthai Station individual church statistics.

**TABLE 11 (Cont.)**

**ANNUAL BAPTIZED MEMBERSHIP OF UTHAI  
CONGREGATIONS  
AS AT 30TH SEPTEMBER EACH YEAR**

	Church '66	'67	'68	'69	'70	'71	'72	'73
Uthaihani	7	7	10	10	10	10	14	19
Uthai Sala	25	25	31	29	30	29	31	33
Nong Jik	8	6	6	6	5	5	5	6
Watsing/Thahae	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	2
Nong Chang	7	10	12	11	13	12	12	12
Sawang	8	5	6	6	6	7	7	7
Nong Ta Ngu	2	2	2	4	4	4	4	4
Taptan	13	15	9	11	10	11	8	10
Don Hiang	3	3	1	1	1	2	6	6
Nong Taw		1	3	5	5	8	9	7
Tung Sangop				3	3	14	16	18
Khlong Po				1	1	3	4	8
Nong Kii			1	4	4	4	10	10
Taluk Du			2	6	8	10	10	15
Bung Fang	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
Pong Khoi			2	5	14	12	14	12
Nong Fang				1	1	-	27	30
Hu Chang					3	3	3	9
Thap Kuang					6	6	10	11
Barnrai						2	2	8
Thap Khlai							4	4
Caw Wat					5	4	4	3
Karung						24	19	18
Barn Jan						9	8	8
Idang/Rabum	-	1	2	2	1	1	1	36
Tung Na								3
	77	78	90	108	136	184	238	307

Source: Uthai Station individual church statistics.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

Thai Convert Profile

## THAI CONVERT PROFILE

("How God is Calling People to Himself")

Name: Mr./Mrs./Miss \_\_\_\_\_

Church \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

"If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things are new" II Cor. 5:17. The Christian life is a changed life. It is a life changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. As we repent, and trust the Lord Jesus Christ, God meets our personal need by using different people, means, and circumstances to bring us to new life in Christ. We can learn from each other's experience how God is dealing with the Thai people. Please help us by answering these questions about your own conversion.

1. Do you remember *when* you repented and received Christ?  
Yes / No

2. *How long ago* was it since you were converted?

Less than 1 year \_\_\_\_\_

6 – 10 years ago \_\_\_\_\_

1 – 3 years ago \_\_\_\_\_

more than 10 years ago \_\_\_\_\_

3 – 5 years ago \_\_\_\_\_

3. Mark an X in the square beside the *persons* most used of God to cause you to become a Christian.

a. Family Relatives

Father 5 (5)

Mother 4 (4)

Wife 0 (-)

Husband 3 (2)

Son 2 (-)

Daughter 1 (1)

Uncle 3 (3)

Aunt 2 (1)

Your whole family 1 (-)

Brother 2 (1)

Sister 1 (1)

Other relative 1 (1)  
(maternal grandmother)

b. Church People

Local Pastor 15 (7)

Church Member 8 (12)

Sunday School

Teacher 1 (-)

Missionary 19 (6)

Church Elder 9 (3)

Layman Thai

Evangelist 17 (6)

69 (24)

---

25 (19)

c. Acquaintances

Christian friend	12 (1)
Christian neighbor	26 (20)
Christian Doctor/Hospital Nurse	16 (6)
Christian School Teacher	1 (-)
Nurse at leprosy clinic	27 (19)
Evangelist at hospital	2 (-)
Other person	<u>6 (2)</u>
	90 (48)

Now go back and write 1 beside one ONE person who was the *most important* person in causing you to become a Christian. (93 General Respondents 91 for First Cause)

4. *Means employed:* which of these ways did God use MOST to bring you to conversion

listening to Christian songs	19 (15)	20.6	(5.7) %
attending annual church conferences	31 (2)	33.7	(2.3) %
reading the Bible	41 (24)	44.5	(27.6) %
seeing Gospel films	11 (2)	10.8	(2.3) %
learning English from a missionary	-	-	-
listening to Christian radio broadcasts	22 (2)	23.9	(2.3) %
being visited by evangelistic team member	30 (8)	32.6	(9.2) %
attending leprosy clinics	30 (10)	32.6	(11.5) %
reading a Gospel tract	22 (2)	23.9	(2.3) %
being in a Christian hospital	24 (5)	26	(5.7) %
going to a Christian school	2 (-)	2	-
having a dream about God or Christ	10 (6)	10.8	(6.9) %
going to a youth camp	3 (2)	3.3	(10.4) %
reading a Christian book	27 (7)	29.3	(8.0) %
other	<u>9 (3)</u>	<u>9.8</u>	<u>(3.5) %</u>
	87		(100) %

Please go back and mark 1 beside the ONE God used the *most* to bring you to conversion. (92 General Respondents 87 for primary cause)

5. Circumstances: Mark with an X those circumstances which most caused you to turn to Christ for help.

Death of a relative or friend	4	(3)	4.3	(3.6)%
Whole family was becoming Christian	9	(-)	9.8	(-)
Serious illness	26	(14)	28.3	(16.6)
Fear of evil spirits	16	(4)	17.4	(4.8)
Difficulties in life, and poverty	16	(3)	17.4	(3.6)
Loneliness	14	(4)	15.2	(4.8)
Dream or vision	15	(5)	16.3	(6.0)
Miraculous healing	23	(11)	25.0	(13.1)
Loss of personal property	2	(1)	2.2	(1.2)
Feeling of hopelessness and failure	26	(14)	28.3	(16.6)
Relatives or friends became Christian	8	(2)	8.7	(2.4)
Threat of war or political strife	1	(-)	1.0	(-)
Fear of going to hell	45	(19)	48.9	(22.6)
Other	11	(4)	11.9	(4.7)
	84		100.00%	

Now go back and mark 1 beside the *one most outstanding* circumstance that caused you to turn to Christ. (92 general responses 84 for primary causes)

6. Message appropriated: Which parts of the Gospel spoke to your heart's need the most, causing you to accept Christ.

God's power to heal	30	(10)	32.6	(12.5)%
God's love	49	(20)	53.3	(25.0)
God's holiness	26	(2)	30.4	(2.5)
God's power over evil spirits	37	(4)	40.2	(5.0)
God's power to cleanse from sin	45	(7)	48.9	(8.8)
God's judgment of sinners	24	(-)	36.1	(-)
Christ's dying instead of us	41	(7)	44.6	(8.8)
Christ's redemption of sinners	43	(11)	46.7	(13.7)
Christ's power in resurrection	23	(2)	25	(2.5)
Christ's teachings	15	(1)	16.3	(1.2)
Christ's power to do miracles	24	(3)	26.1	(3.8)
Christ's return	21	(1)	22.8	(1.2)
Christ's power to give hope and happiness	44	(11)	47.8	(13.7)
Other	14	(1)	15.2	(1.3)
	80		100%	

Now go back and mark 1 beside the *one most important* element in the Gospel that influenced you. (92 general respondents 80 for primary aspect.)

What was your *religions* before you became a Christian. Please circle.

Spiritism                  Buddhism                  Islam                  Catholic                  Other \_\_\_\_\_

7.     Personal Data

Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you lived in this village? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you accept Christ here? Yes / No

Were you a Christian believer before you moved here? Yes / No

To what grade did you study in school? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was the first one in your family to become a Christian? \_\_\_\_\_

(Relationship, e.g. mother, father, husband, wife, uncle, aunt, etc.)

Did you accept Christ the same time as others of your family, or soon after? Yes / No

If yes, who else accepted Christ with you? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you become a Christian soon after someone in your extended family believed? Yes / No

If so, who? \_\_\_\_\_

\* Numbers in brackets indicate “primary cause” responses.

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