

**A Manual for Evangelism and Discipleship
Among Middle Class Thai Buddhists for
Western Missionaries**

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The Faculty of the Seminary & Graduate School of Religion
Bob Jones University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by
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This manual is dedicated to God for calling me into the ministry
and giving me an opportunity to serve Him in Thailand;
to my wife, Pattamawadee, for teaching me courage
and for her unwavering inspiration, intimate love, and support;
and to my daughter, Kidakarn, for helping me understand
the heart of the Father.

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Table of Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BBCS	Bangkok Bible College and Seminary
BJUS	Bob Jones University Seminary
CCT	Church of Christ in Thailand
CTS	Chiangmai Theological Seminary
EFT	Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand
FEBC	Far East Broadcasting Company
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MCTB	Middle-Class Thai Buddhists
NCC	The National Christian Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NTM	New Tribes Mission
OMF	Overseas Missionary Fellowship
TBC	Thailand Baptist Convention
TBS	Thailand Bible Society
US	United States
YFC	Youth for Christ

Institutional Board Review Approval



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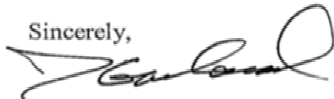
Dear Aruj:

Re: Doctor of Ministry Project

The Office of Planning, Research and Assessment (OPRA) administrates Bob Jones University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and hereby grants approval as exempt research for the proposed project titled "A Manual for Evangelism and Discipleship among Middle Class Thai Buddhists." The research is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree offered through the BJU Seminary and Graduate School of Religion. Dr. Wade Kuhlewind Sr. is noted as the supervising faculty member.

Any significant deviations to the proposal must be submitted for review and approval by Bob Jones University. An electronic copy of the completed dissertation must be submitted to the BJU Office of Planning, Research and Assessment.

Sincerely,



Doug Garland
Director of Assessment

DG

Enclosures

Chapter 1

Introduction

Thailand, previously known to the world as “Siam” until 1936,¹ means “the Land of the Free”² and is also known as “the Land of Smiles.”³ The Thais are related to other Tai-speaking people who live in Thailand, Laos, northeastern Myanmar, northern Vietnam, Cambodia, northern Malaysia, and southern China. Originally, the Thais came from the Yunnan province of southern China and later migrated down to the southern region of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia.⁴ The group that journeyed down to the northern part of Thailand was known as the kingdom of Lanna, and the group that journeyed further south was known as the kingdom of Sukhothai.

The Thai population estimate for 2014 is approximately sixty-seven million, distributed over seventy-seven provinces.⁵ Thailand’s population divides into approximately five percent upper-class, thirty-five percent middle-class, and sixty percent poor.⁶ The Thai middle class is comprised of

¹ Peter C. Phan, *Christianities in Asia* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 143.

² Thailand is called the “the Land of the Free” because it has never been colonized by Western powers.

³ Thailand is called the “Land of Smiles” because of the friendly and welcoming nature of its people.

⁴ Noel F. Busch, *Thailand: An Introduction to Modern Siam*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company Inc., 1964), 48.

⁵ “Population of Thailand 2014,” Worldometers Population, (accessed May 15, 2014); <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/Thailand-population>.

⁶ “Rich, Middle Class and Poor in Thailand,” Facts and Details, (accessed May 15, 2014); [http://www.factsanddetails.com/southeast asia/Thailand/sub5_8c/entry-3229.html](http://www.factsanddetails.com/southeast%20asia/Thailand/sub5_8c/entry-3229.html).

well-to-do, urban-based, homogeneous elites who are well-educated professionals. Because industrialization and urbanization have exerted a powerful transformative influence on Thailand's social structure, Thai society now includes a middle class level in which people in many occupational groups belong.⁷ Middle-class Thais are government clerks, school teachers, university professors, doctors, technical experts, managers, administrative officials, armed servicemen, policemen, and the like. Middle-class Thais practice Theravada Buddhism as a practical guideline for living their lives, whereas rural Thais practice folk Buddhism⁸ as a superstitious and ritualistic way of living.⁹

⁷ "The growing modernization of the Thai capital has increased the flexibility and altered the composition of this transitional social system. Mobility from one status or group to another is by family connections, wealth, education, and political influence." Before Thailand became a globalized industrial economy, it was an agricultural society. Frank C. Daring, *Thailand: The Modern Kingdom* (Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 1971), 30. "From the 1940s onwards the growth of Bangkok was closely associated with industrialization and the internationalization of the national system. This was reinforced by the American presence and expenditure, which promoted industrial, financial and service sector growth. Despite the growth of manufacturing, between 1964 and 1975 the main growth in employment was in the service and commercial sectors. In response to increased employment opportunities, there was a rapid increase in migration to the capital. So the dominance of rural-rural migration—in search of new land and employment—was gradually superseded by rural-urban migration, and more significantly rural-Bangkok. In addition, Bangkok was increasingly recognized not only as a source of employment and remittance income, but also as the only place which offered educational facilities and the prospects of social mobility." Chris Dixon, *The Thai Economy: Uneven Development and Internationalisation* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 197-198.

⁸ A combination of Hinduism ("the beliefs that focus on angelic beings") and animism ("the beliefs that deal with spirits").

⁹ Further discussion of these topics will be included in the section Current Expressions of Thai Buddhism.

The Thai people are the dominant ethnic group in Thailand. Approximately eighty-nine percent of citizens are ethnic Thais.¹⁰ Thailand consists of different ethnic minorities, namely Chinese, Malay-speaking Muslims, Khmers, and Laos. Other ethnic minorities are the tribal groups in northern Thailand, consisting of Karen, Lisu, Mien, and Hmong.

Neighboring countries that share a land border with Thailand are Malaysia, Cambodia, Laotians, and Myanmar. Because of its strategic geographical location, Thailand competes with Singapore and Malaysia to become a strategic hub of the Southeast Asia region.

The Thai people¹¹ are very proud of their rich cultural heritage, their monarchy, and the fact that their country has never been colonized by Western nations. Socially, Thais are open-minded and tolerant toward people of other cultures. The Thai family relationship is closely knit, with several generations living together in the same household. The Thai people tend to preserve their Buddhist values such as moderation and self-discipline, which become a framework for their social structure.

Today Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, with a prime minister as the head of government. Ever since Thailand became a constitutional monarchy it has faced several incidents of political unrest, with elected governments being brought down by numerous coups followed by military rule.

¹⁰ "Population, Nationality, and Religion," Thailand People, (accessed January 21, 2016); http://www.factover.com/people/Thailand_people.html.

¹¹ The Thai people here refers to the general population of the country.

Over the last four decades Thailand has experienced rapid economic growth and industrialization, which has significantly affected the lifestyle of the Thai people. In spite of its recent economic growth and the influence of modernity, the Thai people still maintain their desired cultural identity and heritage. Even though Thailand is considered a developing country in which manufacturing and tourism lead its economic growth, a majority of Thais still work in the agricultural sector.¹²

Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion in Thailand. However, current expressions of Thai Buddhism are centered on a combination of pure Buddhism and animism.¹³ The concepts of karma and merit have dominated the spiritual lives of most Thai Buddhists.¹⁴ Although the constitution provides for freedom of religion in Thailand, Buddhism is closely tied to the national identity.

The gospel was introduced to the Thai people by Western missionaries in the early nineteenth century. Today, the Thai people are becoming more open and receptive to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and missionaries have the freedom to preach in public places. Providentially, there has been no persecution of Christians in Thailand, and the government has provided millions of dollars each year to Christian organizations that provide relief to the victims of natural disasters and HIV/AIDS. Some Christian organizations

¹² D. Insor, *Thailand: A Political, Social, and Economic Analysis* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 143.

¹³ Valentin Chu, *Thailand Today: A Visit to Modern Siam* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), 55.

¹⁴ Thomas Fitzsimmons, *Thailand: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture* (New Haven, CT: Hraf Press, 1958), 94.

emphasize social work by providing goods and services to the Thai people, while other Christian organizations minister to the spiritual needs of the Thai people. Presently, over a thousand foreign missionaries and over a hundred Thai mission agencies from different denominations work in Thailand.¹⁵

Need for This Paper

Although Christianity came to Thailand in the early nineteenth century, only a very small percentage of middle-class Thai Buddhists (MCTBs) have committed their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. According to the 2011 Thai church statistics, there are 372,251 Protestant Christians in Thailand, which represents 0.58% of the total population of the country.¹⁶ However, there are more Christian conversions among the hill tribes than among MCTBs.

Annual growth rate of Thai Christians is 4.22%....Annual growth rate of Tribal Christians is 8%....Fifty-seven percent of all Christians live in the North. 51% are from the provinces of Chiang Mai, Chaing Rai and Mae Hong Son alone....Even though they (Tribal Christians) make up less than 2% of the population of Thailand, they make up more than 40% of the Christians. Over 12% of the tribal people in Thailand are Christians whereas only 0.31% of the Thai speaking people are Christians.¹⁷

¹⁵ “Thailand Prayer Update Issue 8,” eSTAR Foundation, (accessed January 20, 2016); <http://estar.ws/research-church-database/prayer-updates.html>.

¹⁶ “Thailand Prayer Update Issue 2,” eSTAR Foundation, (accessed January 20, 2016); <http://estar.ws/research-church-database/prayer-updates.html>.

¹⁷ “Thailand Prayer Update Issue 3,” Benchmark Community, (accessed, December 3, 2014); <http://community.benchmarkemail.com/users/dwimar/newsletter/Thailand-Prayer-Update>.

It is evident from these statistics that not many Western missionaries are working with MCTBs.¹⁸ The problem leads one to ask why the gospel has made such little progress among MCTBs.¹⁹ The proclamation of the gospel is more effective when Western missionaries understand the Thais' cultural background, religious history, and worldview.²⁰ Based on firsthand

¹⁸ "What we discovered was very encouraging. Among the churches that worship in Thai 85% were started by nationals, there was no missionary involvement. Of the 15% with missionary help, 6% were started by resident missionaries. We then randomly called over 60 churches that worship in one of the tribal languages; the results were surprisingly different. 60% of the churches that worship in a tribal language were started by nationals with no missionary involvement. 40% had missionary involvement of which 19% were started by resident missionaries." "Thailand Prayer Update Issue 6," Benchmark Community, (accessed December 3, 2014); <http://community.benchmarkemail.com/users/1813E/newsletter/Thailand-Prayer-Update-Issue-6>.

¹⁹ "In 2012 the percentage of Protestant Christians in Thailand improved slightly. Christians now consists of 0.59% of the total population. There is still much work to be done. 226 of Thailand's districts are still without churches. 5,716 of 7,425 sub-districts don't have a church. 39.5 million people live in these sub-districts." "Thailand Prayer Update Issue 7," eSTAR Foundation, (accessed January 20, 2016); <http://estar.ws/research-church-database/prayer-updates.html>. "Why is that after over 183 years of evangelical missionary work, an investment of thousands of lives and millions upon millions of dollars, out of a total population of 65 million there are only 370,000 evangelical Christians, one half of one percent?" "The Difficulty of Evangelizing in Thailand," Stiller, Brian C. *Huff Post Religion*, (accessed January 18, 2016); http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-c-/brian-c-stiller/the-difficultly-of-evangelizing-in-Thailand_b_3237160.html. "Numerically Christianity, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, had made somewhat slower process in Siam than in the other major lands of south-eastern Asia" Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. 4 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), p. 245. "In spite of the presence of over six hundred missionaries, nearly all of them Americans, the Christian impact on Thailand has been negligible." J. Herbert Kane, *A Global View of Christian Missions: From Pentecost to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 168.

²⁰ Missiologist David J. Hesselgrave supports this point by writing, "If missionaries are to have any influence at all, they will touch upon culture every time they speak and wherever they work. It is important, therefore, that they have a biblical view not only of Christ but also of culture....The missionary cannot communicate *Christianity* without concerning himself with culture because, although Christianity is supracultural in its origin and truth, it is cultural in its application." *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 115-119. "Christians must

observations and conversations, this study asserts (the interviews also provide a basis for my assertion) that a significant hindrance to effective Western missionary work is an inadequate understanding of Thai culture, religion, worldview, and language.²¹ Therefore, a manual that details these areas and suggests effective and productive methods to communicate the gospel and disciple believers biblically is necessary.

Several challenges need to be identified and addressed in order to evangelize the Thai people effectively. First, the Thai people's way of life is different from Western culture and traditions. In order to evangelize the Thai people effectively, Western missionaries must have a thorough knowledge and understanding of Thai history, culture and religion. The concepts of karma and merit are deeply embedded in the foundation of Thai culture and traditions. These ideas must be confronted and explained in light of biblical teaching.

Second, the reason many Western missionaries experience difficulty in evangelizing the Thai people is that they often present the gospel message in

take the worldviews of other people seriously, not because they agree with them, but because they want to understand the people they serve in order to effectively share with them the good news of the gospel." Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldview: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 69. "The idea of contextualization is to form the gospel message in language and communication forms appropriate and meaningful to the local culture." Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 15.

²¹ "The failure of Christianity to make significant number of converts among the Thais could be partly explained by the fundamental differences in the basic worldviews of Christianity and Theravada Buddhism, partly by the salience of Buddhism in the Thai identity and way of life, and partly also by the often uncompromising attitudes of both Catholic and Protestant missionaries toward the 'heathen' beliefs and customs of the natives whom they have sought to convert." "Southeast Asia Christianity," Academia, (accessed December 3, 2014); http://www.academia.edu/4781739/Southeast_Asia_Christianity.

a manner that ignores the Thai worldview. Three basic belief systems make up Thai religion: Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism, and Animism. Most Thai people do not actually practice pure Buddhism but rather practice folk Buddhism—a combination of animistic practices and Hindu-Buddhist beliefs.²² While many Western missionary gospel presentations are mainly centered on the issue of sin, salvation, and God, most Thai people do not have a biblical concept of either personal sin or of God. The Thai worldview is very different from that of Western missionaries, and unless the Western missionary realizes this difference, he will fail to communicate the gospel effectively and the listener will receive a false view of the gospel message.

Third, the unhealthy and slow growth of the church in Thailand is due to the lack of biblically sound teaching and preaching.²³ Today many mission works in Thailand advocate a social gospel that seeks to alleviate problems such as inadequate health care and education, poverty, and prostitution, while deemphasizing the fundamental spiritual truth of the gospel. These mission organizations have placed their focus on social work by providing goods and services as their main operation. Consequently, while there are many Christian charitable activities and organizations, hospitals, and Christian schools, little proclamation of the truth of the gospel is evident.

²² John F. Cady, *Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 1.

²³ Also present are promoters of the charismatic movement and the prosperity gospel, who are spreading false teaching among Thai Christians. These are unbiblical gospel messages that false teachers, who are perverting the gospel by their selfish ambitions, claim as a “ministry.” In order to be a biblically sound church, the gospel must be fully preached according to the whole counsel of God.

A fourth problem in evangelizing the Thai people is their misunderstanding of Christian terminology typically used by Western missionaries. For a Thai person Christian terms such as “salvation,” “born again,” “eternal life,” “grace,” “justification,” and “atonement” have different connotations altogether than they do in the West. Communication with the Thai people may break down when Western missionaries assume that the Thais clearly understand the gospel message, while in reality they are actually unpacking a significantly different message from what the Western missionaries intend to communicate. An understanding and an application of the principles of cross-cultural communication is essential for working in the Thai context. This paper will help the Western missionaries who come to evangelize MCTBs to understand the Thai culture and religious backgrounds in order to communicate biblical truth effectively.

Statement of Purpose

The mission field in Thailand is already ripe for harvest. In issuing the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:19-20). This manual will assist Western missionaries who are called to engage in cross-cultural evangelism understand the Thais’ cultural background, religious history, and worldview so that they can become better equipped in evangelism and discipleship among MCTBs. It will provide an initial base of knowledge for the life-long study of MCTBs.

Delimitations

The following are delimitations that necessarily apply to this study of Thai culture and religion. First, this paper will not provide a comprehensive anthropological and sociological study of the Thai culture and religion; rather it will discuss certain aspects of Thai culture and religion that have particular relevance to the work of evangelism and discipleship among MCTBs. Second, this paper will not provide a detailed discussion about political and social issues in Thailand. It will discuss only those matters that are especially pertinent to discipleship and evangelism. Third, this paper does not seek to provide a detailed history of all the mission works and mission agencies in Thailand. A survey will be sufficient for the present purposes. Fourth, this paper will not provide a detailed explanation of Bible passages or give a critical analysis of theology in correcting the misconceptions of the Thai people's worldview. Here again, a basic discussion will be sufficient. Fifth, it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed guide for learning the Thai language and cross-cultural communication skills. Sixth, it is beyond the scope of this paper to describe all of the outreach ministries that are currently active in Thailand. Seventh, this paper will not provide an exhaustive treatment in dealing with evangelism and discipleship, but will discuss certain aspects that are relevant to the need of middle-class Thai people.

Previous Works

Existing literature has not adequately examined Thai culture and religion from a conservative Christian perspective for the sake of an evangelistic outreach ministry and discipleship training to MCTBs. Many

writers have contributed to the study of Thai culture and religion; nevertheless, their cultural and religious observations are not applied to evangelism and discipleship, as is the purpose of this manual. However, a few of them provide helpful insights into the culture and religious beliefs of the Thai people.

Books

Village Life in Modern Thailand, by John E. deYoung, is a detailed study of the Thai people's history, culture, and religious beliefs.²⁴ Chapter titles include "Village Organization," "Social Organization," "Life History of the Individual," "Agricultural and Economic Patterns," "Religious Beliefs and Practices," and "Changing Scope of the Villager's World." This study provides the reader with general background information concerning the Thai people's culture and religion. Especially helpful is the chapter entitled "Religious Beliefs and Practices." It contains brief accounts of how Thais become Buddhist monks and what their lives are like in the monastery. Although this work provides some helpful insights, it does not aim at equipping the Thai Christian in evangelizing and discipling the Thai people. However, this book can be helpful as source material since deYoung has done an extensive study of the Thai people's history, culture, and religious beliefs.²⁵

In 2014, La Trobe University published the gifted writer and editor Pranee Liamputtong's *Contemporary Socio-Cultural and Political*

²⁴ Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955.

²⁵ This book addresses rural Thais whereas this manual is addressing MCTBs, who typically live in urban setting.

Perspectives in Thailand.²⁶ This book is worthy of study and will be useful since Liamputtong provides comprehensive discussions regarding the socio-cultural and political aspects of contemporary Thailand. This book also includes treatments of contemporary social issues concerning Thai people in general such as health care, education, poverty, and prostitution. Although Liamputtong frequently has provided insight by evaluating the various aspects of contemporary Thailand from a sociological perspective, she does not aim at equipping Thai believers for evangelism and discipleship.

Another helpful book in relating the history of the Thai people is *Thailand: A Short History*, by David K. Wyatt.²⁷ This book covers almost 1000 years of the history of the Thai people from A.D. 1000 to 1982. Although it offers important background information pertaining to the demographics of the Thai people, its main purpose is to provide a history of the Thai people rather than to give instructions for equipping them for evangelism and discipleship. Wyatt discusses Thailand's transformation from a monarchy to a constitutional monarchy and how Western cultures have influenced Thailand to become a modern society. The majority of the book concentrates on the history of the Thai people, but it offers some material pertaining to early mission work from a sociologist's standpoint.

Mo Bradley and Thailand, by Donald C. Lord, is another helpful book. Mo Bradley, a physician, was one of the most important American missionaries who ministered in Thailand from 1835 to 1873.²⁸ This book

²⁶ Bundoora, Australia: La Trobe University, 2014.

²⁷ New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984.

²⁸ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969.

provides an account of Bradley's pioneer ministry and the American missionary movement in Thailand. It discusses the functional emphases and methods Bradley used and the theological foundations that he laid in his mission work in Thailand. The missiological notes and records about Bradley's mission work with the Thai people offer valuable background information for the prospective missionary who desires to engage in evangelism and discipleship among the Thai people.²⁹

The above books contain helpful cultural observations and insights for understanding the Thai people. Some will serve as sources from which a composite picture of an urban Thai Buddhist individual can be drawn. However, a need remains for a study of the Thai people's culture and religion from a Christian perspective and for the sake of evangelistic outreach ministry and discipleship training. The vast majority of the books analyzing Thai culture are from a secular standpoint.

Articles

A number of articles contain brief but helpful cultural and religious background information concerning the Thai Buddhists. Larry Powell, a professor of Communication Studies at the University of Alabama, wrote, "The Wai in Thai Culture: Greeting, Status-Marking and National Identity Functions," which discusses the function of the Wai from the perspective of people in Thailand.³⁰ The Wai is a form of greeting used by the Thai people

²⁹ However, it has some deficiencies (i.e., age of the book and technological advancements).

³⁰ *Journal of Intercultural Communication* 34 (March 2014): 1-7.

by placing two hands together while bowing one's head. This article shows that the Wai functions as a sign of greeting, status, and national identity.³¹

American Missionaries and the Introduction of Western Science and Medicine in Thailand, 1830-1900, by Richard L. Popp, evaluates missionary programs and strategies that have influenced the slow growth of the Thai church.³² It investigates the impact of mission works on Thai culture and social values. This article contains an overview of how Western science and medicine have affected Thai society. This article would be helpful to the Western missionary who desires to present the gospel to the Thai people.³³

The Missionary as Stranger: A Phenomenological Analysis of Christian Missionaries' Encounter with the Folk Religions of Thailand, by Erick Cohen, contains an overview of Thai folk Buddhism and animistic beliefs in contemporary Thailand.³⁴ This article reveals the dimension of the religious and cosmological reorientation of the Thai's conversion from animistic religious beliefs to Christianity. This article is helpful to any Western missionary who wants to learn about cross-cultural communication and encounters with the spirits' power in a Buddhist-animistic context in Thailand.

Theology and Culture: Implications for Methodology of Case Study in Northern Thailand, by Philip J. Hughes, is a theological paper with some

³¹ Ibid., 2.

³² *Missiology*, 13/2 (April, 1985): 147-157.

³³ However, it has some deficiencies (i.e., a historical work tracking a period ending over 115 years ago).

³⁴ *Review of Religious Research*, 31/4 (June, 1990): 337-350.

interesting insights into Thai culture from the viewpoint of an ordained minister.³⁵ Hughes investigates the Thai Buddhist and Christian cosmological systems and social values. He points out how Thai Christians have incorporated what they have been taught about Christianity into their concepts of *karma* (do good, receive good; do evil, receive evil) and merit. This article is helpful to any Western missionary who wants to learn about Thai Buddhist and Christian cosmological conceptions and social values.

Bangkok: A Profile of Urban Evangelism, by Ronald Perschky, examines the people groups of Bangkok and urban evangelism models in Bangkok.³⁶ This article provides the reader with general information about Bangkok's residential areas and regional people groups. Perschky analyzes four evangelism strategies: (1) The Mega Church, (2) Divide and Multiply Churches, (3) Community Church, and (4) Consultant Model. Although this article provides some helpful insight, it does not provide a detailed application for evangelism and discipleship, as is the purpose of this manual. However, this article can be helpful as source material since Perschky has written a brief case study of urban evangelism models in Bangkok. All the articles referenced above will serve as helpful sources for Western missionary in effectively communicating the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to MCTBs.

Dissertations

In the Doctor of Theology dissertation, *A Prolegomena for the Thai Context: A Starting Point for Thai Theology*, Steve Taylor (as a cultural

³⁵ *Colloquium*, 18/10 (1985): 43-53.

³⁶ *Urban Mission*, 12 S (1994): 51-57.

“outsider”) looks at how an indigenous theology may be formed within the Thai religious beliefs, social structures, and cultural influences.³⁷ Taylor makes some observations relating to Thai belief and thinking as follows:³⁸

(1) The Thai do not necessarily think about the causes of things. (2) The Thai are concrete, not abstract or conceptual. (3) The Thai believe what they can experience. (4) The Thai think from the particular to the particular. Taylor further suggests some possible starting points for developing Thai Theology as follows:³⁹ (1) Promote an ongoing development of indigenous theology, and (2) Develop key elements for the Thai church materials such as a Thai creed and catechism. Although his work contains valuable source material on Thai cultural background and religious beliefs, his main emphasis is Contextualized Theology. His objective is not to provide an application for evangelism and discipleship among the Thai people, as is the purpose of this manual.

In his Doctor of Missiology dissertation, *Meekness: A New Approach to Christian Witness to the Thai People*, Nanthachai Mejudhon (as a cultural “insider”) proposes the Thai characteristic of “meekness” as an alternative approach for communicating the gospel to the Thai people as contrasted with the Western missionary’s aggressive approach in evangelism.⁴⁰ Mejudhon suggests that the meek approach for evangelizing the Thai Buddhists

³⁷ Th.D. diss., International Theological Seminary, 2003. <http://docplayer.net/2808534-International-theological-seminary.html> (accessed July 20, 2014).

³⁸ Ibid., 49-88.

³⁹ Ibid., 90-96.

⁴⁰ D.Miss. dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1998. <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/ecommonssatsdissertations/159/> (accessed July 22, 2014).

requires (1) respectful attitudes toward Buddhism and Thai culture; (2) honest relationships with Thai Buddhists; (3) communication of the gospel with meekness and gentleness, rather than confrontation and aggressiveness; (4) time for diffusion of the fundamental spiritual truth of the gospel; and (5) development of indigenous methods for presentation of the gospel's message.⁴¹ Although Nanthachai provides some material concerning the cultural and historical information that pertains to Christianity and the Thai people, his main purpose is to develop a relational approach to evangelism in Thailand rather than to give instructions for equipping the Thai people in evangelistic outreach ministry and discipleship training, as is the purpose of this manual.

In his Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, *Dynamic Biblical Christianity in the Buddhist/Marxist Context: Northeast Thailand*, Thomas Noel Wisley develops three main ideas that would promote dynamic equivalence Christianity.⁴² He states, (1) Respect the dynamic nature of Thai culture. (2) Commit to Christian praxis. (3) Focus on the meanings of form. However, this work is written from a theologically liberal standpoint. Wisley argues that Christianity is a dynamic force for social and economic change. Wisley suggests that the church in Thailand should use the dynamic-equivalence biblical Christianity model and a syncretistic approach to religion. This work does not satisfy the purpose of this manual.

To date, there are no thorough treatments of Thai culture and religion from a conservative Christian perspective for the sake of an evangelistic

⁴¹ Ibid., 330-50.

⁴² Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1984.

outreach ministry and discipleship training to the Thai people. The void in this area leaves much room for a treatment of this topic.

Method of Procedure

This manual consists of two main parts: (1) Necessary Background Information about Thai Religion and Culture, and (2) An Informed Strategy for Evangelism and Discipleship. Part One provides necessary background information for the Western missionary to engage in cross-cultural evangelism in Thailand. In order to be effective in evangelizing MCTBs, the Western missionary must have a thorough knowledge of Thai culture, religious history, and worldview. Part Two presents the various evangelism methods that will be applicable in the Thai context and discipleship training that will prepare the future leaders in Thailand.

Beginning Part One (Necessary Background Information about Thai Religion and Culture), Chapter Two surveys Thai religious history. This chapter begins with the Thai religious beliefs. Endeavoring to understand Thai religious beliefs help the Western missionary understand the Thai worldview and be better able to communicate the gospel to them. The chapter then examines the history of Christianity in Thailand and discusses the arrival and work of the first Western missionaries. It surveys current denominations and identifies some of the failures and successes of evangelistic efforts in Thailand.

Chapter Three presents a brief overview of the social demographics of the Thai people. It provides historical background and examine the Thai political structure, communication, and economy. Finally, this chapter

presents an overview of the Thai educational system and discuss the Thai language.

Chapter Four discusses Thai culture, society, and worldview. The first section of this chapter presents Thai values and customs. The next section discusses the basic social structure of the Thai people, including Thai social issues. It will then explain the Thai family structure. The final section of this chapter presents the Thai religious worldview of God, life after death, salvation, and sin. Taking time to understand the Thai religious worldview helps the missionary to effectively communicate the gospel to the Thai people. It is important for the Western missionary to understand how the Thai culture, social life, and ways of thinking have influenced Thai concepts of Christianity. This section gives some Bible passages that will correct their inaccurate perceptions.

Beginning Part Two (An Informed Strategy for Evangelism and Discipleship), Chapter Five discusses the primary considerations for the missionary. It introduces a plan for Western missionaries to prepare themselves for evangelism in Thailand. This chapter first discusses the importance of building a trusting relationship with the Thai Buddhist. Then it discusses the lifestyle of the missionary and the importance of developing national leadership. The first section of this chapter discusses missionary training, which should include study in cross-cultural missions, theological education, cross-cultural communication, and language. Taking time to learn the Thai language and cross-cultural communication helps the Western missionary to overcome frustration and discouragement in the work of the ministry. The next section discusses the preparation for communicating the gospel that will be helpful for Western missionaries to work in Thailand. It

covers some important issues of presenting the gospel and understanding Christian conversion among Thai Buddhists.

Chapter Six introduces different methods of evangelism and discipleship of the Thai people. The first section of this chapter examines effective strategies of personal visitation, home Bible study groups, printed media, social media, radio, English teaching ministry, and crisis counseling ministry. The next section discusses practical considerations of discipleship. Then it discusses disciplines for discipleship, such as personal Bible study, prayer, Bible memorization, witnessing, and serving. Finally, this chapter presents discipleship training for converts, including recommendations for group discipleship training in Sunday school classes and institutional settings. The aim of this chapter is to prepare and equip Thai Christians for the work of the ministry so that they may build up the body of Christ.

Part One

Necessary Background Information about Thai Religion and Culture

Chapter 2

Religious History

Thailand has been influenced by many religions which have shaped the Thai people's belief systems and worldviews. It is important that Western missionaries have a general understanding of the Thai religious history and worldview to effectively evangelize Thai people. This chapter covers the history of Thai religious beliefs, the history of Christianity in Thailand, and the development of Thai religious worldview.

Historical Development of Indigenous Thai Religious Beliefs

The established religion in Thailand is Buddhism, yet the Thai constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and practice for its citizens. Several other religious groups in addition to Buddhists have a presence in Thailand. This section will discuss the five religions that are most strongly interwoven with Thai cultural identity: Buddhism, Hinduism, animism, ancestor worship, and Islam.

Buddhism

Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism is the state religion of Thailand, practiced by ninety-three percent of its population.¹ It plays an important role in the cultural and political history of Thailand, and in the everyday life

¹ "Buddhists," "Pew Research Center, (accessed January 20, 2015); <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-buddhist>.

of the Thai people. Thai people are proud of their religious identity; therefore, it has often been said that to be a Thai is to be a Buddhist.

There exist two major branches of Buddhism: Theravada (or refer to as Hinayana) and Mahayana.² Theravada Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Mahayana Buddhism spread north to China, Tibet, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Theravada Buddhism claims to be closer to the original form of Buddhism than Mahayana Buddhism and emphasizes the teachings of the Buddha.³ Mahayana Buddhism, however, regards the Buddha not only as the historical teacher, but also as an eternal being and universal principle.

Buddhism was founded in India by Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BC), who became known as Buddha (“one who is enlightened, or awakened”).⁴ Buddha taught that life is impermanent (*anicca*), non-self existent (*anatta*),⁵ and filled with suffering (*dukkha*).⁶ Because it is based on Hinduism, Buddhism accepts the Hindu doctrines of *karma*⁷ and reincarnation (endless cycles of birth, and rebirth). Thai Buddhists believe that deliverance from

² John Snelling, *The Buddhist Handbook* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1998), 76.

³ Thai Buddhists are of the Theravada school, which is the southern, purer branch of Buddhism.

⁴ William MacQuitty, *Buddha* (New York: Viking Press, 1969), 16.

⁵ Thai lexicon offers these two words that best translate the meaning.

⁶ These three words have permeated the worldview of all Thai Buddhists. Ravi Bhavilai, *Buddhism in Thailand: A Modern Thai's Interpretation of Buddhism* (Bangkok, Thailand: South-East Asia Treaty Organization, 1967), 17.

⁷ The doctrine of *karma* is central to the structure of Buddhist beliefs. *Karma* is the belief that every action has its consequences not only in this life, but in the next life.

this chain of existence can only be achieved by eliminating desire through self-discipline and earning merit through good works and good behavior.

The Buddhist sacred text is called in the Thai language *Tripitaka* or *Phra Tai Phi Dok*, which literally means “three baskets,” in reference to the three main aspects of religious belief.⁸ The “discipline basket” pertains to the rules of monastic life. The “teaching basket” contains sermons for the lay people. The “metaphysical basket” deals with cosmological speculation.

From these aspects come the “Four Noble Truths” of Buddhism:⁹

1) Life basically is suffering. 2) Suffering is caused by desire. 3) Cessation of desire ends life and suffering. 4) Cessation of desire is accomplished by following the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path has also been called the “The Middle Way” because it was devised to help people avoid all extreme ways of living and to live the way of temperance. This Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism includes having right understanding, right aspiration, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right attentiveness, and right concentration.

Buddhism has five moral precepts that should be adhered to by every Thai Buddhist: do not kill, do not steal, do not lie, do not have immoral sexual relationships, and do not be intoxicated with alcohol or drugs.¹⁰ Three more

⁸ “Apart from the *Tripitaka*, there is a quantity of non-canonical literature which has been widely used in the Thai Buddhist monasteries. One work of importance is the *Visuddhimagga* or ‘The Path of Purity’ written in Ceylon in the fifth century A.D. by a great Buddhist monk named Buddhaghosa...The *Visuddhimagga* has been described as a summary of the *Tripitaka* with Buddhaghosa’s excellent commentary.” Bhavilai, 8.

⁹ The fundamental teaching of Buddhism is found in the four Noble Truths.

¹⁰ These ruled are described in the *Tripitaka*, the Buddhist scripture.

pertain to the Buddhist monks, who must not eat solid food in the evening, sing, or use perfumes. The Buddhist monks observe these eight precepts and some 227 other precepts. Collectively the monastic disciplinary code is called *Patimokkha*.¹¹

At present, ordained Buddhist monks number more than 200,000 and novices number over 85,000 in Thailand.¹² Nearly 29,000 *wats* (i.e., Buddhist temples)¹³ exist throughout Thailand, and nearly every town or village has a temple. The temple provides essential religious rituals and spiritual support for the lay Buddhist community. Four holy days (*wan phra*) per month are observed by the Thai people. They go to the Buddhist temple to offer gifts to the Buddhist monks such as flowers, burning incense sticks, candles, and food. Holy day services include chanting (in Pali), a Thai sermon, and periods of meditation. Every morning just before dawn Buddhist monks walk the streets around their temples, and people line up the streets to offer food to them. The Thai Buddhists, in preparing their daily food in the morning, set

¹¹ Ariyesako Bhikkhu points out that “a competent *bhikkhu* (monk) who has learned this by heart will recite it (*Patimokkha Rule*) in the *Pali* language for the community so that they can remind themselves of their responsibilities in keeping the major 227 Rules. The complete recitation may take anywhere from thirty-five minutes to an hour, depending on the skill of the reciting *bhikkhu*.” “The Bhikkhus’ Rules: A Guide for Lay People,” Buddhanet, (accessed February 15, 2015); <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/ariyesako/layguide.html>.

¹² “Monks in Thailand Information,” Thailand Paradise, (accessed January 27, 2015); <http://www.thailandparadise.com/thailand-monks.htm>.

¹³ “Buddhist Monastic Community: The Daily Life of a Thai Monk,” Buddhanet, (accessed January 27, 2015); http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/wat_m5.htm.

aside some for the monks. They will wait at the entrance of their houses with rice and other food in their containers. When Buddhist monks arrive, they will bow and put the food in the bowl with great respect, and again bow before the Buddhist monks pass on their way.

Religious life practices are distinctly different between the rural and urban populations. For most Thai rural people, the Buddhist temple is still the center of village life and they often participate in the various religious rituals and activities in the Buddhist temple. In contrast, the urban middle-class Thai Buddhists (MCTBs) seldom worship at the Buddhist temple anymore; they go only on special occasions (such as festivals and the New Year holiday). Because of the rapid changes in urban life, the Buddhist temples no longer have a place in modern Thai society.¹⁴ However, at present the MCTBs have a growing desire to return to the Thai's former relationship with the *wat* and to the teachings of Buddhism.

Most Thai Buddhists often have altars in their homes with a Buddha idol, and they worship and offer food to the Buddha idol many times during the day (e.g., at bed time, before leaving the house to go to work, at the work place before the working day starts, etc). The author used to regularly worship and offer food to the Buddha idol both at the temple and at home.

¹⁴ J.A. Niels Mulder points out that although the educated urban residents may be involved in the traditional religious rituals at the Buddhist temples, these activities have lost their emotional importance and continue only as polite social gatherings. *Monks, Merit, and Motivation: Buddhism and National Development in Thailand* (De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University, 1973), 11.

Current Expression of Thai Buddhism

Today many nominal MCTBs do not believe all of Buddha's teaching, nor practice philosophical Buddhism. Rather, they regard Buddhism as a moralistic guideline for living their lives.¹⁵ Therefore, many MCTBs strive to perform good works to acquire merit in this life and to improve their lot in the next life.

Although Theravada Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand, it is very rare to find anybody who really practices a pure form of Buddhism.¹⁶ Thai Buddhism is essentially an amalgamation of various religious practices, many of which can be traced back to syncretistic Buddhism in India and Khmer (Cambodia).¹⁷ It is intricately mixed with Hindu Brahmanism and animism, which is called Thai Folk Buddhism or Thai Practical Buddhism.¹⁸ Hindu Brahmanism is a religious belief that worships the angelic beings or gods, whereas animism is a religious belief that worships the spirits. Only

¹⁵ "Many continually revisit their practice not by searching for a pure Buddhism that exists somewhere in the golden past, but by responding to the changing needs of the time." Stephen C. Berkwitz, *Buddhism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc, 2006), 123.

¹⁶ Berkwitz points out that "although Thai Buddhism is often wrongly associated with stagnancy, orthodoxy, purity, and isolation, it is instead marked by flexibility, openness, and negotiated innovation that form the hallmarks of contemporary Thai Buddhism." *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷ The acceptance of Theravada Buddhism did not displace Hindu Brahmanism and the animistic beliefs that were already in existence in Thailand, but rather added to them.

¹⁸ "Thai religious behavior is a syncretism of Hindu-Brahmanic, animist, and Buddhist beliefs and ritual. The Hindu-Brahmanic segments of this religious complex encompass state ceremonies at the national level (e.g. the blessing of grain and the royal ploughing ceremony) as well as rituals at the personal level (e.g. marriage, the erection of the guardian spirit house, and the worship of Hindu gods and symbols)." Mulder, 1.

those MCTBs who are well educated in Buddhism can differentiate among Buddhist, animistic, and Hindu Brahmanistic religious beliefs.

Since the beginning of Thai history, Hindu Brahmanistic and animistic beliefs have been intimately a part of the Thai way of life. In this regard it is not unusual to see Thai Buddhists worshipping at a Buddhist temple, and then at a Hindu Brahmin shrine, while wearing an animist amulet.¹⁹ The author was born and raised in a Buddhist home in Thailand where the author's house had a small Thai spirit house guardian near the entrance where the animistic spirit has its residence to protect the house. Also at the front door is a Hindu Brahmin Blessing sign put at the top of the doorpost by a Buddhist monk during the house blessing ceremony. It is important for the Western missionary to understand the syncretism that results in the current expression of Thai Buddhism in order to minister to the Thai people effectively. Understanding the current expression of Thai Buddhism helps the Western missionary to comprehend how animism and Hindu Brahmanism have shaped Thai Buddhism.

Hinduism

Thailand was strongly influenced by the Hindu culture, and the influence still remains visible in most Thai religious rituals and Thai festivals. There appear several Hindu Sanskrit words found in Thai vocabulary. For instance, *manut* (human being), *wela* (time) and *thuk*

¹⁹ Berkwitz rightly points out that "Thai Buddhists have remained relatively outward looking and willing to combine multiple practices (including protective magic amulet collection, Hindu and other image worship, martial arts, Zen meditation techniques, and so on) in the modern era." Berkwitz, 127.

(suffering) are some of the Hindu Sanskrit terms that Thai still use. Hindu Brahmin Astrology is considered to be the most popular in Thailand. Even the traditional Thai house blessing rituals have Hindu-Brahmanism influence.

One may observe Hindu images and shrines in every city in Thailand, where Thai adherents offer their prayer and food to the gods. There exist four well-known Hindu temples in Bangkok, besides a number of other shrines. The most popular is the Erawan Shrine, named after the Brahma's three-headed elephant, which is believed to bring good luck.²⁰ It is situated in front of a luxury Hotel in downtown Bangkok, where many of the worshippers are MCTBs.

Animism

Many Thai Buddhists in Thailand today practice animism on a daily basis, whether they are in the rural or urban areas. The Thai in actuality are deeply involved in the animistic belief of the supernatural world of spirits.²¹ These animistic beliefs include the use of spirit houses, fortune-telling, and the collection of amulets and charms. One can find in nearly every house compound in Thailand a spirit house or *San Phra Phum*,²² which is usually no bigger than a bird cage. Spirit houses are so essential to the Thai

²⁰ "The basic belief of Hinduism is that there is one all-pervading and all transcending spirit which is the source and ground of all beings. This is the basic reality, personified as God (*Is'vara*) by the faithful and known by the wise as Brahman the impersonal Absolute." Bhavilai, 9.

²¹ They believe that humans are under an unknown spiritual force which cannot be explained by the human intellect.

²² A spirit house is a "residence" for local spirits, or more likely for the property spirits.

Buddhists that they can be found in most markets, commercial buildings, Western-style hotels, crowded streets, and airports. In order to maintain good relations with the spirit, one must not only provide residence for these spirits but also take care of them through offerings. These offerings usually include rice, fresh fruit, candles, flowers, and a small glass of water, accompanied by sticks of burning incense.

Most Thai Buddhists also wear amulets and charms to ward off evil and to be protected from misfortune. Usually they wear amulets around the neck and charms around the wrist, which they believe to contain power and good fortune. Many Thai Buddhists collect these amulets simply as religious relics to sell.²³ Typically, in most urban cities in Thailand, amulets are sold by hundreds of street vendors. Fortune telling is also prevalent in Thai life. Many Thai Buddhists consult monks or fortunetellers to divine an auspicious time to schedule a wedding, to purchase a lottery ticket, to start a new business, or to move to a new home. They also use animistic ceremonies to consecrate the main pillar of a building to invite spirits to come and live there.

In times of difficulty, illness, and stress, few Thai Buddhists depend on the teachings of the Buddha; instead they turn to the animistic spirits for help. Even MCTBs offer prayers or sacrifice animals to pacify and appease the spirits on occasion. The Bible teaches that fortune-telling, sorcery, and

²³ “Of the many items sold at temples, the ‘sale’ of amulets has been the focal point of the most heated discussions over the commercialization of Buddhism. Critics of the Dhammakaya Temple focused on the Temple’s distribution of the Mahasiriratthat amulets as a clear sign of its commercialized practices.” Rachele M. Scott, *Nirvana for Sale: Buddhism, Wealth, and Dhammakaya Temple in Contemporary Thailand* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 178.

worshipping of spirits are an abomination to the Lord (Deut. 18:10-12). Those who practice them will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:20-21).

Leviticus 19:31 says, “Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.” The Lord strongly commands the people not to consult familiar spirits and mediums for advice and help, but to inquire God for help (Isa. 8:19).

Ancestor Worship

Usually most Thai Buddhists who practice animism also practice ancestor worship. The practice of ancestor worship is particularly strong among the Thai Chinese who often have in their house a small shrine that contains their ancestor tablet instead of a spirit house of the land guardians in their front yard. As a sign of respect to the dead, many Thai Buddhists worship their ancestors, such as parents and grandparents. They believe that the souls of deceased loved ones are still lingering about in and around the house to protect them from evil spirits and to bring blessing upon their lives.

Most Thai Buddhists worship their ancestors at the grave sites on the anniversary of the day of their ancestor’s death by offerings of food along with candles, incense sticks, and flowers. They also offer sacrifices to their ancestors on special occasions, such as New Year celebrations and Buddhist holidays. It is common to see pictures of their parents and grandparents hanging on the walls in their houses to be venerated. The author was taught to believe that the spirits of dead ancestors could influence the destiny and fortune of one’s life. Before the author became a Christian, his parents would say, “Do not be disrespectful by not worshipping the ancestors; it could bring

bad luck.” Thus, the author often offered sacrifices to them not out of respect, but out of fear of the dead.

Islam

Following Buddhism, Islam is the second-largest practiced religion in Thailand, and as the largest religious minority, it plays an important role in shaping the cultural landscape of Southern Thailand. About 3,952,000 Thai Muslims (5.8 percent of the population) mostly live in the four southernmost provinces of Thailand adjacent to Malaysia, which are Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani, and Satun.²⁴ Most Thai Muslims of this region are ethnic Malay, although a few ethnic Thai have converted to Islam. They tend to share a common cultural heritage with the Malays of the region. For example, Thai Muslims in this region speak Yawi, a local dialect of Muslim Malays, rather than Thai.²⁵

Islam first came to Malay Peninsula through Arab traders, and only began to have a strong foothold when Pattani declared itself an Islamic state. Subsequently, Pattani became part of Thailand’s territory in 1909.²⁶ Since then, radical Muslim groups who are seeking an independent Muslim state in Southern Thailand have led armed rebellions. Recent violence in Southern

²⁴ “Muslim Population by Country,” Guardian, (accessed February 7, 2015); <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/jan/28/muslim-population-country-projection-203D>.

²⁵ Duncan McCargo states that “the area remains around 80 percent Malay-speaking and Muslim, and has never been properly incorporated culturally or psychologically into predominantly Buddhist Thailand.” *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 2.

²⁶ Ibid. Pattani was forcibly assimilated into the territory of Thailand. The Southern border provinces are administered by unelected governors from Bangkok.

Thailand has escalated and it has increased fears of additional acts of terror.²⁷

Thai Muslim populations are scattered in small groups all over the central and northern regions of Thailand, and are living in harmony within predominantly Buddhist communities. Additionally, mosques number over 3,000 in Thailand, with 173 of them located in Bangkok alone.²⁸ Muslim schools that provide Islamic religious instruction number over 200 in cities and villages all over Thailand.²⁹ Thai Muslims observe the traditional Muslim feasts and Sabbath and are obliged to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives. Typically, in most Muslim areas, they are very slow to respond to the gospel. When a Muslim young person becomes a Christian, he or she usually faces excommunication by the family and members of the community.

The History of Christianity in Thailand

As discussed in the previous sections, Thailand has a rich historical heritage and diverse religious and cultural background. Even though Buddhism is the state religion in Thailand, it has been influenced by Christianity to some extent. The Western missionary to the Thai people needs to learn the history of Christianity in Thailand in order to understand

²⁷ “Since January 2004, there have been more than 4,100 deaths and 6,509 casualties attributed to the violence in the deep south. The conflict has had many detrimental effects upon local Thais, among them distrust and suspicion between Muslims and Buddhists.” Michael K. Jerryson, *Buddhist Fury* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

²⁸ “Muslim in Thailand,” Thai Embassy, (accessed February 28, 2015); <http://www.thaiembassy.org/riyadh/th/organize/29025-Muslim-in-Thailand.html>.

²⁹ Ibid.

the development of Thai Christian identities. To understand the history of Thai Christianity, it is also important for the Western missionary to learn some of the history of Roman Catholicism in Thailand. This section will first discuss the Catholic missions and then the Protestant missions in Thailand.

Roman Catholic Missions in Thailand

The first known Catholic presence in Thailand was two Portuguese Dominican missionaries, Friar Jeronimo da Cruz and Sebastiao da Canto, who arrived in Thailand in 1555.³⁰ From the start, the Catholic Church grew slowly; however, it has brought modern science and Western medicine to the country. Although the Catholics established a number of schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals, they have been unsuccessful in reaching the Thai Buddhists. According to the 2005 statistics, there are 292,000 Catholics in Thailand, which is 0.46% of the total population of the country.³¹ Most of the Catholic population is concentrated in central Thailand, especially in Bangkok, where many of them are member of the middle-class.³²

³⁰ “*The Catholic Directory of Thailand* states that Roman Catholics first entered Siam in 1511 when priests accompanied the Portuguese’s Embassy of Alfonso de Albuquerque. In 1555 two Dominican priests arrived, but both were soon martyred in 1566 and 1569 respectively.” Alex G. Smith, *Siamese Gold: A History of Church Growth in Thailand* (Bangkok, Thailand: Kanok Bannasan, 1981), 9.

³¹ “Statistics by Country by Catholic Population,” Catholic-Hierarchy, (accessed March 19, 2015); <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/sc1.html>.

³² According to the 2000 census, there are an estimated 335,000 catholic in Thailand. “US Department of State,” Thailand, (accessed March 12, 2016); <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization171673.pdf>.

Catholicism in Thailand has been syncretized with traditional Thai culture in the use of its architecture and rituals in churches.³³ Most Thai Buddhists do not differentiate between Catholic and Protestant, but consider them the same. They are not interested in converting to other religions, because they perceive that all religions are good. However, many Thai Buddhists have converted to Catholicism because they received some tangible and immediate benefits, such as medical services or education, by joining the Catholic Church.

Protestant Missions in Thailand

The beginning of Protestant Christianity in Thailand is attributed to Carl Augustus Friedrich Gutzlaff, a German Lutheran affiliated with the Netherlands Missionary Society, and Jacob Tomlin, an English man affiliated with the London Missionary Society. They began ministering in Thailand in 1828.³⁴ They received permission to focus their ministry only among the Chinese in Thailand that a way might be opened into China. Tomlin had to leave on May 14, 1829 to regain his health and to get more books and medicine.³⁵ Gutzlaff stayed in Thailand for only three years, during which he translated some of the Scriptures into the Thai language and produced a Thai dictionary. Nevertheless, after these three years of ministering in Thailand, he baptized Boon Tee as his first Chinese convert who would contribute much

³³ For example, Catholics have adopted the Buddhist temple architecture for Catholic churches and have used many other traditional folk rituals in their religious ceremonies.

³⁴ Kenneth E. Wells, *History of Protestant Work in Thailand* (Bangkok, Thailand: Church of Christ in Thailand, 1958), 5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

to Christianity in Thailand. Although he was unsuccessful in reaching the Chinese minority in Thailand, forty years later the first ethnic Thai Buddhist converted to Christianity.³⁶ In response to Gutzlaff's appeal in 1831,³⁷ two American missions entered Thailand: the American Baptist Mission and the Presbyterian Mission.³⁸ More missionaries arrived as a result of an appeal made to America for Thailand. The first of these missionaries to arrive was Dr. David Abeel under the American Baptist Mission.³⁹ Later in 1893 Maitrichit Chinese Baptist Church, the first Protestant in Thailand, was founded.⁴⁰

A prominent pioneer medical doctor who enters Thailand as a missionary was Dr. Dan Beach Bradley under the American Baptist

³⁶ "The 1869 January week of prayer concluded with the first baptism. The first Thai convert baptized was gray haired Nan Inta. His coming for medical help for a cough was his first contact with McGilvary. He had been a respected Buddhist monk. – Nan being a title indicating he had taken the full course as a Buddhist priest. His faith in Buddhism was seriously shaken when he saw McGilvary's precise prediction of the great eclipse of August 17, 1868, come to pass." Daniel McGilvary was an American Presbyterian missionary to Northern Thailand. Smith, 66.

³⁷ "Thai Church History in Global Context," Timeline, (accessed March 14, 2016); <http://xn--12cfm4cab2b2dcdbd3bo2ae1gsakk2bh93c.com/index.php/en/>.

³⁸ "Protestantism entered early in the nineteenth century and was spread mainly by American Presbyterians. Numerically it was weaker than Roman Catholicism." Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity Vol. 2: A.D. 1500—A.D. 1975* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1997), 1320.

³⁹ Dorothy Fowler, "A History of Protestant Missions in Thailand" (M.A. thesis., Graduate School of Missions of Columbia Bible College, 1955), 28.

⁴⁰ "The last Baptist missionary left the field in 1893, but the mission left behind a strong church in Bangkok (the first Baptist church in East Asia and the first Protestant church among Chinese), which later became known as the Maitrichit Church." Scott W. Sunquist, ed., *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 833.

Mission.⁴¹ During his thirty-eight years in Thailand, Bradley made several accomplishments such as introducing vaccinations to fight smallpox, building a printing shop on which to print tracts, and publishing the first Thai newspaper.⁴² The medical work proves to be a successful method in gaining the acceptance of the Thai Buddhists.⁴³ His legacy still persists to this day.⁴⁴ However, the Thai Buddhists were fearful of the king, who had great power at that time, that no one dared displease him by taking an interest in the foreign religion of the missionaries.

During the pioneering stage of Protestant missions, most Christian works were run by missionaries. However, in 1934 the mission works were gradually handed over to the indigenous church when the Presbyterian missions joined together and organized the Church of Christ in Thailand

⁴¹ The greatest pioneer among the American Baptist missionaries, and the one who served longest in Thailand. Wells, 10.

⁴² "In the course of thirty-eight years Dr. Bradley made but the one visit to America, 1847-1849. After his purchase of the American Board presses and property he was of no further expense to the American Missionary Association, but supported his growing family by printing. It was one of these newer presses that, April 27, 1839, turned out the first government document ever printed in Siam, 9000 copies of royal proclamation contra banding opium....For a time he published a newspaper, the *Bangkok Calendar*, which has been a mine of information. Some of Siam's classical literature first appeared in print through his efforts." Ibid., 14.

⁴³ "Dr. Bradley's successful operation on the monk and his achievements with small-pox serum and vaccine undoubtedly influenced the court to view Protestant missionaries with more favor." Ibid., 13.

⁴⁴ "His name continues to be mentioned in Thailand in connection with the 'firsts' of the modern period, the first press, the first surgery, the first successful inoculation and vaccination against small-pox. In 1951 there appeared in Bangkok a Thai biography of *Maw Bradley*. The author, 'Nai Hon Hui,' was a journalist, not a Christian, but one who could not forbear to tell the story of the doctor whom, not having seen, he yet admired." Ibid., 15.

(CCT).⁴⁵ Currently there exist three main umbrellas of the Protestant organizations that are recognized by the Thai government, namely: the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), comprising mainly the Presbyterian churches; Thailand Baptist Convention (TBC); and Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT).⁴⁶ The Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand include the various denominational groups, such as the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA), Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Assemblies of God, Charismatic, New Tribes Mission (NTM), and Korean World Mission Association, etc. The organization and management of CCT and EFT are different. CCT is organized with nineteen districts. While EFT is just a fellowship organization.⁴⁷ Today the largest Protestant organization, Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT), has approximately 300 churches.⁴⁸ The Baptist Convention is associated with the Southern Baptist Convention and is the smallest organization.

For more than a century the Presbyterian Mission would remain the main missionary organization. However, most of the early Presbyterian

⁴⁵ “The National Christian Council (NCC) supplied the funds for the meeting in Bangkok of the first General Assembly of the new church, April 7-11, 1934. The Assembly adopted a constitution and chose the name ‘The Church of Christ’ in the hope that all Protestant bodies would become members of this autonomous national church. Actually only the members of the Presbyterian and American Baptist (Chinese) churches did so.” Ibid., 143-45.

⁴⁶ EFT functions as an umbrella organization of evangelical Protestant churches that include different denominational groups.

⁴⁷ “In 1970 the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand was founded. Members – Missions, institutions, denominations, local churches or individuals—are associated with this loosely structured fellowship, but are not controlled or governed as a denomination like the C.C.T.” Smith, 226.

⁴⁸ “Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand,” Reformiert, (accessed March 27, 2015); <http://www.reformiert-online.net/adressen/detail.php?id=13333&lg=eng>.

missionaries' efforts focused more on educational and social development than on preaching the gospel. An important period of expansion of the mission work in Thailand was dominated by an American Presbyterian missionary to the North, Dr. Daniel McGilvary. In 1888, he founded the McGilvary Theological Seminary.⁴⁹ He recognized the need for training indigenous pastors and leaders, personally instructing many who became pastors in the churches.⁵⁰ The work of the Presbyterian mission also expanded in other ways that contributed to the social and educational development of the people (e.g., the establishment of schools, hospitals, and many other para-church organizations).

The initial response to the missionaries' proclamation of the gospel was slow. Thai Buddhists did not accept the gospel presented by the missionaries, especially during the first forty years of mission work. One of the main reasons that many Thai Buddhists did not become Christians was that they were not convinced of sin, and still thought that salvation was to be earned by doing good works and being a good person rather than trusting Christ Who earned salvation for them. Some of them, who became Christians, still thought that they must do good works and be a good moral person in order to be saved.⁵¹ The Bible teaches the necessity of good works only as the proof of

⁴⁹ Smith, 86.

⁵⁰ "From the very start, McGilvary practiced a valuable method of training. He took national converts along with him on his tours as apprentices, especially older men he deemed potential church workers. In this way he taught them by example and practices the principles of evangelism, church planting and pastoral care." Ibid.

⁵¹ "However, when a Thai accepted Christ, the central issue was to transform his sense of values and to ingrain the concept of freedom of God's gift of salvation as opposed to the personal effort of merit. Some have become little better than

saving faith (Jas. 2:14, 20). Others became Christians for the sake of financial benefits rather than spiritual benefits.⁵² This is an important point for Western missionaries to be aware of, and missionaries will likely face circumstances in their ministries when people expect some material gain from becoming Christians.

Summary

Throughout Thai history, religion has played a significant role in every aspect of Thai life and culture. The current Thai religious landscape is highly syncretistic in its combination of traditional indigenous beliefs that existed in pre-Thai history. It is an amalgamation of Theravada Buddhism, Hindu Brahmanism, and Animism.

It cannot be overlooked that Buddhist-Hindu-animistic religious belief is still Satan's stronghold in Thailand. Ephesians 2:2 tells us that the unbelievers "walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Romans 1:25 says, "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

Christian Buddhists—still depending on works instead of grace for living the Christian life." Ibid., 277.

⁵² "Self support is still a major issue in the churches throughout Thailand today. Then, as now, the average Thai Christian has expected foreign support....Furthermore, they observed most missionaries came from rich Western lands. Many Thai falsely believed missionaries were the paid agents of their governments. All these elements helped produce a dependent mentality among many Christians in Siam, still reflected in many Thai Christians today." Ibid., 110.

Chapter 3

Social Demographics

This chapter provides Western missionaries with enough Thai history and cultural background to overcome cultural misunderstandings and misconceptions and increase their effectiveness in cross-cultural communication. Taking time to learn Thai history and cultural background will help the Western missionary to gain a deeper appreciation of the Thai way of life and avoid some of the related frustrations and discouragement in the work of the ministry. This chapter will also identify some of the current social and economic trends in Thailand to enable Western missionaries to cope with the challenges of a changing Thai society.

Historical Background

No written historical record exists on the origin of the Thai people.¹ However, most Thai scholars agree that the Thai people originated in the Yunnan province of China.² They migrated south to the Chao Phraya River in

¹ “Accurate and fairly complete records date only from the Bangkok Era, since the official records of the Ayutthaya Era were destroyed when the Burmese sacked the Thai capital in 1767. There is thus an almost complete lack of early indigenous historical accounts.” Bangkok Era begins in 1782 and continues up until the present time. Frank J. Moore, *Thailand: It's People, Its Society, Its Culture* (New Haven, CT: Hraf Press, 1974), 41.

² “Although scholars disagree about the origins of the Thai race, they generally agree that the Thai people lived in southern China for many years before beginning to migrate southward into the Indochina peninsula...” Donald E. Nuechterlein, *Thailand and the Struggle of Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 3.

the northern part of Thailand³ which was inhabited by animistic people groups, such as the Mon and Khmer peoples.⁴ These groups influenced the development of the Thai people's culture, religious beliefs, and national identity.⁵

The Thai people founded their first Thai kingdom at Sukhothai in the north central part of Thailand. During the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng, the kingdom of Sukhothai flourished as a center of art and culture.⁶ However, in 1350, the kingdom of Sukhothai fell and had to submit to a new Thai kingdom under the rule of King Ramathibodi who founded a new capital at Ayutthaya.⁷ King Ramathibodi, who was regarded as a deity,⁸ established

³ "Thereafter a steady flow of Thais moved southward....A third segment traveled directly south from Yunnan into the basin of Chao Phraya River; they were the forefathers of the Thais." Ibid.

⁴ "As the Thai moved into Southeast Asia they found other settled kingdoms already there. Among those the Thai encountered were the Burmese and Khmer (Cambodian) empires each of which at one time or another controlled most of present-day Thailand." James Basche, *Thailand: Land of the Free* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1971), 176.

⁵ "Before Buddhism sank its roots into Thai society, Thai settlers were practicing the sophisticated religion of the Mon and Khmer. Through them, Thai had adopted the Hindu view of kingship, the caste system of the Brahmins, and the worship of Erawan, the Elephant God." Jim Goodman and Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Thailand* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2012), 80.

⁶ During King Ramkhamhaeng reign, he invented the Thai alphabet and encouraged the rival of Thai classical arts.

⁷ "A series of less-than-visionary kings reigned and, by 1350, Sukhothai's influence had begun to wane under the shadow of a new and powerful star rising to the south: the Kingdom of Ayutthaya." Timothy D. Hoare, *Thailand: A Global Studies Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 29.

⁸ "Only the king is highest in the land, because he is god-like. When the king gives an order it is like the axe of heaven. The king is feared and respected almost like a god. No-one dares look at him in the face." John L. S. Girling, *Thailand: Society and Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 22.

Figure 3.1 Map of Thailand.⁹

⁹ "Atlas: Thailand," Infoplease, (accessed November 15, 2014); <http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/thailand.html>.

Theravada Buddhism as the state religion of Ayutthaya. In 1767, the kingdom of Ayutthaya was invaded by the Burmese armies and its capital was captured and destroyed.¹⁰ However, an army general named Taksin organized resistance against the Burmese armies and transferred the capital from Ayutthaya to Thonburi across the Chao Phraya River from Bangkok. After the death of Taksin, General Chakri crowned himself as king and took the name Phra Buddha Yodfah Chulaloke. He transferred the royal capital at Thonburi to Bangkok.¹¹ He was the first king of the Chakri Dynasty that continues to the present day. The Revolution of 1932 transformed Thailand from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. The present king on the Thai Throne is King Bhumibol Adulyadej.¹²

Thai people are proud of their national heritage, monarchy, and culture. Understanding the historical background of the Thai people helps the Western missionary to appreciate the Thai people's origin and their cultural and religious heritage.

Political Structure

Thailand was previously ruled under an absolute monarchy,¹³ but the turning point occurred when military and bureaucratic elites came to power

¹⁰ Nuechterlein, 9.

¹¹ "He restored order and assumed the royal title in 1782. The Chakri dynasty he established still reigns in Bangkok, which he made the capital." D. R. SarDesai, *Southeast Asia: Past and Present* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 77.

¹² "In 1982 there was a grandiose commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the founding of Bangkok and the Chakri dynasty, of which King Bhumibol Adulyadej is the ninth monarch in direct succession." George Constable, ed., *South-East Asia* (Amsterdam: Time-Life Books, 1987), 129.

¹³ I have already dealt with some of this information under the heading of "Historical Background."

through a bloodless *coup d'état* in 1932.¹⁴ This event changed the government of Thailand into a constitutional monarchy in which the king acts as a symbolic Head of State under the constitution.¹⁵ Even though Thailand has transformed itself into a constitutional monarchy, the king still occasionally intervenes in political affairs to restore law and order to the country.¹⁶ Ever since Thailand became a constitutional monarchy it has faced several incidents of political unrest, with elected governments brought down by numerous coups followed by military takeovers.¹⁷ Nonetheless, MCTBs are deeply concerned and engaged in the political affairs of their country despite its unstable political situation.

¹⁴ “In the early 1930s, the Great Depression created financial problems for the Thai economy. The king tried to solve this by taxing salaries. The move only made the Thai more dissatisfied with the monarchy. In 1932 a group of army officers and intellectuals overthrew the royal government in a bloodless revolution.” Goodman and Spilling, 27.

¹⁵ “Since 1932 Thailand has been a constitutional monarchy—that is, the king is the head of state, but the power of the state is held by a democratically elected parliament. The current king of Thailand, King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Or Rama 9, has reigned since 1946, making him the world’s longest-reigning monarch.” Ibid., 38.

¹⁶ “The coup leaders installed a widely respected businessman, Anand Panyarachun, as prime minister. Elections were held in early 1992 and parties supporting the military won control of the parliament. General Suchinda became prime minister even though he was not himself an elected member of parliament and had publicly promised not to claim the prime ministership for himself. Public uproar by pro-democracy demonstrators followed. The demonstrators were led by the former Governor of Bangkok, Major-General Chamlong Srimuang, who staged a public hunger strike in protest at Suchinda’s actions. The chaos led, in mid-May, to a massacre of demonstrators by soldiers apparently acting under the orders of Suchinda himself. Suchinda was forced from office in disgrace. Further conflict was avoided when the King intervened by re-appointing Anand Panyarachun to the prime ministership to prepare for fresh elections, subsequently held in September.” Peter G. Warr, *The Thai Economy in Transition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 17-18.

¹⁷ “Since the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, Thailand has withstood 13 revolutions, 8 constitutions, and more than 30 changes of administration.” SarDesai, 184.

Although Thailand has never been under Western colonial rule, it is not free from the communist threats of Vietnam, the separatists south of Thailand, or tensions with neighboring countries like Burma and Cambodia. Despite Thailand's political instability and many national security challenges, it has become an integral part of the global community, as signified when Thailand was admitted into the United Nations in 1946.¹⁸ In 1966, Thailand signed a treaty with the United States, which promotes commercial and political relations between both countries.¹⁹ For Thailand, becoming an ally with the United States means protection from the threat of communist regimes and the promotion of national security.²⁰

Currently, Thailand has a parliamentary form of democratic government in which a Prime Minister functions as the leader of the government. Both the Senate and House of Representatives make up the National Assembly called the *Rathasapha* which is the legislative branch of government.²¹ For the executive branch, the House of Representatives elect a prime minister, who is then appointed by the king, and a prime minister, in turn, selects his cabinet (comprised of ministers) from the House of Representatives. The Senate elects a Secretary of the Senate and examines

¹⁸ David A. Wilson, *Politics in Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 23.

¹⁹ Moore, 326.

²⁰ "President Kennedy assured Thailand of full United States support for its independence and territorial integrity, and he pledged American determination to meet any communist attack on Thailand." Nuechterlein, 230.

²¹ "The legislative branch took its current form in 2007 following the newly drafted constitution of that year. The National Assembly has 630 members. Both houses of the National Assembly meet at the Parliament House of Thailand." Goodman and Spilling, 33.

draft legislation, and finance bills. The Supreme Court judges are appointed officially by the king on the recommendation of the Judicial Commission of the Courts of Justice. The Thai regional administration consists of seventy-five provinces (each province having its own governor), and is then divided into districts, minor districts, subdistricts and villages. Despite the fact that Thailand has a democratic model of governance, it is still very much influenced by the hierarchical power structures in which corrupt businessmen, influential MCTBs, and military bureaucratic officials dominate the power.

Thus, in order to be effective in evangelizing Thai people, it is imperative for the Western missionary to understand Thai political power structures of those who really hold the power in the communities. Learning these political power structures of Thai society will help the Western missionary understand how the Thai societies are connected together and how groups within a Thai political power relate to one another. If the Western missionary hopes to influence people in the community, he must find a way to be recognized as acceptable within the community.

Currently, Thai people and political parties are deeply polarized in their political opinions as demonstrated by the yellow shirts (supporters of Thai King Bhumibol) and the red shirts (supporters of ousted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra) that have for more than a decade instigated mass protests in Thailand. When evangelizing the Thai people, the missionary should avoid discussing this topic of political tension between the yellow shirts (who accuse Thaksin for corruption and disrespect to the monarchy) and the red shirts (who support Thaksin's return to power) or between the King of Thailand and Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra's regime.

Economy

As learning the Thai political system assists the Western missionary in understanding Thai people, so also does learning the economic development of the country. Economic growth has had a profound effect on the nation, as well as the individual.

Thailand, previously an agricultural society until 1960, has adopted the global capitalist system.²² Since then, the country has experienced rapid economic growth and has recently played an important role in the world's economy.²³ While the economic growth rate in Thailand overall has accelerated over the past decades, few of the rural areas or the poor in society have benefited from this modern development. Apparently, for the sake of modern developments, MCTBs have left behind a lifestyle of moderation to embrace industrialization and modernization way of life.

The economy of Thailand is an emerging economy with export and tourism as the main drivers of the country's economic growth. The main exports include rice (the largest commercial crop), textiles, jewelry, petroleum products, fishery products, poultry, farmed shrimp, and rubber. Thailand's main export industries include automobiles, computers, and electronics that

²² "By the (Second) War's end, the groundwork had already been laid for Thailand's transformation from a regional agrarian economy to globalized industrial/technological economy." Hoare, 65. "The centralizing policy of the dynasty in Siam, as everywhere else, was accelerating as a result of the demands by, and the opportunities derived from, the expanding global capitalist system." Girling, 47.

²³ "Following a brief period of recession in the early 1980s, Thailand became the recipient of massive foreign capital investment, particularly from Japan. By 1991, Thailand had been declared 'the Fifth Tiger' of the Asian Pacific 'tiger economies' (along with Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea)." Hoare, 65.

contribute significantly to the economy.²⁴ Trade is largely conducted by government, private investors, and MCTBs. The millions who live in the industrialized areas often benefit from a higher standard of living and better job opportunities. Tourism is another major force that contributes greatly to economic growth. Thailand attracts millions of tourists each year from all around the world, generating large revenues to the country.²⁵

Thailand has a partly capitalist and partly socialist economy that provides many services and goods for its people. For instance, the Thai government provides education for low-income families in which the parents pay a minimal tuition fee for their children. Thailand provides a universal health care coverage program, through a thirty *Baht* scheme²⁶ (less than one US dollar), with the aim of providing Thai people with free health care coverage. Hospitalization costs in a government hospital, such as prescription drugs and emergency care are free to patients. All elderly residents who are citizens of Thailand receive government pensions, available at sixty years of age or older to those who do not earn any income permanently. These elderly people will receive cash benefits, 500 *Baht* (approximately fifteen US dollars) per month. The Thai government also provides disability allowances and

²⁴ “The modern Thai economy is heavily reliant on exports, with two-thirds of the country’s earnings coming from exported goods such as cars, auto parts, computers, clothing, and electronic goods. In 2010 Thailand produced 1.6 million cars, and it is predicted that by 2015 it will be one of the top 10 carmakers in the world.” Ibid., 43.

²⁵ According to the 2012 statistics of TAT (Tourism Authority of Thailand) 20.51 million of foreign tourists came to Thailand. “Tourism Authority of Thailand Informative,” Tourism Authority of Thailand, (accessed November 18, 2014); <http://www.tourismthailand.org/About-Thailand/About-TAT>.

²⁶ The patient only pays thirty *Baht* for a treatment.

child benefits. It has been common for Thai families to have many children so that their children can support them financially in their old age. In Thai culture, children tend to be financially dependent on their parents well into adulthood, especially for their college tuition fees. When their children finish college and find employment, they financially support their parents.

Most of the country's wealth is centralized in Bangkok.²⁷ Bangkok is one of the fastest-growing economies in Southeast Asia.²⁸ It has a population of around 8.5 million people,²⁹ with around fourteen million people living in Bangkok's metropolitan area,³⁰ many of whom are migrants from rural areas of the country. MCTBs are financially successful. Most visitors to Bangkok are astonished by the impressive modern high-rise buildings, enormous condominium buildings, and new housing development projects around the

²⁷ "The city dominates the Thai economy and its interaction with the international economy to the extent that it is often asserted that Bangkok is Thailand. The capital has long been described as the Kingdom's only 'growth centre' and Thailand as 'a Bangkok based state.'" Chris Dixon, *The Thai Economy: Uneven Development and Internationalisation* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 190.

²⁸ "In 2010 Thailand had the second-largest economy in Southeast Asia (after the highly populous Indonesia) the 24th largest in the world. In terms of per capita (per person) wealth, Thailand is the fourth richest in Southeast Asia, after Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia. In the 10 years up to 1995 Thailand had one of the world's fastest-growing economies, at an average rate of 8-9 percent a year." Goodman and Spilling, 42.

²⁹ "Bangkok Population 2014," World Population Review, (accessed 18 November, 2014); <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/bangkok-population/>.

³⁰ "Bangkok General Information," FIP World Congress Bangkok 2014, (accessed November 18, 2014); http://www.fip.org/bangkok2014/Bangkok-Bangkok-Thailand/2057/Bangkok_General_Information/.

metropolitan area. Today, every urban household boasts a television set, as do many rural homes. Mobile phones, printers, and personal computers have become essential devices of everyday life for most MCTBs. Because of the material attraction and work opportunity to earn greater sums of money, many teenagers and young adults from rural areas move to Bangkok or other cities to seek their fortunes. As mentioned before, many of these teenagers and young adults are either deceived or forced into becoming victims of sex trafficking. Consequently hundreds of thousands of young people end up involved in drugs or prostitution, or as victims of AIDS.

Due to the modernization process, Thailand is changing at a faster pace than in the past, and people are not responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Modernization has become closely related to materialism. The love of money and materialism have also crept into the Thai church, making it ineffective in evangelizing other Thai people. The Scripture warns of the danger of loving money and earthly goods: “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10).

Non-Verbal Communication

In order to understand Thai communication, missionaries must have knowledge of Thai nonverbal communication and behavior. Therefore, recognizing the different types of nonverbal communication will help missionaries effectively evangelize Thai people with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This section will then discuss different types of Thai nonverbal communication (i.e., Thai’s approach to time, eye contact, and personal space).

Thai people have a different concept of time from Westerners who are very time-oriented. Traditionally, Thai people have been more event-oriented than time-oriented; they live from day to day without thinking about making schedules or long term plans for the future. Modern MCTBs who have adopted the Western lifestyle are gradually changing from an event-oriented culture to a time-oriented society. They are generally well organized with their time and know the importance of punctuality. However, even they are naturally more relational and event-oriented people. On the other hand, Thai people who are from the rural areas have the mind-frame that time is less important than people or events. For the Thais, it is disrespectful for someone to leave an event early, even though they have a prior appointment elsewhere. Most Thais are very hospitable and open their homes to other people who take time to visit them.³¹

The influence of Buddhism on the culture is clear in the Thai concept of time. According to the Thai Buddhists concept of time, time is not so crucial because the Thai Buddhists culture is based on a current time frame of mind. They believe in living fully in the present moment without being preoccupied with the past or future. For instance, when a Thai person schedules an appointment at three o'clock, it could mean 3:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m., or 9:00 p.m. Western missionaries could become frustrated with the Thai time frame of mind if they are not willing to adjust their minds regarding Thai concepts of time. They will need to be patient when planning a schedule

³¹ “Thais are very hospitable, and it is not uncommon for foreigners visiting the country to be invited by strangers into their homes for food. Friends and strangers alike consider the welcoming of guests to be an important demonstration of Thai culture.” Arne Kislenko, *Culture and Customs of Thailand* (Westport: CT, 2004), 158.

or setting their expectations for Thais spiritual development. They should not try forcefully to insist on punctual church services times. Instead, they need to deal with lateness and absence sensitively while gradually teaching the importance of starting church services on time.

With respect to eye contact, typically failures to make eye contact with others while talking with them communicate insincerity or the hiding of guilt. However, making a strong or constant eye contact may be considered rude or disrespectful. Avoiding direct eye contact with those who are older or have a higher status communicates respect and politeness.

In conversation, Thai people usually allow at least three to four feet of distance between them when speaking with other people. Personal space for conversations among friends or personal acquaintances has a closer personal distance zones (usually one to two feet). One will observe that during the rush hours of Bangkok's public transit system, even though the vehicles are packed with people, people still keep their personal space between them (usually one foot).

Education

In Thailand, the government provides free public education through high school, and it is compulsory for young people to attend school for at least nine years (up until lower secondary school).³² Even though the government provides free public education for its people, the public schools in the rural areas are facing many challenges, such as lack of funding, declining numbers

³² Lower secondary is equivalent to Western grades seven through nine.

of teachers, and declining student performance.³³ A high percentage of rural young people drop out after secondary school³⁴ in order to assist their poor parents make a living, whereas a high percentage of MCTB young people perform relatively well in their studies and do complete a high school education.³⁵ In comparison with schools in some of the countries in Southeast Asia, the attendance rate of Thai young people in secondary school and high school is still considered acceptable.³⁶

Students who would like to be admitted into a public university need to pass the national university entrance examination at the end of high school. Those students who perform well on their entrance exam may attend one of several prestigious government universities in Thailand: Chulalongkorn University, Mahidol University, Karetsart University, Thammasat University, or King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. The oldest of these is the Chulalongkorn University, which was established in 1917.³⁷ These universities also offer international programs,

³³ "Teachers normally present their material in a traditional lecture format that doesn't provide much opportunity for student response or participation. Students are taught from a very young age simply to accept what a teacher says without question, as anything less would be deemed disrespectful." Hoare, 124.

³⁴ "But with a compulsory requirement of only six years—the completion of the primary/elementary level—the dropout rate in secondary schools is considerable, particularly in rural and/or impoverished communities. The circumstances for dropping out vary, but the vast majority of them are financial." Ibid., 129.

³⁵ "High school graduates tend to come from higher income families, non-agricultural households, with fathers who are civil servants, military officers, or merchants." Kristine L. Anderson and Bruce London, "Modernization, Elites, and Distribution of Education Resources in Thailand," *Social Forces* Vol. 63 Issue 3 (March 1985): 776.

³⁶ Hoare, 128.

³⁷ "It was created in 1917 by amalgamating the Royal Medical College with the Civil Service College." Kenneth Perry Landon, *Siam in Transition: A Brief*

using English as a medium of instruction. Currently, there are several universities in Thailand that are promoting collaboration in curricula and programs with other countries, such as the USA, Singapore, Australia, and England.

The most prestigious private university is Assumption University which is run by the Roman Catholic Church; the main campus is located in Bangkok and two other branches are located in Bang Rak and Bang Na. The Presbyterian Church has established two well-known institutions, one in Bangkok (Bangkok Christian College) and the other in Chiang Mia (Payab University). These two institutions have won respect from the general public and its students occupy most high offices and places of influence in Thailand.

Those students who perform poorly on their entrance exam may apply to one of the private universities, colleges, or institutes. There are two-year vocational colleges where students can take courses that prepare them for employment. Those who would like to further their education with a bachelor's degree can go to a higher education institute for an additional two years of study.

Education is viewed by most Thai people as the most important means for attaining social mobility. MCTB students tend to be more serious about learning and education than many of the students who come from the rural areas or poor families. Many MCTB students study late into the night and take private afterschool classes in mathematics or science. MCTBs tend to have a very high regard for people who achieve academic success, especially

Survey of Cultural Trends in the Five Years since the Revolution of 1932 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 109.

those who are in the fields of medicine and engineering. Academic success is often used as a measurement of a person's worth.

Thai Language

The Thai language is a tonal language³⁸ which belongs to the Tai branch of the Sino-Tibetan language group.³⁹ Furthermore, the Thai language is related to the language spoken in Myanmar, Vietnam, Yunnan Province of China, and Laos. The Thai language is divided into four major dialects: Northern Thai (Lanna), Southern Thai, Northeastern Thai (Isan), and Central Thai. Central Thai is the official language of Thailand, spoken nationwide especially in Bangkok and surrounding areas. Originally, Thai language was influenced by Khmer' concepts. Later, the Thai language was considerably influenced by Sanskrit and Pali concepts, and Hinduism and Buddhism permeated deeply into the language.⁴⁰

³⁸ "...the Thai language is "tonal"; the inflection or sound pattern that is given to a word is as much a part of its meaning as is its spelling. There are five tones in Thai: middle, rising, falling, high, and low. The alphabet is divided into three categories or classes referred to as high, middle, and low), and each of these classes is governed by different tone rules. There are many Thai words whose consonant and vowel patterns are identical, but as they are spoken with different tones, their meanings are completely different." Hoare, 226.

³⁹ Moore, 88.

⁴⁰ "Pali and Sanskrit established an international medium of communication between all countries of Buddhist and Indian cultures, but they also erected a class barrier within Siam itself." Virginia Thompson, *Thailand: The New Siam* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1941), 760.

The Western missionary to the Thai people needs to learn the Thai language to effectively evangelize this people. Although the Western missionary has a desire to take every opportunity to evangelize Thai people, he should not depend solely on an interpreter to communicate the gospel message. For the Western missionary to understand Thai people and to become part of the Thai culture, he must communicate in the Thai language.

Summary

In this chapter we have looked at a brief overview of the demographics of the Thai people. Western missionaries who are called to do cross-cultural evangelism need to understand the history and background of Thai people in order to effectively evangelize them with the gospel within their cultural context.

Chapter 4

Culture, Society, and Worldview

The Thai people are very proud of their rich socio-cultural heritage. It is important that Western missionaries have a general understanding of Thai values and customs to effectively evangelize Thai people. Understanding Thai values and customs will help the missionary to make sense of the people's behavioral norms. This chapter covers Thai culture, Thai society, and Thai religious worldview.

Thai Culture

Learning the unique features of Thai culture enables the Western missionary to understand better the Thai people. Understanding distinctly Thai cultural values and customs will help the Western missionary to avoid offending them. He will be able to interpret his observations of the behaviors of the Thai people in light of their own history and culture.

Thai Values

While western culture tends to promote the fulfilling of one's personal potential, valuing individualism and self-reliance, Thai culture puts great value on polite behavior that shows respect and consideration for other people. An important Thai cultural value is saving face. Therefore, Thais try to avoid conflict and confrontation with other people at all costs. Losing face¹

¹ "Losing face" is when one loses one's own sense of dignity or self-respect in public. Losing face occurs when someone is embarrassed in public or when someone is being caught for doing something wrong. In Thailand, it is called "*Khay Na*."

by expressing a negative emotion in the presence of other people is considered to be a great shame for Thai people. In interpersonal relationships, showing anger or telling a lie is shunned. In a situation in which a Thai person might feel frustrated or upset, he will always try his best to maintain peace and a calm attitude with a sense of humor and a smile.² Thai people express this attitude with the passive verbal expression *mai pen rai*, meaning, “no problem, it’s okay” in responses to situations involving conflict.³ For example, when two persons are involved in a work-related conflict, the younger person will usually be the first to apologize and then the older person will say, “*mai pen rai*.” This passive way of responding to conflict has caused frustration to visiting westerners who think Thais are apathetic, rather than considerate. Because of this non-confrontational attitude, fear of losing face, and fear of offending, the Thai people seem to respond to the gospel message, but whether they will actually accept the gospel message is another matter. Many times with the intention of pleasing the missionary, Thais will respond to the missionary’s gospel message with “yes” regardless of their true feelings. Western missionaries assume that Thais have accepted the gospel message, although they may have only agreed to relieve themselves of the immediate pressure of responding to the gospel message.

² This is a typical Eastern attitude, possibly stemming from the Thai’s roots in China.

³ “Generally speaking, this oft-heard phrase reflects the rather cool-headed disposition for which Thais are known. Although life is fraught with twists, turns, and reversals of fortune, Thais tend not to over-react to them. Things simply happen, and they will be dealt with in due time, in the appropriate manner, and with a calm heart.” Timothy D. Hoare, *Thailand: A Global Studies Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 157.

Another important value that shapes Thai culture is the concept of gratitude, or *kra-than-yoo*, as an act of reciprocating for the kindness one has received. *Kra-than-yoo* literally means “debt of loyalty.” *Kra-than-yoo* is displayed in all levels of Thai society as an essential part of social interaction. For example, students should show gratitude to teachers, as should children to their parents as an act of appreciation for their help and support.⁴ As an act of gratitude, children feel obligated to take care of their parents in their old age. Traditionally, most Thai Buddhist males who reach twenty years of age would become a monk to show gratitude to their parents.⁵

The Bible encourages believers to demonstrate a grateful spirit (Col. 3:15-17) and to “do good unto all men” (Gal. 6:10). However, one’s obligation to reciprocate the kindness of other people should be subordinate to one’s desire to please the Lord. Therefore, one should not allow an act of reciprocation to become the sole factor in determining one’s act or decision.

Thai people highly value respect for hierarchy, particularly for royalty, Buddhist monks, civil service employees, and physicians. In this Thai cultural value, showing respect means highly regarding what those in high positions say without expressing one’s opinion in their presence. When conversing with an elder or a person of high position, a Thai person would use the word *krap* (used by males) and *ka* (used by females) as an expression of politeness.⁶ Western missionaries need to understand that the Thai culture

⁴ Once a year students would show their gratitude and appreciation to their teachers during the Paying Homage Ceremony *pitee wai kru*.

⁵ Most Thai Buddhist males become monks for at least three months. However, some of them remain in the temples for many years.

⁶ These are the equivalent titles as used in the West when addressing people as “sir” or “madam”.

has placed great emphasis on respect for elders and the hierarchy status. Respect for elders and those in high position is in accordance with the scriptural teaching; however, one should not place seniority or a person's status above one's relationship to God (Acts 5:29).

Western missionaries must endeavor to understand Thai values and behavior so that they can better lead Thais toward living in a biblical way. Failure to understand these cultural values and behaviors will cause much frustration and confusion to the missionary. Thai people will not be offended when Westerners violate Thai *morés*, because they understand that Westerners are not accustomed to the intricacies of Thai cultural values. Thai people are tolerant of alternative behaviors and cultural values as long as they do not disrespect their monarchy or religion. Even though Thai people are very tolerant of foreigners, it is necessary for Western missionaries to learn Thai social values in order to gain their respect.

Thai Customs

Thai people are proud of their unique customs. Some of these customs are based on cultural nonverbal communication as mentioned in preceding chapter, meaning gestures and behaviors. Recognizing the Thai customs will put the missionary in good stead for evangelizing them with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important that the missionaries observe the custom of Thai greeting when meeting one another. Usually, a younger person will greet with *Wai*⁷ the older person by slightly bowing one's head while bringing one's hands together at the level of the chin and greeting by saying

⁷ The *Wai* is a form of greeting used by the Thai people to show respect and friendliness.

“*Sawasdee*⁸ *Krap* (male), *Sawasdee Kaa* (female).” Other Thai customs that missionaries need to be aware of are: (1) taking off one’s shoes when entering a home, (2) slightly bending the body while walking past someone who is older or has a higher status, (3) never touching someone’s head, (4) never speaking loudly in public places, and (5) never using one’s foot to point at things or placing one’s foot on books or raising one’s foot above a person’s head. Practicing these and other customs will help missionaries to be respected and win the trust of the Thai people.

Thai Society

Thai society is highly relational; it includes elements of social and family structure that express dependence, loyalty, and intimacy. Understanding the Thai people’s roles as members of the family and the larger community helps Western missionaries minister effectively to them and address pertinent social issues from a biblical perspective.

Social Structure

The foundational structures of Thai society are hierarchy and relationship.⁹ Thai Buddhists believe that the consequence of one’s social status is a result of accumulated *karma*¹⁰ from previous lives in the form of

⁸ *Sawasdee* can be used anytime of the day, or as hello or goodbye.

⁹ Patron-client relations reflect two complementary values in Thai society: (1) personal freedom, and (2) social order. John L. S. Girling, *Thailand: Society and Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 40.

¹⁰ The belief that person’s actions in the previous life determine one’s fate in the next life.

good deeds (*punya*) or evil deeds (*apunya*). There are social classes in Thailand, but they are not sharply defined like a caste system.¹¹ In early Thai society there were two main classes: (1) the upper ruling class *Khunnang*,¹² and (2) the lower peasant class *Phrai*. Most Thai people belonged to the lower peasant class. The *Sakdina* system¹³ in Thailand was a system of cultural and social order, in which different members of society have different social ranks based on the size of their land *Rai Na* (literally means a paddy or rice field). The size of one's land *Rai Na* will determine how people behave towards one another as well as how people attribute worth.

In Thai society, Buddhists monks are believed to have a higher status ranking than the ruling class. Both the ruling class and middle-class Thai Buddhists (MCTBs) are very dependent upon these monks to provide them with teachings and spiritual inspiration as a moralistic guideline. The head monk is responsible for the religious ceremonies and all the land that belongs to the Buddhist temple or *Wat*. All activities that pertain to birth and death are conducted in the Buddhist temple.¹⁴

¹¹ “Historically, Central Thai society had a hierarchical structure even though it lacked the rigid boundaries of the Indian caste system that, through the Khmer mediation, constituted its original model.” Maurizio Peleggi, *Thailand: The Worldly Kingdom* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2007), 67.

¹² Members of the nobility related to the royal family.

¹³ It is a system of social hierarchy which is in effect in various parts of contemporary Thai society. The *Sakdina* was institutionalized through the legal code during the reign of King Chakri.

¹⁴ “The Thai rite *de passage* of life from birth to death has been inseparable from the wat.” Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *Life and Ritual in Old Siam: Three Studies of Thai Life and Customs*, trans. and ed. William J. Gedney (New Haven, CT: Hraf Press, 1961), 66.

Traditionally in Thailand, people of lower class had no opportunity to experience vertical mobility. Today, the Thai social system does not clearly distinguish between the upper ruling class and the lower peasant class as in the former days.¹⁵ Because industrialization and urbanization have exerted a powerful influence in Thailand, they have significantly transformed the social structure of Thai society and formed a middle class to which people in many occupations belong.¹⁶

Education is a necessary means for advancement and social mobility. MCTBs are government clerks, school teachers, university professors, doctors, and the like. More recently, MCTBs are becoming increasingly attracted to positions in the private sector, especially in large and often foreign-owned corporations. Thai workers from the lower class would like to be businessmen or businesswomen (*Nak Turakit*) or government or military officials (*Jaw Panakyan*). These high positions are considered the new ruling class of Thai society.

Thai culture reflects a hierarchical relationship in social situations. For Thais, connectedness in society affects how one behaves with people of different social statuses and age groups. This is reflected among friends, family members, and colleagues. Thus every Thai makes an effort to

¹⁵ "Shifting the locus of political power from a divine king to an oligarchy led to the breakdown of the system of rank by royal decree. Individual influence, liaison with other officials, educational status, and economic wealth became the important factors as individuals maneuvered for position." Frank J. Moore, *Thailand: It's People, Its Society, Its Culture* (New Haven, CT: Hraf Press, 1974), 110.

¹⁶ "The growing modernization of the Thai capital has increased the flexibility and altered the composition of this transitional social system. Mobility from one status or group to another is by family connections, wealth, education, and political influence." Daring, 30.

maintain relationships with others as a high priority. Socialization in Thailand is highly oriented toward teaching the young appropriate behavior toward their seniors. They are taught to give special respect to those of higher social status as well as to parents, teachers, and elders. The younger person should not disagree with the older person or even offer a suggestion in his presence. Those who do not conform to this norm of behavior will be shunned in society. Thai society has a clearly defined expectation for each age group. The person of lower social status is the one who should offer the *Wai* to the higher social status. Typically, teachers are not expected to return the *Wai* to the students nor a superior person to an inferior. Thais do not refer to those who are older or younger by just their first name. Younger people will address an elder as *Phi* (older brother and sister). The younger (*Nong*) will have to pay respect to the older (*Phi*). But because of a monk's status, even his parents must pay the respectful *Wai* to the young newly ordained monk. When eating out as a group, the norm would be for the most senior person to pay the bill.

These expectations of those who are senior and those who are junior are different from those in most Western countries. Understanding the Thai cultural expectations and the behavior of senior-junior may not make sense to those who are not familiar with a hierarchical system. Therefore, a cultural expectation exists behind the actions of the Thai people which may not be apparent to those unacquainted with Thai social structure. To be effective in evangelizing the Thai people, Western missionaries must understand the Thai social hierarchical order and who really holds power in the communities. Western missionaries must understand and respect the

Thai cultural expectations of how one should behave with people of different social status and age groups.

Social Issues

Thailand's rapid economic development has produced a new set of problems. The promise of a better life brought about by industrialization and modernization has attracted workers from the rural areas to the cities for study and employment which has led to overpopulation in the cities and many social problems. The most obvious social problems in Thailand are prostitution, drug trafficking, and the resulting HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Most of the teenaged girls and young women working in the sex industry are from the north and northeast (the poorest parts) of Thailand, where many parents sell their children to traffickers in order to pay off debts or exchange for monetary benefits.¹⁷ These teenaged girls and young women are trapped in the sex trade and caught in a vicious cycle of poverty. Many MCTB females from Bangkok and other cities have chosen prostitution as a career.¹⁸

¹⁷ "In Thai society, the duty of caring for parents belongs to the youngest unmarried daughter, and the allure of lucrative sex work pressures many rural teenagers into a lifestyle they might not otherwise choose." Siddharth Kara, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 155.

¹⁸ "According to the 1990 population census, there were 8.3 million women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine in Thailand, the most common age range for sex workers. If, as one study suggested, there really were 2.8 million prostitutes in Thailand, this would mean that 24-34% of all women in the fifteen-to-twenty-nine age range were sex workers, or that every woman of this age in urban areas of Thailand worked as a prostitute." Siroj Sorajjakool, *Human Trafficking in Thailand: Current Issues, Trends, and the Role of the Thai Government* (Bangkok, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2013), 91.

Because of the friendly and social nature of Thai people—a quality that draws tourists from all over the world, Thai women are being lured or forced into prostitution to meet the demand for international sex tourism.¹⁹ According to a 2004 survey conducted by Dr. Nitet Tinnakul from Chulalongkorn University, he asserts, “most of the country’s 20,000 adult males, two million adult females, and 800,000 boys and girls under the age of eighteen are lured into the sex industry.”²⁰ However, most MCTBs view prostitution as deplorable behavior.

Today because of the sex-trade, Thais are facing the consequences of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS.²¹ According to statistics for 2012 there were 440,000 people infected with HIV/AIDS in Thailand and 23,000 deaths from AIDS.²² It is estimated that eighty percent of prostitutes are infected with sexually transmitted diseases.²³ Most often, the husband contracts the sexually transmitted disease and inflicts this disease on his

¹⁹ “Recent figures indicate that prostitution is responsible for 3 percent of the overall economy, the equivalent of about US\$ 4.3 billion a year.” Hoare, 195.

²⁰ Prostitution: More Thais selling sex, study finds, *The Nation*, 3 January 2004. “Thailand News, Forum, Visa, Immigration,” Thaivisa, (accessed November 18, 2014); <http://www.thaivisa.com/>.

²¹ “Thus prostitutes came to be routinely depicted as reservoirs of AIDS that threatened the health and the structural integrity of the family and general population. Prostitutes and men by sexual services play a part in the spreading of this evil disease [AIDS].” Graham Fordham, *A New Look at Thai Aids* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 119.

²² “HIV and AIDS in Thailand,” AVERT, (accessed November 18, 2014); <http://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/asia-pacific/thailand>.

²³ Hoare, 197.

wife and children.²⁴ If this epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases continues to spread through the population, it will have a very destructive impact on society and on the future generations of the Thai people. In recent years, Thailand's government has promulgated a campaign to eradicate HIV/AIDS through education which has reduced cases of HIV/AIDS in Thailand.²⁵

Another Thai social problem is drug trafficking. Thailand is an important route of international drug trafficking in Southeast Asia.²⁶ Social problems associated with illegal drug trafficking include drug-money laundering and political corruption. Drug-related police corruption is widely viewed as a serious problem. Also, the problem of drug trafficking promotes other illegal activities, such as smuggling, gambling and bribery. It is obvious that financial need is the main factors that draw Thais to the drug trafficking business.

Currently, many charitable social organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and Christian Missionary organizations are actively

²⁴ "Very early on in the Thai HIV/AIDS epidemic, from the time of the first public service health announcements in the early 1990s, it was established that the spread of HIV was due to male sexual promiscuity with prostitutes." Fordham, 118.

²⁵ "Initial AIDS education focused on large-scale country-wide programs utilizing all forms of media: the electronic and print media; roadside banners and boardings; posters; and brochures and pamphlets to give people information about HIV transmission, AIDS risk behavior and about AIDS prevention. The 1991 '100 Percent Condom Program and the 1993 'The Thai Family Combats the Danger of AIDS' campaign, are two examples of major campaigns designed to involve the whole country." Ibid., 188.

²⁶ "Southeast Asia," US Department of State, (accessed April 16, 2015); <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/51080.pdf>.

working in Thailand to alleviate these social problems associated with prostitution, drug trafficking, and the resulting HIV/AIDS epidemic. In order to deal with these social issues the government needs to tackle the problem of poverty and unemployment. More than anything else the church and the Western missionary have to be willing to extend mercy to these victims of sex slavery, AIDS, and drug addiction through the gospel of hope and salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Family Structure

Most families in Thailand are nuclear, consisting of parents and their biological children. In Thai culture, the family is the most important social unit. Family loyalty takes precedence over all other individual relationships. Thais are highly dependent upon their families for support and guidance. Traditionally, Thai children are expected to care for their parents in their old age, and to show respect and thankfulness toward them.²⁷ The father is the head of the family; however, in some cases the mother has considerable authority in making decisions for the family. Mother, who determines all internal affairs, is often considered to be the main figure in the Thai family. Typically, the Thai man will give his entire monthly salary to his wife to determine how it should be budgeted in the family. An extended family including people of two to three generations living together under one roof, such as grandparents, elderly parents, husband and wife, unmarried siblings, and children, is not uncommon. Typically, Thai couples practice patrilocal residence, in which the woman will leave her parents at marriage and move

²⁷ As mentioned before under the heading “Economy.”

in with her husband's parents. The Thai family structure is bilateral, tracing lineage through both families. Hence, the Thai family structure does not have a clan or lineage system in which members trace their descent from a common ancestor through the male line. Inheritance will be divided equally to both son and daughter after their parents die. However, it is a common practice for a daughter who takes care of her elderly parents, to receive the inheritance.

In today's modern Thai society, because of the fast pace of life, MCTB couples want to be independent and live separately from their parents. When a MCTB man marries, he usually moves out of his parents' household as soon as possible in order to establish his own family. However, especially among married couples who are from the country, living in the husband's parents' household continues until they have their first child. The husband is responsible for providing the income for the family by working outside of the home. Traditionally, the wife is responsible for childcare and most of the house work. In the modern MCTB marriage, wives are more likely to work outside the home because of the growth of the factory and service sector which creates a large number of jobs suitable for female roles.²⁸ The MCTB family has adapted to the western conception of family, but in rural areas the old traditions remain unchanged.

It is common for a MCTB couple to have chosen their own marriage mates. However, arranged marriages do exist among the wealthy and poor.

²⁸ Traditionally, Thai society has been male-dominated. However, the Thai government recently has passed a law allowing women to work in politics and business.

Although these arranged marriage couples have the right to choose their own marriage mates, they respect their parent's decision. Generally, a Thai man seeks permission from the bride's family before the couple is engaged. The bride's parents receive a monetary deposit from the groom (known as the *Sin Sawt*) to compensate for the expenses of bringing up their daughter. If the bride's family agrees to the marriage, the couple will consult a Buddhist monk for a date and time for the wedding ceremony. The Thai wedding ceremony is usually conducted in the groom's house. The procession starts at the groom's house and parade to the bride's house. Recently, some MCTBs have been adopting a western-style weddings.

Thai family structure is primarily based on obligations of family loyalty. Western missionaries need to understand the behavior and obligation within the Thai family which may not be apparent to those unfamiliar with Thai culture. Understanding these family behaviors and obligations will help the Western missionary avoid making false assumptions about cultural differences and help him better to evangelize the Thai people.

Thai Religious Worldview

Thailand has been greatly influenced by the Hindu Brahmanism concept of *karma* which has shaped the Thai people's worldviews. It is important for the Western missionary to understand how the Thai people perceive the world and the reality of life in order to evangelize the Thai people effectively. This section deals with four Thai religious concepts: God, life after death, salvation, and sin.

Concepts of God

Although some Thai Buddhists would say that the Buddhist's God is the same as the Christian's God, in actuality their concept of God is quite different from Christian concept of God as the Creator of the heaven and earth. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a prominent Buddhist scholar in Thailand, advocates the notion that God is the same as *karma*, rejecting the divine nature of God in favor of the law of cause and effect.²⁹ Buddhism makes no clear reference to a personal God though there appear to be some noticeable inferences. For example, some Thai Buddhists believe in the Hindu deity, *Brahman Sutra (Phra Prom)*, as the first born of this earth.³⁰ Some Thai Buddhists, especially the MCTBs, believe that "God" is only the natural law which governs the earth and the universe. They reject the concept of a personal God. The God of the Bible is unknown to them.³¹ Thus, in the MCTBs worldview, there appears no existence of God as the Creator of the world and no ultimate Judge or judgment day.

Buddha never said that he was a God nor claimed that he was the truth.³² Therefore, MCTBs worship and pray to the idol of Buddha, not as God, but as a teacher who is a source of inspiration for them. While the

²⁹ Buddhadasa explicitly points out that the law of *Karma* reflects the same reality as God. Kari Storstein Haug, "Christianity as a Religion of Wisdom and Karma: A Thai Buddhist Interpretation of Selected Passages from the Gospels," *Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin* 35/2 (April 2006): 43.

³⁰ However, they do not regard Brahman Sutra as a personal God who created the heavens and the earth, but as one of the deities.

³¹ Moreover, in the pure Buddhist teaching the concept of God is a combination of ignorance and *karma*.

³² He claimed to be just an ordinary human being who taught the path to enlightenment.

MCTBs are wandering in their ignorance of the truth about God, with no concept of God, Christians are waiting eagerly to be with their Creator God when this life on earth is over. When beginning to witness to MCTBs who are unfamiliar with the Christian faith, one must begin with truth that God is alive and is the Creator of this world. The Bible declares that God is the Creator of all things, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). When witnessing to the MCTBs, the author has used some object in the house as a means of illustrating the idea of creatorship; by asking, “This chair in the living room, did it come by itself, or did someone make it?” The author would try to lead the listener to the reality of a Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Concepts of Life after Death

There exist great differences between the Buddhist’s concept of *Nirvana*³³ and the Christian’s concept of heaven. *Nirvana* is a state of “non-existence” and can be achieved by human effort alone, while heaven is a particular place.³⁴ In *Nirvana* desire and life have been extinguished, while in heaven there is life. In *Nirvana* there is no God, but in heaven Christian will enjoy God’s presence forever. According to Buddhism, any state of existence is considered imperfect. Therefore, the aim of the Thai Buddhist is

³³ *Nirvana* is a Buddhist’s concept of heaven.

³⁴ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu points out that “the condition of emptiness resulting from the complete and thorough elimination of the self-idea is *nirvana*. This can be summarized by saying ‘*Nirvana* is supreme emptiness.’” *Buddha Dhamma for University Students*, trans., Roderick S. Bucknell (Thailand: Dhamma Study and Practice Group, 1996), 35. <http://www.buddhanet.net/ftp12.htm> (accessed March 2, 2015).

to attain *Nirvana*—a state of “cessation” of birth, death, and rebirth.³⁵

Perhaps the only Thai Buddhists who ever try to attain *Nirvana* are a few of the more intellectually minded Buddhist monks.³⁶ And undoubtedly they would all agree that *nirvana* is unattainable in the present age for even the most disciplined of monks who live in the secluded temple. In spite of the rapid influence of modernization in Thailand, some devout MCTBs still try to reach *Nirvana*; however, they do not consider it as an immediate goal.

In modern Thai society, some MCTBs believe that heaven and hell begin in this life within one’s heart. Moreover, many Thai Buddhists believe that after death there is a heaven (in the sky) for people who accumulate good *karma* and hell (underground) for people who accumulate bad *karma*. Thai Buddhists do not believe in eternal punishment in hell, though they do believe that the spirits of dead humans who lack sufficient merit or good *karma* may be reincarnated in hell. They remain there until their bad karma is weakened, and they are then reincarnated as human beings or as some other animal or being. The relatives who are alive on earth can make merit and transfer merit to their deceased family members or ancestors in hell by offering alms to a monk and performing religious services at the temple. This would then allow the dead loved ones in hell to be reborn on earth or in heaven. In Buddhist belief, if one lives in a poverty-stricken condition it is

³⁵ Thai Buddhists believe that failure to attain *Nirvana* in one life requires ongoing rebirths until in some incarnation a person ultimately becomes pure.

³⁶ Most Thai Buddhists do not expect presently to reach *Nirvana*, but they hope by acts of good deeds to receive a slightly better state of life in their following incarnation.

because in a former life he or she did not take care of the monks and give alms to the poor.

Some MCTBs hold the view that people are born once and die once. However, many Thai Buddhists believe that when one dies, the spirit leaves the body and is reincarnated into a new existence according to the law of karma. In Buddhism everything born and extinguished depends on *karma*—the accumulation of merit and demerit. The accumulated *karma* from the Buddhist's previous and current life will determine his life after death. On the one hand, a person who has accumulated more demerit than merit is believed to be reborn in a lower status as an animal in his next life. On the other hand, a person who accumulated lots of merit is believed to be reborn in a higher status as one of the deities in heaven or as someone who is wealthy and respectable in his next life.³⁷

Concepts of Salvation

Because the Thai Buddhist's concept of salvation differs greatly from the Christian's concept of salvation, understanding the Thai Buddhist's conception is vital. Thai Buddhists believe that salvation is a state of freedom from suffering, anxiety, and rebirth. According to the Buddhist concept of salvation one can end suffering by eliminating desire that is the cause of

³⁷ "Most of them feel that *Nirvana*, the supreme goal of Buddhism, is beyond their limited mental capacity to arrive at in the present life. However, they believe that, in giving alms to the monks who tread the direct Path, they are piling up 'merits' that will enable them to be reborn into higher planes of existence, and further on the way to *Nirvana*." Ravi Bhavilai, *Buddhism in Thailand: A Modern Thai's Interpretation of Buddhism* (Bangkok, Thailand: South-East Asia Treaty Organization, 1967), 4.

rebirth. In other words, the Buddhist concept of salvation is achieved by man's effort in overcoming all desire through self-discipline and meditation.³⁸

The Thai Buddhists believe that salvation is earned through good works; one must strive by oneself to be good for one's own salvation without the redemptive work of God.³⁹ They perceive that "do good, receive good; do evil, receive evil" is an important life principle. This seems to correspond with their elemental belief in merit-making: life is about accumulation of merit (good *karma*) through doing good deeds, following the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, meditation, and by keeping the five prohibitions.⁴⁰ The five prohibitions held by the Thai laity are: do not kill animals, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not lie, and do not drink alcohol. Thus, for Thai Buddhists, salvation depends on their own effort, and not by atonement for their sin.

³⁸ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu states that "training in concentration consists in developing the ability to control this mind of ours, to make use of it, to make it do its job to the best advantage. Morality is good behavior in body and speech; concentration amounts to good behavior of the mind, and is the fruit of thorough mental training and discipline....For this reason the Buddha counted concentration as one of the marks of great man." Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Handbook for Mankind*, trans., Roderick S. Bucknell (Surat Thani, Thailand: Dhammadana Foundation Co., 1996), 60. <http://www.buddhanet.net/budasa2.htm> (accessed March 12, 2015).

³⁹ Laksanawat Palarat points out that "Buddha taught that 'one should not rely on luck and chance in order to have a good life. One must not rely on supernatural beings, or even, on what is called "God." One must help oneself by doing good work and living a moral life. Making the effort is something that each person should do for himself.'" *Introduction to Buddhism* (Bangkok, Thailand: Ramkhamhaeng University Press, 2002), 67. (Translated by author from Thai).

⁴⁰ "Merit ideally means to be rid of attachment and to have a purified mind that results in insight and happiness. The three recognized Buddhist ways to acquire merit, and a meritorious life, are, in order of increasing difficulty: (1) to give (*Dana* or *than*); (2) to respect the religious rules (*sila* or *sin*); and (3) to cultivate, control and develop the mind (*phaawanaa*), i.e., meditation with the purpose of understanding the *Dhama*." J.A. Niels Mulder, *Monks, Merit, and Motivation: Buddhism and National Development in Thailand* (De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University, 1973), 2.

Many Thai Buddhists who become Christians tend to bring their previous Buddhist understanding of salvation into their Christian thinking. They tend to translate their Christian salvation as a virtue and a quality of life to help them live a good moral life. When Thai “Christians” are asked if they are saved, they will most often reply that they have gone to church, read the Bible, tried to be a good Christian, and given tithe to the Church. Thus, they associate doing good deeds and living a moral life with salvation. The author often hears Thai “Christians” say, “If I live a good, moral Christian life I will go to heaven and not go to hell.” When the author asked Thai “Christians” how they know that they are Christians, neither the atonement of Christ nor His death by crucifixion on the cross is ever mentioned. The general response is that God saves people because He loves them.

Christian salvation comes only through believing in the work of God through Christ (Jn. 3:16). Salvation is found in Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, apart from a person’s good work or merit.

Concepts of Sin

The Thai Buddhist’s concept of sin differs greatly from the Christian’s concept of sin. Buddhists believe that the primary problem of human beings does not lie in sinful human nature inherited from the fall of Adam, but in one’s wrong deeds or bad *karmas*.⁴¹ When asked if they are sinners, many will reply, “Never in my life have I broken the law.” They do not perceive themselves as sinners, but only a person who commits sin. Their sorrow is

⁴¹ They believe that when a person breaks one of the precepts, it will cause a bad karma which will then have effects on one’s future life condition and endless cycle of rebirths.

generally for some specific bad behavior, such as murdering or stealing, and not for their personally sinful condition. They often compare a good person with someone who has never committed an obviously wrong action, has never gone to prison, and has never committed a crime. They perceive that one who is simply harmless is a good person. Thai Buddhists are satisfied with this much, or if one makes more good *karma* than bad *karma*, he or she is considered a good person. Most MCTBs view themselves as inherently good people, in terms of keeping the religious rules and practices and living a good moral life.

Summary

The effective Western missionary approaches the local communities with an open mind and is sensitive to cultural differences. Examining the socio-cultural structure of Thai society and worldview will help him better understand Thai behaviors and lifestyles. Western missionaries who are called to do cross-cultural evangelism need to understand Thai socio-cultural structure and worldview in order to effectively evangelize Thai people with the gospel within their cultural context. As the Western missionary builds relationships with the Thai Buddhists, he will gain a better understanding of their social-cultural structure and worldview.

Part Two

An Informed Strategy for

Evangelism and Discipleship

Chapter 5

Primary Considerations for the Missionary

The Western missionary should learn as much as he can about Thai culture and should prepare appropriately for beginning his time among the Thai Buddhist people. This chapter will integrate the information from prior chapters to assist the Western missionary by suggesting practical considerations for effectively evangelizing the Thai Buddhist people. There are several things he needs to take into consideration in preparation for his ministry among these people.

Building Relationships

Thai Buddhists are relationship-oriented rather than task-oriented. This means that relationships are essential to Thai Buddhists. They live interdependently, doing whatever is needed to help each other and responding to each other's needs. The Western missionary must be aware of these relationships, realizing that Thai Buddhists will not trust him to the same degree as a close friend or a family member.¹ Usually he will be viewed as an outsider. Jim Hayes, who founded the Surin Baptist Church and ministered for thirty-five years in Thailand, comments, "They perceive us foreigners, as very different than themselves." In an interview, he commented,

¹ In most cases the Thai Buddhists trust those who are in the inner circle (family members and close friends).

They don't see the Western missionary as understanding their culture. They will really not be [interested] without knowing them very well. This perception can be changed toward the Western missionary by becoming friends with them, by really getting to know them and asking questions like a Thai Buddhist would ask and knowing their likes and dislikes.²

It is essential for the Western missionary to establish good relationships with the Thai Buddhists, according to their social status,³ before he can minister to them.⁴ He can do so by building a trusting relationship and being sincere in his approach with them. Once the Thai Buddhists perceive that the missionary has a genuine interest in them, they will also be more prepared to receive the gospel message.⁵ Steve Taylor, who has worked with indigenous Thai churches for more than thirty years, commented that many Thai Buddhists think that the Western missionary is trying to convert them to a foreign religion. He points out,

Their perception could change, if the Western missionary is involved in the community. It depends upon whether the Western missionary shows patience and gentleness or if he is arrogant and too strong (aggressive or assertive). If he is too strong, then I think that the Thai Buddhists would be patient with him but will not like what they see. If the Western missionary is

² Jim Hayes, interview by author, August 29, 2015, Winston Salem, NC, tape recording.

³ According to each one's level in society.

⁴ There are missionaries who relate more easily with the rural people, while others relate easily among MCTBs. The author observes that if the prospective missionaries work among the right people, they may build relationships faster in more depth and may be able to evangelize the Thai Buddhists more effectively.

⁵ Paul G. Hiebert states, "People's feelings are also influenced by their degree of trust in the communicator. If the messenger lacks credibility in their eyes, the message itself is generally rejected. On the other hand, if they sense that the missionary truly loves them, they are more open to the gospel." *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 167.

genuinely accepting, patient and shows respect to the community, they will very much admire, and accept, and appreciate him.⁶

When the author interviewed national Thai leaders about some of the effective strategies that Western missionaries can use to approach middle-class Thai Buddhists (MCTBs), most of them agreed that building good relationships with the MCTBs is the most effective strategy in reaching them with the gospel.

The beginning step toward building a trusting relationship with the Thai Buddhist is through personal interaction on a more mundane level of life, such as visiting his home and being willing to help in his time of need. The Western missionary can learn much while helping people with computers, working in their backyard gardens, and painting their houses. Larry Dinkins, former Dean and Seminary Director at the Bangkok Bible College and Seminary (BBCS), commented explicitly during the interview that many Western missionaries do not get involved in aspects of society that would engage themselves with non-Christians. His method is to build relationships—meaningful involvement with non-Christians. He points out concerning missionaries that “They end up spending lots of time with church people, and they spend lots of time discipling Christians, but they don’t interact with the non-Christians.”⁷

The Western missionary wants to be where the people are and spend as much time as possible with them in order to understand them and be able

⁶ Steve Taylor, taped Skype interview by author, August 26, 2015.

⁷ Larry Dinkins, taped Skype interview by author, August 30, 2015.

to build relationships.⁸ The more time a Western missionary spends interacting with the people, the more the relationship will develop and the more they will respond to the gospel message. Dinkins states, “The Western missionaries don’t stay long enough to assimilate. The best missionaries that give good impressions to their people are those who actually live among the people; they don’t stay in a mission station.”⁹

The Lifestyle of the Missionary

The missionary who desires to work in Thailand must lead an exemplary life because the Thai Buddhist tends to follow those who walk the talk. In fact, it is a biblical principle; Paul encouraged Timothy to be “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). The power of the gospel must be seen in every aspect of the missionary’s life before he can reach out to the Thai Buddhists. The author observes that in reaching the MCTBs, a godly example in the missionary’s lifestyle can be a strong motivating factor for them to become Christians.¹⁰ In order to effectively evangelize Thai Buddhists, the

⁸ Kosuke Koyama, a Japanese missionary to Thailand, says about his experience, “As my relationship with Thai Buddhist friends increased and my language comprehension grew, I came to realize that what really matters is not a set of doctrines called Buddhism, but people who live according to the doctrine of the Buddha, or should I say who are trying to live according to the doctrine of the Buddha. Accordingly, my interest shifted from Buddhism to Buddhist people....What matters for the Christian Gospel is not Buddhism, but the Buddhist.” *Waterbuffalo Theology* (Bloomsbury, London: SCM Press LTD, 1974), 129.

⁹ Dinkins, taped Skype interview.

¹⁰ In support of this point Jim Peterson states, “The life a Christian lives in the presence of those he seeks to win is a preview of what the nonChristian’s life will become if he accepts what he is hearing. Generally, he will decide either to accept or reject Christianity according to what he has seen....the first response of the unbeliever will be related to what he sees in us. So each of us needs to ask, ‘When a

Western missionary must show the gospel message by the way he lives his daily life that lead to a verbal presentation of the gospel.

In evangelizing the Thai Buddhists, the Western missionary must guard his spiritual life. There must be a balance between his Christian knowledge and the quality of his spiritual life.¹¹ In training the prospective missionary, there needs to be an emphasis on developing his personal walk with the Lord. He must be a student of the Scriptures and live a life of personal godliness.

Understanding the Priority of Developing National Leadership

The missionary who is called to engage in cross-cultural evangelism in Thailand should also come to a scriptural understanding of the priority of developing national leadership. He should study Paul's pattern for developing national leadership in cross-cultural settings. At first, the Apostle Paul revisited the churches which he had established in order to encourage them, and he developed national leaders to care for the indigenous churches.¹²

Secondly, in Acts 14:23, Paul selected church leaders from among the congregation, and furthermore, in Titus 1:5, he charged Titus to appoint

nonChristian looks at me, who does he see? Is my lifestyle attractive to him?" *Living Proof: Sharing the Gospel Naturally* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989), 119-20.

¹¹ J. Herbert Kane states, "Many Christians, including some seminarians, do not know how to minister to their own spiritual growth. Over the years they have come to depend on external props—meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops, etc. When these crutches are suddenly removed, however, they find themselves unable to cope with the situation. Many missionaries, especially those in their first term, have the same problem. They have depended too long on the fellowship of others, churches services, prayer meetings, and other forms of 'body life.' Suddenly they are alone and they find they do not know how to meet their own spiritual needs." *Life and Work on the Mission Field* (Grand Rapids: Baker , 1980), 302.

¹² Paul's establishment of churches is recorded in Acts 13-21.

elders in every city. He did not become their pastor, but handed over the work to the local leadership.¹³ Paul also gives a list of the qualifications of church leaders as follows:

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil (1 Tim. 3:2-6).

Thirdly, in 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul explains that he trained Timothy, and instructs him to train other leaders: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Early in his ministry, the Western missionary encourages the young converts to grow in their faith through discipleship and to discover their gifts and calling by training, and equipping them for church ministry.¹⁴ The multiplication of trained national workers continues as the Western missionary teaches the young converts to become faithful disciples who are able to teach others.¹⁵

In Thailand, certain aspects of Thai hierarchical status affect how Thai national leaders perceive leadership, and Western missionaries are often

¹³ “The long-term success of cross-cultural church planting is largely determined by the establishment of local lay leaders, turning over the church governance to them, and the continuation of a relationship through visits and correspondence.” Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 48.

¹⁴ Some of these gifted young converts, who receive proper training, will answer the call to serve the Lord as leaders of various ministries of the church, or as lay workers, pastors or evangelists.

¹⁵ Discipleship is essential to the process of spiritual growth, developing strong leadership, and church reproduction.

given higher status because of their foreign identity.¹⁶ Similarly, Matt Jones, who is a missionary at Surin Baptist Church, Thailand, comments, “Western missionaries are typically placed in a higher place in society because they are 1) white, 2) educated 3) religious teachers, and 4) believed to be wealthy.”¹⁷

One of the weaknesses of Thai national leaders is their lack of strategies towards a clear goal for the church’s ministries, whereas the missionaries are very goal-oriented towards the long term. For this reason many missionaries have embraced a dominant role in the church’s ministries and national church leadership has been difficult to develop.¹⁸ Western missionaries should gradually train the Thai national leaders about the importance of setting clear goals for the church’s ministries. Meanwhile, they will need to be patient when trying to raise the standard and thinking toward long-term ministry goals.

The author has observed that some missionaries who first arrived in Thailand played a dominant role in church planting, while the national leaders played subservient roles. The role of missionaries should be to partner and share equal responsibilities with Thai church leaders as two adults relating to one another. The national church leader must be

¹⁶ Duane Elmer states, “Westerners in Third World countries often find themselves assigned to a high status because of their comparative wealth, education and influence.” *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 92.

¹⁷ Matt Jones, email message to author, September 16, 2015.

¹⁸ “Most missionaries, I believe, do not consciously try to control through these forms of power, but they easily slip into a controlling mode unless they consciously understand, manage and share the power that comes with their cultural baggage. Despite all our talk about empowerment of others most of us (whether Westerners or Two-Thirds World peoples) find it very difficult to give up power.” Elmer, 155.

encouraged to become an equal partner in the process, not just a subservient partner to the missionary.¹⁹ This does not mean that the missionary should not be involved in church-planting ministries; instead he must be a facilitator, not direct national church leaders. He must be willing to hand over the work of the church's ministries to the national church leaders, such as administering church programs and outreach events.²⁰ The missionary must understand that the national leader is his partner, and should treat him with respect, politeness, and gentleness.

Pre-Field Missionary Training

It is imperative for the Western missionary who works in a foreign field to have substantial training in cross-cultural missions. Cross-cultural mission training is important because it helps the Western missionary understand the Thai Buddhist culture with the hopeful outcome that he may better communicate the gospel to them. Secondly, this training will greatly benefit the Western missionary in working with the Thai Buddhists.

¹⁹ "The goal of an empowering partnership is always to give with an open hand, looking to the common goal. Any attitude of superiority, control, or paternalism will do great damage, but a two-way exchange of resources, strengths, insights, hospitality, and values helps to keep a partnership healthy and interdependent." Ott and Wilson, 379.

²⁰ Charles Brock points out, "A key to development toward an indigenous church is the planter's willingness to share responsibilities with group members. If the church planter must have someone who can preach as he can before he allows one from the group to try, the planter becomes a major obstacle in planting an indigenous church." *The Principles and Practice of Indigenous Church Planting* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981), 88.

Cross-Cultural Mission Training

The Western missionary should take a course on cross-cultural mission training²¹ before going to serve among the Thai Buddhists. It is essential for him to understand people from different cultural backgrounds and to be able to adapt his approach in ministry accordingly.

He must be open to cultural differences if he wants to communicate the gospel effectively in a cross-cultural setting. These differences include varying beliefs, values, worldviews, and thought patterns.²² Effective cross-cultural missionaries understand and appreciate these cultural differences and values²³ without expressing ethnocentrism.²⁴ Hayes points out, “They should be very careful to feel how the Thai Buddhist is responding to them and then they should be very gracious and respectful, and not push a message on to them that they cannot receive or won’t receive. And he must not be critical of Buddhism. There is no need to talk critically about Buddhism.”²⁵

The Western missionary can learn much from the Bible about how the apostles adapted their approach to different cultural setting in

²¹ Cross-cultural missions training for missionary.

²² John R. Davis points out, “The Thai Buddhist perceives his worldview as essentially ‘supernaturalistic.’ He ‘sees’ all phenomena as an integrated whole, in a ‘sacred’ rather than a ‘secular’ world, a cosmos that is to a large extent governed and controlled, not by just the human ‘powers that be,’ but by the supernatural power.” *Poles Apart: Contextualizing the Gospel* (Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan—OMF Publishers, 1993), 35.

²³ For example, the missionary can appreciate how they show respect and thankfulness to their elders.

²⁴ The belief that one’s culture is better than others.

²⁵ Hayes, interview.

communicating the gospel.²⁶ Jesus Christ is represented as the ultimate example of what is involved in ministering in cross-cultural missions. John 1:14 says, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” Moreover, Jesus ministered the gospel to different cultures without demanding that they conform to the Mosaic Law. The Bible records Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman by the well of Jacob which later served as an example for his disciples for cross-cultural missions. (Jn. 4:1-2). Jones observes that many Western missionaries try to westernize Thai Buddhists. He further observes, “(1) Western missionaries have failed to understand the syncretism of Folk Buddhists that is practiced in most of Thailand. (2) They have tried to impose Western culture on Thai Buddhist culture. (3) They have employed a ‘One Size Fits All’ philosophy concerning missions in Thailand. They think that if a particular method is popular in America, it will be popular in Thailand.”²⁷

The Western missionary must know that the Bible is relevant to every culture, society, and time. He should evaluate how other cultural practices and values stand in relation to the Scripture, and which one must be renounced.²⁸ Humility and willingness to adapt must be evident in the

²⁶ Hesselgrave states, “Missionaries can temporarily adopt the worldview of their non-Christian respondents. Then, by reexamining their message in the light of the respondent worldview, they can contextualize the message, encoding it in such a way that it will become meaningful to the respondents.” David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 20.

²⁷ Jones, email message.

²⁸ Paul G. Hiebert states, “To involve people in evaluating their own culture in the light of new truth draws upon their strength. They know their old culture better than does the missionary and are in a better position to critique it, once they have biblical instructions. Moreover, their involvement helps them to grow spiritually through learning discernment and applying scriptural teachings to their own lives.” *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 90.

cross-cultural missionary—a disciple as well as a trainer—in order to effectively adapt to the culture in which he works.

Missionaries face many cross-cultural challenges while serving in the mission field in Thailand, such as stressful ministry work, cultural adaptation, and unfulfilled missionary expectations. These cultural challenges could cause frustration to the missionaries if they were reluctant to adjust and learn Thai culture.²⁹ When the missionaries are serving in cross-cultural settings among Thai Buddhists, knowledge of Thai culture is crucial. Failure to clarify cultural differences often results in missionary frustration or even leads to stressful relationship with the local people. For instance a Thai Buddhist considers it impolite not to return a *wai* when someone gives a *wai* or touch people on top of their head or point one foot at people; such things are considered impolite. Different concepts of time and different ways of communication can also cause frustration for the Western missionaries.³⁰ Most missionaries are direct in their communication, whereas most Thais are indirect. For this reason Thai people tend to avoid confrontation and conflict in their personal relationships.

²⁹ Sherwood Lingenfelter states, “Further, since missionaries are often paying the bill for this labor they insist that nationals do it the Western way. This means that the national must adapt to the missionary’s work schedule, standard of productivity, organization of the work, and system of rewards....Further, such changes often lead to tension and frustration between missionaries and nationals and create barriers to the significant growth and development of mission and church ministries.” *Agents of Transformation: A Guide for Effective Cross-Cultural Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 235.

³⁰ Most Western missionaries are punctual with their appointment times, whereas most Thai people are not.

Formal Educational Training

A sound Christian liberal arts education benefits the Western missionary in personal spiritual growth and in preparing for effective ministry cross-culturally. Cross-cultural mission training includes learning a foreign language. Though a challenge for many missionaries, it is necessary for effective communication with people of the target culture.³¹ The Thai language is a tonal language having words which sound similar but have totally different meanings depending on the rise and fall of tones. Learning Thai as a second language can be accomplished at a Thai language school which provides basic courses in grammar, pronunciation, and conversation. It is recommended that the missionary have close relationships with the Thai people so that they will also be happy to correct his language mistakes.³² He must be willing to be a life-long learner of a foreign language and not be afraid of being corrected by the Thai local people.

Preparation for Communicating the Gospel

When the Western missionary is communicating the gospel message to Thai Buddhists, the response to the message may be either approval, uncertainty, or rejection. Even though Protestant mission works have

³¹ Eugene A. Nida states, "Language learning is more than simple mechanical ability to produce acoustic signals so as to buy, sell, and find your way about; it is a process by which we make vital contacts with a new community, a new manner of life, and a new system of thinking. To do this well is the basic requirement of effective missionary endeavor." *Learning a Foreign language: A Handbook for Missionaries* (New York, NY: Friendship Press, 1957), 8.

³² The most effective way to learn the Thai language is to immerse oneself completely in the Thai culture. The author observes that the missionaries who learn the Thai language are those who make the most frequent contacts with the Thai people.

continued in Thailand for many years, most Thai Buddhists still are not receptive to the gospel message. They do not think the gospel message is relevant in their lives and they perceive that the Buddhist teaching as more profound than the teaching of Christianity. This section will discuss two areas which the Western missionary needs to understand when engaging in cross-cultural evangelism to Thai Buddhists: How to present the gospel message to the Thai Buddhists in a culturally relevant way and the consequences of conversion of the Thai Buddhists.

Presenting the Gospel

It is imperative that the Western missionary to the Thai Buddhists communicate the gospel message in the Thai cultural context and clearly explain the gospel so that they can respond accordingly to its challenge. Communicating the gospel to the Thai Buddhists is not merely the communicating of an intellectual or propositional argument; rather it is to prepare the Thai Buddhist to come to a saving knowledge in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, communicating the gospel message should be done in a culturally relevant way.

The common obstacle to effective evangelism within mission work in Thailand is an emphasis on social work rather than presenting a clear message of the gospel.³³ Many Western missionaries are involved in hospitals,

³³ Concerning the barrier to the extension of the Church in Buddhist Thailand, Alex G. Smith wrote, "The cause was a shift of the primary goal. A subsidiary cause was an inadequate church planting strategy. Sometimes good secondary goals like education, healing or any other right and proper ministry becomes the dominant focus. Overshadowing the primary objective the secondary goal displaces the fundamental heart of mission with its own goal." Alex G. Smith, *Siamese Gold: A History of Church Growth in Thailand* (Bangkok, Thailand: Kanok Bannasan, 1981), 273.

schools, and other social works, but the work of planting churches through the auspices of a local church is being neglected. Whenever these mission activities become the main approach in cross-cultural evangelism, they fail to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.³⁴ These mission activities must be considered as one of the approaches to evangelism.

Bringing Thai Buddhist converts into fellowship of the Church must be expected as a result of preaching the gospel; otherwise the Great Commission of Jesus Christ is not reached. Social works are necessary for church ministry, but they must not be a substitute for presenting a clear message of the gospel, discipling new believers in basic fundamentals of the faith, and equipping them for the ministry.³⁵

The Western missionary then must have a clear understanding of the Great Commission so that he can have a truly biblical approach to evangelism.³⁶ This clear understanding helps the Western missionary to present the gospel message effectively. Mark Sandlin, a former director of

³⁴ The main objective of cross-cultural evangelism must be a clear focus: reaching the non-believers with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ and discipling them in churches. Jesus told the disciples to go “and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28: 19-20).

³⁵ David J. Hesselgrave points out, “Paul’s primary mission was accomplished when the gospel was preached, people were converted, and churches were established. Obedience to the Great Commandment to love one’s neighbor was part of the commission to teach all things Christ commanded. But good works were the fruit—not the root—of Paul’s mission.” *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 24.

³⁶ Donald A. McGavran states, “A multitude of excellent enterprises lie around us. So great is the number and so urgent the calls, that Christians can easily lose their way among them, seeing them all equally as mission. But in doing the good, they can fail of the best.” *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 24.

Kanok Bannasan (OMF Publishers Thailand) and a minister in Thailand for more than twenty years, observes that some Western missionaries who are ministering among the MCTBs are preaching a prosperity gospel rather than the true gospel. They try to present the gospel as something that would make the MCTBs become more successful, better business people, and make more money. He opines,

It seems to me that the most successful groups have either really emphasized miracles and exciting supernatural things or they emphasize the prosperity gospel (you can have Jesus, but you can also have money, success and fame and all that). So my concern is that true gospel will continue to spread even though very slowly among rising MCTBs in Thailand.³⁷

Before the Western missionary presents the gospel message, he must understand the culture's worldview and belief system. Generally, most Thai Buddhists perceive Christianity as the religion of Westerners (*farang*).³⁸ They are proud of their Buddhist religious identity and do not see the need to change to another religion. Taylor states, "The Thai Buddhists would feel secure in a socially accepted Buddhism-animist worldview and to step out of that socially accepted worldview is more risky for them."³⁹ Most Thai Buddhists perceive that all religion leads to the same destination and all religion teaches people to be good and do good things. When the Western missionary presents the gospel, he should not ignore the cultural situation of the Thai Buddhists. Henry Breidenthal, one of the founders of the Bangkok

³⁷ Mark Sandlin, taped Skype interview by author, August 30, 2015.

³⁸ Most of the Missionaries and National Thai leaders that the author has interviewed say that most Thai Buddhists perceived Christianity as a foreign religion.

³⁹ Taylor, taped Skype interview.

Bible College and Seminary (BBCS) and Chiangmai Theological Seminary (CTS), remarks, “Many Western missionaries don’t know Thai Buddhism. They might know some Buddhism, but not Folk Thai Buddhism. The Western missionaries don’t understand enough of the Thai cultural religion. Thai Buddhism is not true Buddhism.”⁴⁰

He must communicate to the Thai Buddhists on their level of understanding and worldview. He must start where they are in their belief and worldview. For example, it is best to start with the Thai Buddhist concept of karma and reincarnation and then lead into the biblical concept of sin and salvation. When the Apostle Paul was in Athens, he observed among their objects of worship an “Altar to an unknown God” (Acts 17: 16-34). Paul took this observation of their religious worldview and used it as a starting point in explaining the gospel message to the Athenians. Paul’s clear presentation of the gospel challenged the Athenians to respond appropriately to the gospel. In like manner the Western missionary wants to see this kind of response happen among the MCTBs, that they accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior after having heard the presentation of the gospel. Dinkins states, “I think one important thing when witnessing to MCTBs is that they not go to Jesus too quickly. Build bridges within their worldview; speak about the Buddhist concept of suffering and *karma*, and [Christian] forgiveness.”⁴¹

In presenting the gospel, the Western missionary must realize that he is dealing with spiritual darkness in the culture’s worldview and belief

⁴⁰ Henry Breidenthal, taped Skype interview by author, August 17, 2015.

⁴¹ Dinkins, taped Skype interview.

system that is deeply rooted in animism.⁴² The Bible says, “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:4). The western missionary must understand that his mission is “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18). Breidenthal remarks, “Thai Buddhists for the most part are blind to the gospel and do not understand the Christian gospel as I see it. For the most part they think the Christian works to do good in order to get to heaven.”⁴³

The western missionary should be able to present the gospel message as clearly as possible so that the Thai Buddhists can understand it and put their faith in Jesus Christ. Often the message of the gospel has been hidden, complicated, and unclear because it has been presented with Christian terms that are foreign to the Thai Buddhists.⁴⁴ When asked what is the most common mistake Western missionaries make when reaching out to the MCTBs, Taylor states,

The main thing that I would say here would be assuming the MCTBs understand the vocabulary that is being used—a false assumption that the person listening (the MCTBs) would understand the concept of sin and salvation. The biggest mistake that the Western missionary makes, is

⁴² “Power encounter (however alien to the West), ought nevertheless to be seen as an important ‘contextualized’ medium for the communication of the Gospel in all areas where folk religion is dominant, especially in Thailand.” Davis, 113.

⁴³ Breidenthal, taped Skype interview.

⁴⁴ Most of the linguistic terms the Western missionary use to explain the Gospel message are identical terms that the Buddhist uses, but the meanings are remarkably different.

thinking that they shared the gospel, when it actually may not have been communicated at all.⁴⁵

Because the Thai Buddhist perceives Christian terminology within the framework of their Buddhist worldview, the Western missionary must endeavor to explain and illustrate Christian terminology clearly. It is interesting that Jesus regularly uses many illustrations such as parables to highlight certain truths and to teach the people on their level of understanding. The western missionary would be effective in presenting the gospel message if he would use illustrations that are appropriate to the Thai Buddhists' life experiences and worldview.⁴⁶

The Western missionary must be clear in explaining the biblical concept of sin in terms the Thai Buddhists can understand. Actually, western missionaries and Thai Buddhists use the same terminology for sin, but they interpret the meaning differently. According to Thai Buddhists, only those evil thoughts that become actions are considered sinful. For this reason many Thai Buddhists find it difficult to understand that "all have sinned." If they have not been convicted of a crime or sent to prison, they are considered good persons. The Western missionary must clearly communicate to them that one's sin is not an outward action but a process that begins in one's heart (Mk. 7:20-23).

⁴⁵ Taylor, taped Skype interview.

⁴⁶ The use of parabolic story, analogy, or illustration is typically more acceptable to the Thai Buddhist mind than giving a logical or propositional argument. The use of parabolic story, analogy, or illustration are great ways to get the Thai Buddhist to open up for discussion of the Gospel.

It is important to understand that the Bible's standard of human righteousness is perfection, as Christ is perfect. The Bible explains that no one can be considered righteous because of his own merits: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. 3:5). The Bible also states that all have sinned, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and no one can pay for the penalty for one sin, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). The fundamental cause of all human dilemmas is proclaimed to be one's inherently sinful nature, and the cure of this is through the death of Christ on the cross.

The Western missionary must be clear that sins have separated man from God because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3). Also, Romans 3:23 defines sin as "falling short" of what we should be for the glory of God. Thus, when presenting the gospel, the Western missionary must explain what the Bible teaches about sin and meanwhile challenge the cultural concept of sin. Taylor states, "Most Thai Buddhists are looking for salvation from suffering rather than salvation from sin. There is no real conviction of sin and the sense of accountability toward God that make men [feel] guilty."⁴⁷

There are various reasons MCTBs reject the gospel. First, they reject the gospel, because the message of sin is unappealing to them. Sandlin says, "I communicate the concept of sin very early when I am sharing the gospel with the MCTBs. I think because, typically the MCTBs tend to think only about very material things. They tend not to take very seriously that they

⁴⁷ Taylor, taped Skype interview.

have a terrible sin problem before themselves and God.”⁴⁸ Second, they reject because of prosperity. Sandlin further states, “The love of money is probably one of the obstacles that hinder MCTBs’ response to the gospel. More people are able to own automobiles and homes, and so I think financial success and also financial stress makes it hard for the gospel to reach the MCTBs.”⁴⁹ Most of all, MCTBs need to hear the truth about God’s love and saving power. They must learn that God’s gift of salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16).

In presenting the Gospel message, the effective missionary places emphasis on Christ as Lord and Savior. He introduces Christ to the Thai Buddhists as the One who provides man’s salvation through his death on the cross. He is able to demonstrate from the Scriptures the efficacy of Christ’s death as an atonement for man’s sin.⁵⁰ Also, he is able to demonstrate from Scriptures which show that man’s merit or good deeds cannot pay for his sins. The center of Paul’s message to the Corinthians was Christ “but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23), a challenging fact to the Corinthians.

In presenting the gospel message to Thai Buddhists, the effective Western missionary also places emphasis on God as the Creator. Thai

⁴⁸ Sandlin, taped Skype interview.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ His sacrificial death on the cross as a substitutionary atonement is to be presented as historical fact rather than attempting to prove it by apologetic arguments.

Buddhists do not have a biblical concept of God as the Creator of the world.

Breidenthal states,

Buddhadasa Bhikku said if the Christian would put away the concept of God as a person and that we can know him personally—if that truth were eliminated, then the Buddhist and the Christian could go together because the Buddhist is seeking an ultimate wisdom and so is the Christian. But the problem is that Christianity believes in a personal God or a relationship to a personal God and His relationship to us. You cannot have that in Buddhism.⁵¹

The effective Western missionary is able to demonstrate from the Scriptures the greatness and power of God over the powers of darkness and His sovereign rule over creation. Taylor remarks, “Another idea that seems to be quite effective is to talk of God’s power over evils spirits. When we talk about evil spirits people become very interested. Talking about Jesus’ death on the cross and that he defeated all powers including the devil, and so we can trust in Christ, and don’t have to fear the spirits, is another effective way.”⁵²

When explaining about God, the western missionary should use the stories of the Old Testament rather than giving a logical or propositional argument.⁵³ He should look for ways to explain about God from the Old Testament stories, especially Genesis 1 and 2, stories of God’s creation of the earth, the land, the water, the sky, and mankind. Dinkins suggests, “Do not present Jesus until you establish a foundation for Jesus. That means that

⁵¹ Breidenthal, taped Skype interview.

⁵² Taylor, taped Skype interview.

⁵³ Forrest McPhail states, “Many involved in world missions, and pioneer missions in particular, realize that the best way to communicate the Gospel is to begin at Genesis and build upon that firm foundation.” *Pioneer Missions* (Charleston, SC: Good News Publishers, 2014), 33.

you need to have a strategy of Bible teaching that starts out with creation; work them through the Old Testament with the key concept of the redemptive story and salvation. And then, after you really have them prepared, when you present Jesus it makes sense.”⁵⁴

The missionary should look for passages which show that God is worthy to be worshipped by all His creation. When the Western missionary uses Bible stories to explain certain biblical truths, he must be clear that they are historical truth; otherwise the Thai Buddhist will get the impression that they are fairy stories or myths and perceive that Christianity is just another religion.⁵⁵

In witnessing to the ancestor worshippers, one needs to let them know that ancestor worship is a form of idolatry (Ex. 20:4; 34:14). Usually when someone who used to be an ancestor worshipper becomes a Christian, the author will encourage him/her to remove the shrine of his/her ancestors.⁵⁶ In addition, one needs to tell them that they can honor their ancestors in a biblical way. Ephesians 6:2-3 says, “Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou

⁵⁴ Dinkins, taped Skype interview.

⁵⁵ Teaching the Thai Buddhist from Bible stories especially from the book of Genesis, provides him with a foundation of biblical truth in order to better grasp the Gospel message and the biblical worldview in general. This biblical approach to evangelism will naturally erase the false perception of Christianity and fears of animism from the hearts of the Thai Buddhist.

⁵⁶ Wai Hong Ho points out that “usually when someone who has ancestor tablets becomes a Christian, the pastor/church will require him to remove them. Naturally, this will create a spiritual and emotional void in his life. After the removal of the ancestor tablet, a plaque of approximately the same size can replace the ancestor tablet.” “A Manual of Pastoral Philosophy and Christian Conduct Toward Ancestor Practices in Hong Kong,” (D.Min. diss., Bob Jones University, 2013), 104.

mayest live long on the earth.” Thus, one can revere one’s ancestors in a biblical way, without having to worship them.

Understanding Christian Conversion

The Western missionary should examine the biblical teaching about conversion to prove a person’s genuine conversion and how it relates to the consequences of conversion of Thai Buddhists. He should look for those passages in the New Testament that describe the conversion of a person who has truly trusted and followed the Lord Jesus Christ.

The two distinct elements of conversion which the Western missionary must communicate are repentance and faith.⁵⁷ The Greek word “μετανοέω” (*metanoéō*), defined as “change one’s mind or regret,” occurs fifty-six times in the New Testament and characterizes the conversion of a person from one way of living to trusting in Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ *Μετανοέω* describes the conscious decision to turn from sin to God, a change of mind, action, and the whole inner nature of a person.⁵⁹ The apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). The apostle Paul portrays here a clear picture of the Thessalonians

⁵⁷ Wayne Grudem states, “Scripture puts repentance and faith together as different aspects of the one act of coming to Christ for salvation. It is not that a person first turns from sin and next trusts in Christ, or first trusts in Christ and then turns from sin, but rather that both occur at the same time.” *Systematic Theology: An Introduction of Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 713.

⁵⁸ Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, trans. and ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 475.

⁵⁹ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 642.

believers who demonstrate genuine conversion: they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”⁶⁰ Wayne Grudem points out, “When we turn to Christ for salvation from our sins, we are simultaneously turning away from sins that we are asking Christ to save us from. If that were not true, our turning to Christ for salvation from sin could hardly be a genuine turning to Him or trusting in Him.”⁶¹

Conversion is not simply an inner emotional experience of the believer, but it is something which other people can recognize.⁶² For the Thessalonians it was the turning from idols which demonstrated a change in their belief and practice. In a similar way, the consequences of conversion of Thai Buddhists should correspond to that of the Thessalonians’ experience. An important mark of a genuine conversion always begins with the “turning away from” all other old beliefs and practices that are associated with the animistic spirit.

The Western missionary must be aware that Thai Buddhists might pray a prayer ostensibly to receive Jesus Christ and confess their sins in a superficial manner, without a conviction of sin or subsequent evidence of change in their lives. Because some of them make a false profession of faith during their conversions in order to receive some material benefits or

⁶⁰ David J. Hesselgrave states, “This is important because the phrase ‘turning from idols’ by itself could mean a ‘turning to’ atheism, materialism, emperor worship, or some other form of religion. It is also important because Christian conversion is seen as a break with former religious practices and beliefs.” *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 234.

⁶¹ Grudem, 714.

⁶² Only when the changes in knowledge and feelings lead to a change in life style, behavior, and allegiance to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, can we say that it is a genuine conversion.

educational advantages, he must also be able to recognize genuine conversion among the Thai Buddhist converts. Taylor states, “Most MCTBs convert through their sense of God actually doing something in their lives. But the concern there, is that if the MCTBs don’t come to a real understanding of sin, of God, and what coming to Him really means, then they are coming for the wrong reasons.”⁶³

Most often, it seems difficult for MCTBs to make the decision to throw away the objects of idol worship by removing amulets and charms. According to the author’s experience (as an MCTB), after one year of professing Christianity, the author still clung to the objects of idol worship and because of this, the author continued to experience spiritual struggle until he completely threw away the objects of idol worship and fully surrendered his life to the Lord. The new convert should voluntarily throw away all false objects of worship. The Bible tells us that the sorcerers received the gospel message and brought their objects of worship voluntarily to be burned (Acts 19:19). Most often those professed converts who still keep their idols tend to go back to their old religious life when they face trials and difficulties in their new Christian faith. Breidenthal comments, “MCTBs think that they are Christian, because they are in the Christian group. They are not clear in their thinking that when they became Christian they had to reject their background in Buddhism.”⁶⁴

As a mark of genuine conversion, the new convert should voluntarily throw away all objects of idol worship because of submission and faith to the

⁶³ Taylor, taped Skype interview.

⁶⁴ Breidenthal, taped Skype interview.

lordship of Jesus Christ. The Western missionary must emphasize the turning away from idols and putting one's faith in God as an important part of the consequences of conversion of Thai Buddhists. A MCTB convert's life will be a powerful witness in his work place and in the community in which he lives because he has demonstrated a change from his old beliefs and practices to a new life in Christ.

Some missionaries have mistakenly thought that leading a Thai Buddhist to receive Jesus Christ is the end of spiritual responsibility to the person. As the new Thai convert grows in the faith and understands more of the Bible's teachings, he will experience a change and transformation taking place in his life. Usually, it takes time to experience a change from old beliefs and practices to a new life according to biblical teaching. He will soon discover that many socio-religious-cultural beliefs and practices contradict biblical teaching. He must choose either the way of the old beliefs and practices or the way of the Bible. Following the new Christian life often means receiving pressure from family members and misunderstanding from friends, and being treated as someone who has abandoned his own religion and culture. In helping the MCTB converts cope with rejection by their Buddhist family, Dinkins states, "The key is to teach them right from the beginning that they may encounter some difficulties. From the moment you share the gospel with the MCTBs you should prepare them to count the cost."⁶⁵

The church needs to incorporate the new Thai convert into the church community to experience God's love and Christian fellowship with other

⁶⁵ Dinkins, taped Skype interview.

believers. The church must become a place that encourages social interaction and interdependence that will help the new converts to have a sense of belonging in a church family and overcome the feeling of being rejected by their parents and friends. Taylor states, “At the same time that they feel secure in their relationship within the church community, it is important not to pull them too far away from their families just because they are being rejected. The church needs to equip and help them to be a witness within their families and to keep showing love to their families.”⁶⁶

Summary

Establishing good relationships with the Thai Buddhists is important. Building relationships of trust is an important element in preparing the way for the gospel to be received by the Thai Buddhists. The Western missionary’s lifestyle is an essential key element in presenting the gospel to Thai Buddhists. He must exemplify a godly lifestyle in order to communicate the gospel effectively.

The Western missionary who desires to work effectively in a foreign field prepares himself with substantial cross-cultural mission training and formal educational training for his mission work. However, this does not mean that he must have a full grasp of cross-cultural missions before arriving on the mission field. In addition to his missionary preparation, he needs to understand the importance of and pattern for developing national leadership.

In presenting the gospel, the prepared Western missionary learns the culture’s worldview and belief system in order to communicate the gospel

⁶⁶ Taylor, taped Skype interview.

effectively in terms that the nationals can clearly understand. In presenting the gospel, he emphasizes the lordship of Jesus Christ and Creatorhood of God. Capable Western missionaries understand that a genuine conversion involves a clear turning away from the old religious beliefs and practices and turning to God by becoming a true follower of Jesus Christ. The new Thai convert learns how to apply the teaching of the Bible to all areas of his daily life. His new life in Christ affects relationships with family members and friends who are non-believers. His new-found faith will be a powerful witness to those whom he comes in contact with because he has found a new hope in Christ and the true living God who has set him free from the bondage of sin.

Chapter 6

Evangelism and Discipleship

Thailand has been evangelized for almost two centuries, but only recently have the Thai people become more receptive to the gospel. The work of evangelism and discipleship remains a challenge for the church in Thailand. In order to see a great harvest in Thailand, the entirety of the Great Commission¹ needs to be obeyed (Matt. 28:19-20).² This chapter integrates the information from prior chapters to assist the Western missionary to employ relevant methods for evangelism and discipleship in the Thai cultural context.

Methods of Evangelism

Because Thailand enjoys freedom of religion, the Western missionary has ample opportunities to spread the gospel in public places throughout the

¹ In 1989 Allan Coppedge stated, “Reference to the Great Commission is often used in contemporary circles only to refer to missionary activity in foreign culture. Further, it usually focuses upon church planting, education, agriculture, medicine, and a host of other missionary ministries.” That may have been true then, but a quarter century later the literature shows that the Great Commission is being applied to churches in their own local context. *The Biblical Principles of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1989), 114.

² “The participial instructions are subordinate to the main verb ‘make disciples.’ The focus, then, is not so much on going to all nations, or on baptizing or teaching; it is upon the making of disciples....If the first dimension of making disciples has to do with evangelism, the second has to do with training those who have made a decision to follow Jesus. In a sense this is where discipling proper begins, when a discipler starts to teach new believers what it means to be a disciplined follower of Jesus.” Ibid., 107, 116.

country. However, in order to evangelize the Thai people effectively with the gospel, the Western missionary should use various evangelistic methods that are relevant in the Thai context. This section does not attempt to give a comprehensive treatment of methods for evangelism, but will mention some practical evangelistic methods that are relevant and effective among the Thai people.

Personal Visitation

The effective Western missionary who is called to serve the Lord among Thai Buddhists employs personal visitation for personal evangelism. Personal visitation provides insights into the culture, custom, and values of the Thai Buddhists that help the Western missionary to present the gospel effectively to them. The time spent interacting with the Thai Buddhists in their homes, which involves getting acquainted with each other, helps the Western missionary to know how to minister to Thai Buddhists in time of crisis and need.³ Devoting time each week to visit Thai Buddhists on a regular basis helps the Western missionary gain personal acceptance and trust among them.

The Western missionary will observe that it will take a long time to replace the old ways of belief and practices with the new way of biblical values. This takes place more easily when the Western missionary takes time to visit new believers in their homes in a friendly and caring manner. When

³ Marvin K. Mayers states, "Unless we enter into our relationship with another with an accepting attitude, we will not be able to discover all that can be known about that person and minister to his total life. As we understand his lifestyle and belief system, we can utilize what we learn to communicate the gospel message." *Christianity Confronts Culture: A Strategy for Crosscultural Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 51.

the author was a new Christian, the missionary who led him to the Lord would regularly visit him at his home to go over the Scriptures and pray for his personal needs. The regular visits of the missionary helped the author to move from a Thai Buddhist worldview to a biblical-Christian worldview, even though it took him several months to understand what the Bible teaches about God, man, and sin.

Home visits are often difficult because of the busy schedule middle-class Thai Buddhists (MCTBs) keep. Alternate ways of visiting may include enjoying lunch at a restaurant or coffee at a coffee shop. The missionary can take this opportunity to get to know the person and build a personal relationship that leads to a one-on-one Bible study and the presentation of the gospel.

Home Bible Study Group

A home Bible study group is an opportunity for missionaries to present the gospel to the Thai Buddhists. A home Bible study group is a gathering of Christian believers meeting regularly in a home for the purpose of discipleship (prayer, Bible study, fellowship, serving one another in Christ-like love) and evangelism. These aspects are expressed in the account of Luke in Acts 2:46-47.⁴

⁴ “Without the private hospitality of Christian homes the work of the early missionaries would have come to a standstill....The practice of hospitality in the early church, together with the house church model, built up an effective network for communicating the gospel.” Roger E. Hedlund, *A Biblical Theology: The Mission of the Church in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 256.

Unbelievers can be invited to join the home Bible study group in a relaxed and non-threatening⁵ setting where they are able to ask probing questions and the missionary can introduce them to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. One of the effective teaching methods for evangelism that the missionary can use in a home Bible study group is the chronological Bible approach, which helps Thai Buddhists understand the central redemptive narrative of the Bible. Hayes says, “I prefer the chronological teaching, from Genesis through the death burial and resurrection of Christ. I find that to be the best form of evangelism.”⁶

In a home⁷ Bible study group the missionary can witness to Thai Buddhists more easily and talk with them about their faith in a more natural manner. Typically, the home Bible study group would have Thai food after the meeting and a time of fellowship and interaction among the Christians and non-Christians.

MCTBs need time to learn and understand the gospel message and see the love of Christ reflected in love for others by the Thai Christians they know. Ezra Mothanaprakoon, a faculty member at Bangkok Bible College and Seminary, says, “Today middle-class Thai Buddhists are more self-centered than in the past. I think they are more concerned about their own

⁵ Western missionaries who share the Gospel to the Thai Buddhists should understand that the Thai people are relational people and do not like aggressive or confrontational approaches in the matter of religion. So, it would be best to share the Gospel to them in a non-aggressive way.

⁶ Jim Hayes, interview by author, August 29, 2015, Winston Salem, NC, tape recording.

⁷ It is also key that the Bible study occur in the private or semi-private confines of a home. This way there is no chance of losing face in public.

lives and success. Therefore, if the missionary presents the view that God is a God of love who cares about every detail of their lives, this truth will resonate with them.”⁸ The MCTBs are a religious people and particularly interested in the moral teachings of the Bible and the historical facts of the Bible.

However, the missionary needs to tell them that the focus of the Bible study is not on acquiring information, but knowing the God of the Scriptures, who sent His Son, Jesus Christ to die for their sins. It will take at least a year to build a trusting relationship with an MCTB. Once a trusting relationship is established, he will begin to open up and share personal stories. When the author asked about the relative amount of time devoted to relationship-building and knowledge-building in the Bible study groups, Thira Janepiriyaprayoon, pastor of the Mahapawn Bangkok Alliance Church and former president of Bangkok Bible College and Seminary, pointed out, “Typically, Thai society focuses more on relationship-building first and knowledge-building second. In order to make what we convey to them be absorbed, relationship-building is very important. I would give more time to build relationships (seventy percent) than to build knowledge (thirty percent).”⁹ Taylor comments interestingly about the importance of creating an atmosphere of trust and relationship in approaching the Thai people,

Again because of the importance of Thai relationship one needs to develop trust, and because of the Thai hierarchical system, especially if I am older than most, if I am discipling them, I need to break through the age difference so that they don’t just *Krang Jai* (show politeness or respect) me, but I need to create a safe atmosphere where they can feel free to share what they really

⁸ Ezra Mothanaprakoon, taped Skype interview by author, August 14, 2015.

⁹ Thira Janepiriyaprayoon, taped Skype interview by author, September 17, 2015.

think, what they really feel and not just *Krang Jai*. So creating a safe atmosphere of trust and relationship is very important. These are two sides of the same road; both are important.¹⁰

Printed Media

Printed media (Bibles, Christian literature, and evangelistic tracts) can be used as a means of evangelism. Early missionaries to the Thai people were successful in establishing Christian publishing ministries and bookstores that make Bibles, Christian literature, and evangelistic tracts accessible. There are two well-established Christian publishers in Thailand: Kanok Bannasan (OMF Publishers Thailand) and the Thailand Bible Society (TBS). These Christian publishers provide Bibles,¹¹ Christian literature, and evangelistic tracts that help the Thai people exercise a personal faith in Jesus Christ. Christian literature and evangelistic tracts are most often used in personal witnessing and have played a great role in the conversion of the Thai people and in helping them commit their lives to Christ. Missionaries should take advantage of printed media that is available and use it as an effective tool in presenting the gospel to Thai Buddhists.

The author used to distribute evangelistic tracts at Suan Lumpini Park situated in central Bangkok where the Bangkokians, especially the MCTBs, would come for recreational activities. He would also use a large visual poster that explained God's plan of salvation. Today the MCTBs are

¹⁰ Steve Taylor, taped Skype interview by author, August 26, 2015.

¹¹ Currently, there exist five different versions of the Thai Bible: (1) Thai Standard Version, (2) Thai New Contemporary Version, (3) New Thai Translation, (4) Easy-to-Read Thai New Testament, and (5) Thai King James Version.

very receptive to the gospel message and they like to engage in discussions about life and religion. Evangelistic tracts have been distributed widely and received with interest among the MCTBs, especially if the witnessing person explains the plan of salvation to them. Evangelistic tracts that are effective present a clear explanation of the plan of salvation and a biblically-based message that attract the attention of the MCTBs.

Social Media

Social media (Facebook, Google, YouTube, and Twitter) play a vital role in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Thai Buddhists—especially among the MCTBs. It has become one of the most effective means of communication to reach out to large numbers of Thai people with the gospel. The internet has greatly changed the way Thai people interact with each other by allowing them to share their views, opinions, and information with others online.¹² Websites containing the Thai Bible, Bible studies, sermons, songs, and other printed materials are readily available. Currently, a great number of Thai people, especially MCTBs, come in contact with the church through social media.

Missionaries should take advantage of this technology of social media which the Thai people use as part of their daily lives to reach others with the gospel. A missionary is able to sow the seed of the gospel to Thai people who are seeking answers to life's questions and are interested in Christianity.

¹² This interaction can take the form of posting on Facebook, texting, blogging, and tweeting.

Radio

Gospel radio broadcasts as a tool in the media outreach are not a new ministry in Thailand. Gospel radio broadcasts have become an effective method of presenting the gospel to Thai Buddhists because of their ability to reach a large audience of Thai Buddhists with the gospel message.¹³

Several radio stations are available in Thailand, and airtime can be bought at a reasonable price. Missionaries can take advantage of this opportunity by getting involved in the Christian radio ministry to reach out to Thai Buddhists who otherwise would not come in contact with the gospel message. They can introduce the listeners to Christianity and the Bible, and as a result, many can be brought to faith in Christ Jesus. Also, the missionary can invite churches in the areas to take part in his radio ministry by doing follow-up work with listeners.

The author used to listen to Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC) Christian Radio Thailand. The programs produced by FEBC consisted mainly of Bible teaching in the form of panel discussions, drama, and gospel music. The radio programs were aired every morning for half an hour in Bangkok. The author believes that FEBC has had a great impact on MCTBs' coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Because most of MCTBs spend much time in traffic commuting to and from work, many of them can turn on the FEBC Christian

¹³ Viggo Sogaard, a missionary in Thailand, who founded the Voice of Peace Studios in Chiangmai, states, "In at least some countries Christians can broadcast as long as they do not speak negatively of the government or the religion. By obeying such limitations the Voice of Peace, for example, achieved at one time up to thirty-six percent listening in certain areas of Thailand." *Media in Church and Mission: Communicating the Gospel* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1993), 135.

radio station while driving and be exposed to Bible teaching and the gospel message, which can lead them to put their trust in Jesus Christ.

English Teaching Ministry

Teaching English has become an effective tool for evangelism in reaching the Thai people with the gospel, especially among university students, many of whom are from middle-class families. Many churches and Christian organizations such as Campus Crusade (Cr) and Youth for Christ (YFC) are currently operating English education centers for university students.

English teaching provides opportunities for missionaries to build strong relationships and interactions, and to model Christ among the Thai people. Western missionaries can start English centers near the universities or in commercial areas where the Thai people can easily come for English classes. Breidenthal states that teaching English is the concept of helping them in the place of their awareness of need when they are away from home and open to new surroundings and philosophies. Breidenthal suggests that missionaries, “go to a large city, rent a place close to the university, and open this place for teaching English to university students. Another place for English teaching is at a small student dormitory where the Western missionary can interact with the students and spend time with them while sharing biblical truth.”¹⁴

The missionary should understand that his primary goal is not only to teach English, but to be able to share the gospel with the Thai people. One of

¹⁴ Henry Breidenthal, taped Skype interview by author, August 17, 2015.

the best ways he can share the gospel is by teaching Bible stories in English. This has become a unique way to draw Thai people to come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Currently, many churches in Thailand are seeing thousands of Thai people especially among the university students come in contact with the church through English teaching. Many university students who were converted to Christianity returned to their home provinces to spread the gospel to their families, friends, and communities.

The author used to be involved in an English teaching ministry at Ramkhamheng University, one of the largest universities in the world with students numbering nearly half a million. He was able to reach university students with the gospel. He organized the teaching sessions with activities such as playing games, teaching Christian songs in English, and teaching English from Bible stories. By building relationships with the university students through these activities, the author was able to discuss Bible with them and lead students to Christ.

Crisis Counseling Ministry

Crisis counseling ministry can be used as a means of proclaiming the power of the gospel to restore broken relationships and families among the Thai people.¹⁵ In Thai society, broken relationships and families exist in every community. Because Thailand is known for its sex industry, it has

¹⁵ “The Lord is promising to minister to those whose hearts have been shattered. This type of ministry is necessary because of what sin has done to the world....One of the ways of defining biblical counseling is ‘broken people helping other broken people find healing through the power of the gospel and in the power of the Spirit as they apply the living principles of Scripture (Hebrews 4:12) to life.’” James MacDonald, Bob Kelleman, and Stephen Viars, eds., *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2001), 39, 41.

influenced men to seek out more than one wife at a time, which subsequently causes stress in their families. Therefore, crisis counseling must be taken seriously and must be based on the biblical teachings of the family. Through crisis counseling the missionary can minister God's Word to Thai people who are facing relationship and family crises. Dinkins says that the MCTBs who convert to Christianity usually need counseling because of financial crises and family break ups.¹⁶ Consequently, the missionary can take this opportunity to share the gospel with them and lead them to Christ.

Discipleship

Most new Thai converts do not enjoy Christian upbringings, but rather come from strong Buddhist-animist religious backgrounds. Additionally, among the small number of Christians in Thailand, many have remained nominal Christians. These circumstances indicate a major failure of the ministry to invest seriously in discipleship with the Thai converts. Mature Christian disciplers are needed to guide new Christians in their spiritual development to grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁷ In order to build a strong body of Thai Christian believers, missionaries will need to encourage them to become faithful disciples of Christ through the process of

¹⁶ Larry Dinkins, taped Skype interview by author, August 30, 2015.

¹⁷ Holt A. Clarke expressly asserts, "The story of Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch reveals dimensions of evangelism and faith sharing but also of a spiritual guidance relationship. We should surround ourselves with spiritual guides who will support, encourage, and hold us accountable to the higher call that is ours in Christ Jesus." *The Discipleship Art of Biblical Mentoring: A Christian Discipleship Curriculum Design for Fashioning a Great Commission Church* (Madison, NJ: Drew University, 2005), 40.

discipleship.¹⁸ Discipleship is mandated by Christ, and all Christian believers should be discipling (Matt. 28:19-20).¹⁹ This section discusses the practical considerations for discipleship, the disciplines for discipleship, and discipleship training among the Thai people.

Practical Considerations for Discipleship

The missionary should understand the practical aspects of discipleship that encourage spiritual growth and service for new Thai converts. Through discipleship, converts are able to develop a biblical worldview and principles. The missionary must become aware that the process of changing one's cultural worldview requires considerable discipleship and time. Therefore, it is a great challenge for a missionary to help new Thai believers to replace their former worldview with biblical principles as he discipless them to grow in Christ. He must rely upon the working of the Holy Spirit to bring about a genuine change in their lives as he discipless them to obey God's Word with the power of God's Spirit. The new Thai convert's former worldview, beliefs, and practices which have been deeply ingrained from their

¹⁸ "The process of discipleship is introduced by Jesus as a vehicle for effectively accomplishing His purposes....The first purpose of discipleship, then, is to cultivate an intimate relationship with Jesus. Out of that closer relationship with Jesus, the Lord more effectively shaped the character of His disciples into His own likeness and trained them for His service....The second essential principle of discipleship is the cultivation of habit patterns that make it possible to develop one's relationship with God. Learning to pray, study the Scriptures, memorize the Word, fast, and worship in community are all part of the process of developing tools for the ongoing cultivation of one's walk with God." Coppedge, 161-162.

¹⁹ Gary W. Kuhne states, "An examination of this command reveals some points essential to our understanding of the Great Commission. The focal point of the command is that the main goal is to make disciples. This seemingly obvious truth has some importance implications to any Christian sincerely desiring to fully obey his Lord." *The Dynamics of Discipleship Training: Being and Producing Spiritual Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12.

Buddhist-animistic culture will gradually change as they learn of the teaching of the Bible and know God more intimately, and apply biblical truths in their daily lives. The Apostle Paul admonished the believers in Colossians 3:9-10 to “put off the old man with his deeds; and...put on the new man.”

Through discipleship, a growing believer acquires an understanding of the primary values of the Christian life that are foundational for spiritual growth. Because the standard of morality among Thai people is relatively low and immorality is seen in every sector of society, discipleship must be taken seriously.²⁰ In such contexts, discipleship must be based on scriptural teachings of separation from worldly practices in order to live a life that is holy before the Lord.²¹

The discipleship process begins immediately after a person accepts Christ as personal Savior.²² New Thai converts receive immediate follow-up care, be baptized, and incorporated in the church assembly as soon as possible (Acts 2:41-42). Hayes explains, “We try to get them to participate as

²⁰ “The rottenness at the core of Thai society can only be fully excised and cleansed through a turning to God. Corrupt military, government and police leaders have protected the large sex trade, drug networks, crime syndicates and ecological degradation of the country.” Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Publishing, 2001), 620.

²¹ J. C. Ryle states, “Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find his mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God’s judgment—hating what he hates—loving what he loves—and measuring everything in this world by the standard of his Word.” *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2014), 48.

²² “Technically, from the moment of spiritual birth, every Christian is a disciple. Disciples are born by the Spirit to be made into mature reproducers, as described in John 15: 7-17. They are to be made in every nation; therefore every person in the church is a disciple...” Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1990), 20.

soon as possible and help them see that they are one-hundred percent members of the church.”²³ To develop disciples, the missionary offers practical guidance for Christian discipleship to the new Thai converts. The missionary encourages the new converts to spend private time in prayer and the reading of God’s Word in order to build a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.²⁴ At the appropriate time the missionary provides training for the new converts to become effective witnesses for the gospel. Becoming committed to the activities of the church and living a sacrificial life are essential factors in being a disciple. Sacrifice does not necessarily mean a person giving up his or her occupation to become a missionary to a foreign country or a full-time minister. It does mean living a life that is totally dependent on Christ and refusing to be conformed to this world.²⁵

A Thai cultural attitude which includes the ideas of *jai yen*²⁶ (“relax” or “take it easy”) and *mai pen rai* (“no problem, it’s okay”), occurs among Christians in the Thai church.²⁷ One of the reasons why many Thai

²³ Hayes, interview.

²⁴ This should also include teaching them how to do this: Bible study, Bible memorization, serving, and witnessing, etc.

²⁵ “Following Jesus entails radical discipleship. Anyone who would be his disciple must forsake all other ties and loyalties in favour of unreserved, committed allegiance to Jesus (Matt. 10:37; cf. 4:22; 8:21; 12:46-50) and take up his cross (Matt. 10: 38-39; cf. 16:24-26).” Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 93-94.

²⁶ Literally means “cool heart.”

²⁷ *Sanuk* (fun or happiness) and *Mai Pen Rai* (no problem, it’s okay) are words which describe the Thai way of life.

Christians remain merely “nominal” is that they do not take discipleship and the gospel seriously.²⁸

Motivating new Thai converts to be interested in discipleship and the application of the Bible to their daily lives is a significant challenge for the missionary. Emphasizing one-on-one discipleship through regularly meeting with the disciples and spending time teaching, advising, and mentoring them can lift them out of their apparent apathy. The author observes that a common excuse of middle-class Thai Christians for not wanting to be involved in discipleship is that they are too busy. The issue is the paucity of time. New approaches to discipleship meetings are required. Taylor points out,

One of the main things for middle-class Thai Buddhists, mainly in Bangkok, is just time. People are so tied up in their work. So the challenge is to help them see how they can be a part of the disciple-making process through their place of work, through their place of living and so forth. So there are more holistic approaches rather than ministry is only church-based. It is very difficult for people just to move around in Bangkok. So helping them to see that every moment of the day can be part of witnessing and disciple-making is very important.²⁹

Thus, because of the busy life in a big city like Bangkok, the author took middle-class Thai Christians out for lunch or coffee near their work places where they could easily come to briefly meet for discipleship and fellowship.

²⁸ Dinkins asserts “Think about the Korean people. There are many reasons why Korea has thirty to forty percent Christians in their population. But part of it is that they take discipleship and the Gospel seriously; many get up at five o’clock every morning for personal devotions. So a basic problem among Thai Christians is a ‘*mai pen rai*’ attitude.”

²⁹ Taylor, taped Skype interview.

Disciplines for Discipleship

Spiritual disciplines are an essential discipleship practice to promote spiritual growth in the life of the believer.³⁰ The main purpose of spiritual discipline is to grow in the likeness and knowledge of Jesus Christ. In order to help the new Thai convert to become a genuine follower of Jesus Christ, the missionary should give him basic instruction in Christian living and encourage him to grow in his walk with the Lord by engaging in spiritual discipline in his daily life.

Personal Bible Study

Developing a discipline of personal Bible study and applying the Bible in everyday life is essential for one's personal spiritual growth.³¹ Paul advised Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The missionary must take personal interest in discipling the new Thai converts by encouraging them to cultivate a discipline of personal Bible study that will help them to grasp the basic Bible truths and deepen their understanding of both the New and Old Testaments for growing spiritually. Developing a

³⁰ John Koessler states, "Living like Christ does not come automatically once we have placed our faith in the Savior. Spiritual maturity demands training and practice. The way we prepare to live the Christian life is by practicing the spiritual disciplines." *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 115.

³¹ J. C. Ryle states, "Next to praying there is nothing so important in practical religion as Bible-reading....By reading that book we may learn what to believe, what to be, and what to do; how to live with comfort, and how to die in peace." *Practical Religion: Being Plain Papers on the Daily Duties, Experience, Dangers, and Privileges of Professing Christians* (New York: Crowell, 1998), 97.

discipline of personal Bible study will aid the new Thai convert to understand the main contents and concepts of each book of the Bible he reads.

Most new Thai converts cannot apply God's Word to their lives and the Thai cultural context. The missionary should teach the new Thai converts how to study the Bible with hermeneutically valid methods³² and how to use Bible study tools to enhance their study.³³ The new Thai converts should be urged to follow a regular Bible reading schedule. The missionary can suggest that new converts first read from the Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John. *Our Daily Bread* devotional guide published in Thai could help the new Thai converts spend time each day in studying God's Word. This devotional guide in Thai give simple explanations and application of Bible passages that will help the new Thai converts better understand Bible truth. Several Christian discipleship books with Bible study lessons are also available in Thai that would help establish new Thai converts in the faith, including *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan and *The Pursuit of God* by A. W. Tozer.

Prayer

Developing a disciplined prayer life is vital for the spiritual growth of new converts.³⁴ The Apostle Paul encourages believers, "Continue in prayer,

³² The author finds that the inductive biblical study method is one of the best methods to help the new Thai converts to study God's Word by themselves. It is a method that brings the new convert directly to God's Word by using observation, interpretation, and application.

³³ Many Bible study tools are available in Thai, such as Bible concordances, commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and different Bible versions.

³⁴ R. A. Torrey emphasized the important of prayer in the disciple's spiritual growth when he stated: "Prayer promotes our own spiritual growth and our likeness to Christ as almost nothing else can. The more time we spend in real, true prayer, other things being equal, the more we shall grow in likeness to our Master." *How to*

and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). The missionary should offer a comprehensive discipleship study that contrasts the biblical concept of prayer from the Buddhist one. He should spend time together with them in prayer so that they can share requests and pray for their needs. New converts should be encouraged to set aside a definite time each day to spend time with God in prayer, praising Him for who He is, thanking Him for His blessings, and confessing sins to Him. The church should have a weekly prayer meeting where the Christian believers can come together in corporate prayer and testimony of answers to prayer. It is extremely important for the missionary to check with new Thai converts periodically to make sure that they spend private time with God in prayer. It is the believer’s opportunity to have intimate fellowship with God and grow in his experience with God.

Bible Memorization

Bible memorization and learning to apply God’s Word to the believer’s life are important aspects of the discipleship process. This spiritual discipline is a vital tool for spiritual growth, victory over temptation, and a strengthened prayer life. Typically, new Thai converts who have come out of their old religious beliefs and practices still fear evil spirits. Missionaries should encourage them to memorize Scripture that describe God’s power over evil spirits (Matt. 16:19; Lk. 11:14-21; 1 Jn. 4:4; Rom. 8:37-39; Eph. 6:11). To keep new Thai converts from turning back to their old religious beliefs and practices, they should be encouraged to commit to memory verses that speak about their new life and position in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:6).

Obtain Fullness of Power: In Christian Life and Service (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1897), 64.

Middle-class Thai converts who usually struggle with the issue of covetousness should be encouraged to memorize Scripture that addresses the proper attitude toward money (1 Tim. 6:10; Matt. 6:24). Jones says, “The love of money keeps many middle-class Thai Buddhists from developing a biblical worldview. It keeps them from committing themselves to studying the Bible on a personal level.”³⁵

There are several methods to start memorizing the Scriptures. The new Thai converts can buy a packet of Scripture memory cards from a Christian bookstore, where they have many topics to choose for memorization. They can choose from any topic that addresses their struggles. Another way that the author prefers is to write down on a card one verse from his regular morning devotional time, the Bible verse that he feels is related to his need, and commit that one verse to memory. For middle-class Thai converts, because of their busy schedule, it may be profitable to record several Bible verses and listen to them as they drive their cars to work or as they are walking in a park or shopping mall.

Witnessing

Witnessing is one of the essential parts of Christian discipline and spiritual growth. When individuals come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, they have a desire to witness to others of their new-found faith in Christ. However, ignorance, lack of confidence, and fear play against their desire to witness. As they begin to witness to others, they will experience spiritual growth in their own lives. Missionaries should challenge new Thai

³⁵ Matt Jones, email message to author, September 16, 2015.

converts to seek opportunities to witness to their family, friends, and co-workers sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many new Thai converts are misunderstood by their families and friends when they witness to them of their faith in Christ. However, through this spiritual experience they will develop a strong and growing faith in Christ Jesus.

Serving

Part of discipleship involves the new converts' commitment to serve one another in the ministries of the church, so that the body edified (1 Cor. 12:15-26; Eph. 4:12-16). Missionaries should teach new Thai converts about spiritual gifts and encourage them to use their God-given gift for ministry as this helps them in their spiritual growth and to bear fruit for the kingdom of God (Jn. 15:1-5). In order to help them to discern and develop their gifts of ministry, he should encourage them to use their gifts by giving testimonies, singing in a church choir, teaching in the children's Sunday school, or serving as an usher. As the new Thai converts learn from and follow the missionary, they are equipped to serve effectively in a way that glorifies God. Typically, Thai people do not like to be forced to do anything; instead they are willing to do something, if approached with kindness and friendliness. The missionary should give them time and be patient in involving them in the ministry of the church, instead of pressuring them to serve in a particular area of ministry where they have no training.

Discipleship Training

Discipleship training³⁶ is an essential component of the discipleship process. One responsibility of the minister of the gospel is to teach new converts to observe Christ's commandment "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20) and equip them to faithfully teach others God's Word (2 Tim. 2:2). At present, Sunday school and Bible institutes are two of the most effective avenues for discipleship training to accomplish the Great Commission for the Christian believers in Thailand.

Sunday School

Sunday school provides an effective means for training and discipling new Thai converts. One of the main goals of Sunday school is to assist the believers to grow in their faith and become fully devoted disciples of Jesus Christ in every aspect of life. In the Sunday school class, the missionary should give a systematic study of the Bible topically and by book for the believers. That means that he is responsible to teach the whole counsel of God's Word to the believers. He should utilize Bible stories in teaching the class. The author believes that one of the best ways to teach the Bible to new Thai converts is through telling Bible stories, starting with the story of creation from Genesis and working through the Old and New Testament chronologically. Through the Bible storytelling approach, believers can understand and recall those stories better and learn basic Bible doctrines that they can easily apply in their daily lives.

³⁶ It is something more formal than the more informal structure and atmosphere of a home-based Bible Study or a one-on-one personal encounter.

In developing curriculum to prepare for the Sunday-school lesson, the missionary should integrate instruction on biblical worldview into the curriculum and lesson plans. He should communicate a biblical worldview concerning God, man, and sin to new Thai converts. An effective missionary can help stimulate Thai converts to think about the cause of things by asking them questions from the Bible concerning the doctrine of God, man, Christ, sin, and salvation. Discussing these doctrinal topics with the Thai converts will help them to think logically and conceptually. Manoch Jangmook, current president of the Bangkok Bible College and Seminary and president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand, says,

I think that the Thai people know little about who God is. The concept of a personal creator God in the Thai context is not very clear. The Thai people see God as an idol that a person comes to ask for something. If God answers prayers that means God is real and powerful. If God does not answer their prayers, they will doubt God's existence. The Thai people have not arrived at that point of who God is. I think we should emphasize in the Sunday school the basic attributes of God, who God is, and that man is a sinner, and Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world who redeems man from sin. Many Thai people come to faith but they don't come through repentance. These areas are key to the Thai and are not being emphasized enough in their Christian education.³⁷

In addition to this, the missionary must instruct the new Thai converts how they should reorient themselves to a new Christian way of living within their Thai cultural context of customs and practices. These things need to be explained to them, because they have just come out from their former Buddhist-animistic background and now have to move into a new context of Christian principles and values.³⁸ A new Thai convert cannot avoid

³⁷ Manoch Jangmook, taped Skype interview by author, September 1, 2015.

³⁸ Many new Thai converts struggle between these two cultural frames of reference, between the new and old way of living within their Thai cultural context.

participating in any Thai rituals or ceremony without confronting the old cultural practices and beliefs. For example, in a traditional Thai funeral ceremony, the relatives would use incense, candlesticks, and flowers as a part of their paying homage to the deceased one. Chatchai Charuwatee, pastor of the Binding Heart Church and a faculty at Bangkok Bible Seminary, says, “The Thai converts should be told to change the form of homage by using only flowers to demonstrate respect to their ancestors in a biblical way, instead of prohibiting them from participating in this cultural ceremony entirely.”³⁹ They need to know how to conduct themselves within this transition period based upon biblical principles. The missionary needs to instruct them clearly about their new Christian life and their responsibilities as Christians. Hayes says, “What I find is important for our Buddhist people is to teach them and show them from the Bible how they can live in their own community, because immediately they worry: ‘Oh I am not a Buddhist now; What can I do? Can I go to my father’s funeral? Can I earn merit?’ They think that since they are not Buddhist anymore they can’t do anything in their society.”⁴⁰

In integrating middle-class Thai converts into the church community, Sunday school should provide a similar social group class for them that would promote social and spiritual interaction. When asked what the church can do to integrate new middle-class Thai converts in the church community, Taylor offered, “I think they can fellowship among a group of peers; if they are business people, they can have fellowship groups that consist of other business people in similar kinds of situations or standing in society as they

³⁹ Chatchai Charuwatee, taped Skype interview by author, August 28, 2015.

⁴⁰ Hayes, interview.

are.”⁴¹ Interacting in fellowship with other believers with similar social standing or occupations will help to foster relationships of interdependence and mutual support. However, middle-class Thai converts should also learn to love, appreciate, and serve their brothers and sisters outside of their social class. Because of its group nature, the missionary can have the liberty to teach middle-class Thai converts about the topic of money in the Bible.

Bible Institutes

Discipleship training through Bible Institute is one of the most effective means for developing disciples for church ministry. Thai converts need both sound biblical training and practical ministry training from God’s Word. To effectively train disciples for church ministry, the Bible Institute curricula must focus on both spiritual development and academic studies.⁴² For spiritual development, it should emphasize personal devotion in prayer and God’s Word, personal soul-winning, and biblical separation. For academic studies, the curricula should include the study of Bible, theology, church history, evangelism, missions, and Christian education.

The missionary should select gifted disciples whom he observes to have been called for ministry and encourage them to consider further Christian

⁴¹ Taylor, taped Skype interview.

⁴² “Spiritual formation at Bangkok Bible College and Seminary is a multidimensional, integrated process that is incorporated into the curriculum through classroom Bible instruction that models pastoral concern for students, a highly intentional system for faculty mentoring, worship, and campus life. The example of fellow students, field education, camps and seminars, evangelistic trips, and the student council are also considered significant in spiritual formation.” Richard S. Herring, “Spiritual Formation at Six Thai Evangelical Theological Institutions” (D.Min. diss., Columbia Biblical Seminary and School of Missions, 1999), 28.

education and discipleship training in a Bible Institute setting to prepare them for effective church ministry. Many new Thai converts who have come to Christ desire to serve the Lord in the ministry and spread the gospel to their people. Many of them have been sent by the missionary to study at the Bible Institutes to be equipped with God's Word for effective ministry.

Before coming to study at Bob Jones University, the author taught at Bangkok Bible College and Seminary. Henry Breidenthal founded the seminary in 1971, with five students. For the past forty-five years, it has trained hundreds of Thai Christians from all over Thailand for effective church ministry and leadership. Currently, the seminary has enrolled more than two hundred students and is the largest full-time conservative Christian education and discipleship training center in Bangkok. Many of the graduates are Bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, pastors, missionaries, church planters, and para church Christian workers who are currently serving in ministries and spreading the gospel throughout Thailand.

In the urban settings, where most of middle-class Thai converts seek their own benefit, it is extremely difficult for them to make a personal sacrificial commitment to go to Bible institutes to receive further discipleship training for church ministry. The city of Bangkok has become the center of commerce, making it more challenging to develop middle-class Thai converts for church ministry and leadership. It is a great challenge for missionaries to encourage them toward a full commitment of discipleship training for church ministry. In order to reach the MCTBs with the gospel, the missionary must spend much time with middle-class Thai converts in discipleship training, by equipping them with the Word of God. The highest priority for missionaries is training middle-class Thai converts to reach other MCTBs. When the

middle-class Thai converts are fully equipped, they will be the best people to reach their own group.

Summary

In this chapter we have looked at the various evangelistic and practical discipleship methods used among the Thai people. The Western missionary responsibility is not only to evangelize Thai converts with the gospel, but to disciple them to grow as genuine followers of Jesus Christ and to train them for Christian service so that they will be a witness for Christ to their own people. In order to effectively disciple the Thai converts, the missionary learns practical aspects of discipleship in the Thai cultural context and helps them to apply biblical truth in their daily lives. The missionary assists Thai converts by providing practical instruction from God's Word in the areas of Christian living and spiritual disciplines so that they will enjoy spiritual growth in their lives. A fruitful work for Christ among Thai converts requires enormous amounts of time and patience, but will bring much fruit for God's kingdom and glory.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

It is important that missionaries understand Thai religious history in order to evangelize this people effectively. This will help him be better acquainted with the religious situation of the Thai culture. Knowledge of Thai religious history, which has shaped the Thai people's belief systems, will help the missionary better understand how the Thai people practice their religious beliefs and interpret their religious concepts today. The missionary will be able to communicate the gospel message more effectively and apply Scripture to the people's lives and cultural context. This understanding is crucial because Thai religious beliefs provide the structure for Thai culture.

Thai Buddhism is essentially an amalgamation of various religious practices—drawn from Buddhism, Hindu Brahmanism, and animism. This combination has been a challenge in evangelizing Thailand ever since the first Catholic and Protestant missionaries arrived in Thailand. Nevertheless, faithful evangelizing from missionaries has been fruitful, yielding established churches. The number of Thai Christians is growing slowly but steadily. Most early mission organizations have placed great emphasis on social work in the founding of schools and hospitals.

Embracing the history and background of Thai people—their origin and religious heritage—helps missionaries to understand modern Thai culture and religion. Earlier indigenous people who lived in this region prior to the arrival of Thai people practiced animism, the belief that spirits are in

everything. The pre-Thai kingdoms rapidly established themselves as centers of art and culture in the region. Their history indicates that they were agnostics who were in desperate need of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The effective missionary understands who holds the power in the community. Thailand's political crisis over the last few years has plunged the country into violence and unrest, indicating a need for positive political reformation and, most importantly, God's sovereign rule in people's lives. Although Thailand has transformed itself economically into a modern society in recent decades, the growth of the Christian population has been very slow compared with that of other Southeast Asian countries. For the missionary to understand Thai people and to become part of the Thai culture, he must know the Thai language, both verbal and non-verbal.

Understanding Thai values and customs will help the missionary to make sense of the people's behavioral norms. The missionary should carefully observe Thai customs and manners, such as the ways they show respect and gratitude toward their elders and their manner of addressing elders.

Moreover, the missionary will need to teach MCTBs how to live based on the teaching of the Bible rather than the values of their society, particularly concerning their non-confrontational attitude, fear of losing face, *mai pen rai* attitude¹, and fear of offending. The missionary will not grasp the intricacies of Thai cultural values and customs by casual observation alone; he will have to be a serious life-long learner of Thai culture. Fortunately, Thai people are usually tolerant of alternative behaviors and not easily

¹ Meaning, "no problem, it's okay" in responses to situations involving conflict.

offended when Westerners violate Thai morés, because they perceive them as unintentional mistakes rather than a reluctance to learn Thai culture.

Comprehending the social hierarchical structures of Thai society will help the missionary understand how Thai societies are constructed and how groups within a Thai social hierarchy relate to one another. This understanding will help him in teaching Christians to accept one another as the Gospel begins to spread in the community and bring about changes in the society. In order for the missionary to evangelize Thai people effectively, he must understand social problems within the Thai community, such as prostitution, drug trafficking, and the resulting HIV/AIDS epidemic.

A major element in any culture is the family structure. Understanding Thai family relationships and obligations is necessary, although perhaps not apparent to those unfamiliar with Thai culture. The Thai family is built on strong bonds of reciprocal responsibility between parents and children.

Thai Buddhism has been influenced by Hindu Brahmanism which sees everything as governed by the law of *karma*. Understanding this worldview helps the missionary to communicate the gospel to the Thai people. He will be aware of Christian terms that are identical to Buddhist terms but have different meanings. Often the missionary uses certain Christian terms for God, life after death, salvation, and sin, but his Thai Buddhist hearers will assign different meanings to the same terms. Thai Buddhists define “life after death” as a cycle of reincarnation, “salvation” as doing good deeds by one’s own strength, “sin” as an act of bad behavior, and “God” as the law of *karma*.

In communicating the gospel to MCTBs, the effective missionary emphasizes God as Creator and Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross as an

atonement for the sins of mankind. He encourages new converts to renounce all involvement with worshiping spirits and turn away from their previous religious beliefs and practices.

The effective missionary understands the Thai people culture and how to build a trusting relationship with them through personal interaction. Once MCTBs perceive that a missionary is genuinely interested in them, they will be more receptive to the gospel message. The missionary's exemplifying a godly lifestyle is an essential element in communicating the gospel effectively. In order for a missionary to evangelize Thai Buddhists adequately, he must also understand the priority of developing national leadership and should disciple young converts and equip them for church ministry. Thai Christian already has a natural relationship with his own people and is uniquely capable of taking on the leadership of the church. He needs to understand the importance of developing national leadership as the New Testament pattern for church-planting strategy and multiplication. A potent missionary works in partnership with Thai church leaders in accomplishing the objectives of the Great Commission.

Missionaries who have cross-cultural training are better prepared to understand the Thai Buddhist culture and better able to communicate the gospel effectively. This training includes studying Thai Buddhist society and worldview, language, values, and customs. Proficient missionaries are open to cultural differences and transcend their own cultural assumptions by appreciating Thai culture and values that do not conflict with biblical values. Willingness to learn and adjust to Thai culture will help the missionary avoid many cultural mistakes and frustrations while serving in Thailand. Learning

to develop competent cross-cultural communication requires the missionary's commitment to be a life-long learner of a foreign language and worldview.

Practical cross-cultural evangelism among the MCTBs requires a clear presentation of the gospel message so that they can respond accordingly to its challenge. The missionary will not convert MCTBs by giving merely a logical or propositional argument or arguing against their religion, but rather by illustrating gospel concepts and communicating the gospel message gradually with gentleness, courtesy, and respect. Many evangelistic works have attempted to present the gospel without seriously considering the cultural, social, and worldview context of the MCTBs whom they seek to reach with the gospel. Some evangelistic works in Thailand have failed because of a lack of clear understanding and focus of the Great Commission.

The missionary should be aware that some Thai Buddhists may make a false profession in responding to the gospel message because of emotional experiences without truly understanding the gospel itself. The missionary must understand that genuine conversion occurs when unbiblical religious beliefs and practices are replaced with faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Through a genuine conversion experience, growth in the faith, and understanding more of the biblical teaching, these new middle-class Thai converts will renounce the old beliefs and practices that are associated with animism. More MCTBs will be able to understand the gospel message and come to the saving knowledge of Christ if the missionary will apply the recommendations suggested in this study.

It is imperative that the missionary consider and understand the socio-cultural context of the MCTBs whom he seeks to evangelize and disciple for Christ. The missionary needs to pray for wisdom in employing those

evangelistic methods that are relevant and effective in the Thai cultural context. Personal evangelism is relevant to Thai Buddhists because of its relational approach. When the gospel message is communicated relationally, MCTBs feel relaxed in a non-threatening atmosphere. For MCTBs, relational communication has been much more effective than non-personal communication or confrontational evangelism. Because most MCTBs are literate, printed materials (booklets, tracts, etc) are considered an effective way of communicating the gospel message to them. Capable missionaries reach out to middle-class university students since they seem to be the most responsive group to the gospel.

The missionary will need to understand the Thai Buddhist worldview in order to effectively root out old religious beliefs and practices from the new Thai converts. He will need to teach new Thai converts to differentiate between these two cultural frames of reference, between his old cultural belief system and the biblical truths. New Thai converts often carry their old religious worldviews into their new-found faith in Christ. Through personal visitation, home Bible study groups, and Sunday school classes, the missionary helps new Thai believers to replace their old way of beliefs and practices and learn the new way of biblical values.

Thai converts preparing for church ministry also need a structured program for discipleship training through a Bible institute. Because of the slow growth in evangelism in the Thai church, Thai Bible institutes must meet the need by discipling future Thai church leaders for church ministry and evangelism. The effective missionary will take every opportunity to give Thai converts both sound biblical training from God's Word and practical ministry experience so that they will grow spiritually.

This manual is intended to help prospective missionaries understand the Thai cultural background, religious history, and worldview so that they can adequately communicate the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and become better equipped in evangelism and discipleship among MCTBs. This manual provides the missionary with efficient evangelistic and practical discipleship methods that are relevant in the Thai context. The research in this manual demonstrates a very limited start in exploring the Thai culture and the effective methods for reaching out to the MCTBs.

However, further research of the following topics would help to enhance the broader understanding of Thai culture and effectively evangelism. The first topic is the evangelistic and communication methods that are effective with other people groups in Thailand, such as the southern, northern, and north-eastern groups. The second topic is the role of biblical spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:12; 2 Cor. 10:4-5) in evangelism and discipleship of the Thai Buddhists. The third topic is the development of culturally appropriate strategies for training an indigenous leadership for church planting and cross-cultural missions in Thailand and beyond.

It is my hope that this manual will provide an introductory knowledge base for the life-long study of MCTBs. A mighty work of salvation among the MCTBs will require much time and patience, but will bring forth fruit of responses to the gospel for God's kingdom and glory. Paul writes,

We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth (Col. 1: 3-6).

Appendix

Questionnaires

Questionnaires on the Preparation of the Missionary

1. What is the perception that Thais have of Western missionaries as they interact with the Thai people? Does their perception change depending on whether the missionaries' interaction is in the community or in the church?
2. What are the most common mistakes Western missionaries make when reaching out to middle-class Thai Buddhists?
3. What are the greatest obstacles that hinder middle-class Thai Buddhists' response to the gospel?
4. What are some effective strategies that Western missionaries can use to approach middle-class Thai Buddhists with the gospel?
5. What do you believe are the most likely explanations (reasons) for middle-class Thai Buddhists converting to Christianity?
6. When witnessing to middle-class Thai Buddhists, what are two key ideas you communicate first and why?
7. How do you help middle-class Thai converts cope with rejection by their Buddhist family?
8. What can the church do to integrate new middle-class Thai converts into the church community?
9. The Great Commission speaks of making disciples and baptizing them. How does the church fulfill the third aspect of the Great Commission: "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever [Christ] commands them"?

Questionnaires on Evangelism

10. Describe the type of evangelism that you believe is the most effective in reaching middle-class Thai Buddhists.
11. What are some concepts for Western missionaries to consider when engaging in personal evangelism with middle-class Thai Buddhists?
12. What type of outreach ministry do you think is the most effective in reaching middle-class Thai Buddhists?

Questionnaires on Discipleship

13. What are some of the challenges when discipling middle-class Thai converts for ministry?
14. When creating a Sunday school curriculum, what two topics would you recommend as most valuable to discuss first for middle-class Thai converts?
15. Describe the relative amount of time devoted to relationship building and knowledge building in your Bible study groups.

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