

# **THAILAND**

**A Church Growth Survey 1956**

HOW TO DO

A CHURCH GROWTH SURVEY

(Illustrated from Thailand)

Donald McGAVRAN

*T H A I L A N D*

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## PREFACE

I reproduce this 1956 study first because it illustrates methodology. Studies like this are often requested by missionary societies or Churches who wish to have an evaluation of their fields from an independent source. This booklet shows how such an investigation may be carried out so that churches of a given society are seen in the light of the typical response to the Gospel manifested by that land and the churches which other communions and missions have found it possible to establish.

I reproduce it also, because it describes truly the Christian situation in Thailand. It is worth noting that my findings in 1956, arrived at quite independently and after spending most of my time in only one small part of the country, have marked similarities to those of Alexander McLeish dated 1942.

The following monograph is a report made to the United Christian Missionary Society (Christian Church--Disciples of Christ) on its mission and Church in western Thailand, around Nakon Pathom. Since I made growth studies in Bangkok and the Chiengrai Chiengmai provinces also, and supplemented these with interviews with missionaries and nationals from all over the country, the one Church is seen in the whole Thai context.

Men and women making church growth surveys of mission fields or of churches will find this little volume of value. Conditions in each set of churches will, of course, differ; but the principles will remain the same.

The researcher must steadily bear in mind the long range goal - that the Gospel be in fact communicated and believers be in fact added to the Church. He must gather hard evidence as to responsible Christians in ongoing churches; and seek the witness of many denominations and many workers - laymen, ministers, missionaries, and other observers. He will always assume the sincerity and good will of leaders of churches and missions. He will see and describe mistakes clearly - and kindly. He will perceive and state factors which encourage growth and those which prevent it; and assess judiciously the real possibilities of winning enduring converts. Finally, he will write the whole clearly and precisely.

These are the guidelines. How successfully my 1956 study of churches in Thailand worked within them, the reader will have to judge. Now twenty years later, with much more to guide him, I trust he will be more successful than I. Continuous evaluation is an essential to responsible mission.

## CONTENTS

### *Preface*

INTRODUCTION 1

I THE GENERAL BACKGROUND 5

II THE INSTITUTIONS AT NAKON PATHOM 11

III OUR CHURCHES IN THAILAND 17

IV A BASIC DECISION 27

V WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHURCH GROWTH? 31

VI THE HEART OF THE MATTER 47

### *The Current Scene*

# Introduction

I ARRIVED in Bangkok from Manila on February 17, 1956, for a six-weeks' study visit of the United Christian Missionary Society and Church in Thailand. I proposed to study both the Thailand Church and Mission.\* I proceeded immediately to Nakon Pathom and studied the setup there for a week. Then I went to Cholburi to consult Mrs. Mary Clark on a number of specific issues. During the next week, Dr. Edna Gish and Mr. John Sams took me to see leaders of the Presbyterians, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Southern Baptists, the American Baptists, the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (former CIM), and others. I also visited some sessions of the great Theological Conference which was being held in the Girls' School at Mattanau, Bangkok.

In all these visits I aimed to discover the pattern of church growth which was being sought and achieved by ourselves and other missions. How does the Church grow in Thailand? How can it grow in a Buddhist land

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*\*For the sake of convenience the phrase "Church and Mission" will be condensed to "Churtion." What exists in many places is not Church and not Mission, but an organization, which partakes of the nature of both, and is properly called a Churtion.*

such as this? What is its structure? To what extent are the missions striving for other goals, such as raising the standard of living or ameliorating cultural conditions? These were the questions I was constantly asking.

It was always necessary to dig beneath the surface. Interviews with the Southern Baptists--who have a choice lot of missionaries--gave the first impression that vigorous preaching was resulting in many conversions. Further questioning revealed that after five years of such work they had 182 church members--some of whom had come from the Presbyterians--and most of their 30 converts in 1955 were students or dependents of missionaries or Thai Christians. Their problems with unmarried student Christians are considerable. I concluded that they did not have the full answer for Thailand.

Similarly, the encouraging account of the growth of a Presbyterian church had to be re-evaluated when I learned that this "growth" was the reviving of a congregation and the adding to it of Christians from other places who had moved to Bangkok. There were comparatively few conversions from the world.

Thus, during the first two weeks I was forming opinions based on a wide sounding of experience, as to *how Thailanders become Christian*. This is the bedrock on which all missionary strategy rests.

On March 4, in order to investigate the multiplication of churches through the leprosy gate, take a look at that section of Thailand where church growth at 100 percent a decade is occurring, and secure Karen helpers for our exploration among the western hills, I went to Chiangmai and Chiangrai. John Sams kindly accompanied me and was a great help.



On March 12, I returned to Bangkok to attend for three days the meetings of the Asian Council on Ecumenical Mission. From March 15 to 28, I lived at Nakon Pathom, sallying out to the Sam Yet villages of Banglee, Hua-pai, and Ban Pong, visiting hospital, schools, Chinese and Thai churches. In an attempt to assess the likelihood of church growth, I observed the responses given by various groups to the gospel. Tentative conclusions were submitted to our leaders in a series of conversations. Sections III, IV, and V of this report were prepared and read on February 26 to the missionaries and on February 27, in translation, to the Field Committee.

This study would have been impossible without the cordial and wholehearted cooperation of Dr. Edna Gish, Dr. H. T. Chen, Mr. John Sams, and indeed, the whole Churrtion staff. It was a pleasure to meet and work with this unusually fine group of men and women, missionaries from many lands working as one team. We have a wonderful idea in the multiracial team.

Rev. Horace Ryburn, Executive Secretary of the Presbyterian Mission, was cordiality itself and helpful in every way. I regret that the visit had to be at a time when an extended study of the entire Church of Christ in Thailand could not be done.

The facts adduced in the following pages came largely from national and missionary leaders in Thailand. The judgments also are a composite made up of the opinions expressed to me by Christian leaders. I have been encouraged to believe that they are substantially correct by the many Thailanders to whom I submitted them.



## The General Background

THAILAND IS divided into three parts: the north, the center, and the long tail-like peninsular south. It is a country of twenty million people. Three million of these live in large cities (two million in Bangkok) and the balance in villages, which are essentially like the self-contained villages of any oriental country.

In the great plain of Thailand--one of the flattest lands in the world--canals and rivers generally take the place of roads. Villages tend to be stretched out along the canals one-house deep. This physical peculiarity does not affect the general characteristics of the Asian villages.

The population of Thailand has five main strata: the Thai-speaking, nominally Buddhist people; the Chinese immigrants and their pure Chinese and Chinese-Thai descendants; Moslem Thais of the Peninsula; tribes living in the plains villages among the Thais but keeping themselves racially distinct, like the Lao Song, the Lao, and the plains Karens; and tribes in the highlands and forests culturally quite distinct from the Thais: Karens, Lisu, Miao, Lahu, and Yao (See *Table 1*).

TABLE 1

| Type of People                | Approximate Numbers |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Thai Buddhists             | 15,000,000          |
| 2. Chinese                    | 3,000,000           |
| 3. Moslem Thais               | 1,000,000           |
| 4. Plains Tribes              | 1,000,000           |
| 5. Highland and Forest Tribes | 200,000             |

The state religion is Buddhism. Most villages have a Buddhist temple called a *wat*. The only schools, except mission schools, till recently were *wat* schools. Many of the boys temporarily enter the Buddhist priesthood. The great company of priests scattered throughout the land are supported by the people. They beg their food from house to house--and live well. Every corpse is taken to the *wat* as a part of the funeral ceremonies. Buddhism has a grip on the people.

There are some evidences that it is a superficial hold. Thais are great meat eaters. The village population's real worship is of spirits. Many Thais seldom go to the *wat*, some of which are quite dilapidated. Yet for all this, it is a real hold, and is today reinforced by nationalism. For example, the universal objection to becoming Christian is that a patriotic Thai must be a Buddhist. He cannot be a Christian.

Church growth in central Thailand, where mission work has been chiefly in the towns and cities, has been inconsiderable. Conversions have been rare. Such as have occurred have come largely from students. When these marry, or move, or start to live at home, there have been considerable losses.

An estimate of church growth is provided by the following figures. Those for 1938 are furnished by the veteran surveyor, Alexander McLeish of World Dominion, and appear in his book, *Thailand Today*, published in 1942. Those for 1955 were furnished by Rev. Lek Taiyong, the Executive Secretary of the Church of Christ in Thailand, and the heads of the various Churches and Missions. Only those cases have been given where a clear comparison is possible. The regrouping of the Chinese churches confuses Chinese figures, so these have been omitted (*See Table 2*).

TABLE 2

| The Districts  | Communicant Membership |      |
|--|------------------------|------|
|  | 1938                   | 1955 |
| The South  | 180                    | 97   |
| Central Thailand   |                        |      |
| <i>Bangkok Thai</i>  | 600                    | 588  |
| <i>Eleventh Pak (including Ratburi and Petchaburi Chinese)</i> | 1000                   | 425  |
| <i>Pitsanuloke</i>   | 150                    | 58   |
| The North  |                        |      |
| <i>Nan, Lampang and Prae</i>                                   | 2470                   | 3146 |
| <i>Chiengmai and Chiengrai</i>                                 | 5100                   | 9422 |

McLeish estimates the Chinese communicant membership

in 1938 at about 1600. The membership today is 1200 in the Seventh Pak, 100 in the Eleventh Pak, and about 300 in other churches. Added together, these figures bring it about that the membership of the Chinese churches is still 1600.

All this looks as if in the last eighteen years the south and center of Thailand had declined, the Chinese had held steady, Nan, Lampang and Prae had grown at the rate of 17 percent a decade, and the "Mai-Rais" (Chiengmai and Chiengrai) at the rate of 50 percent.

While this is true, a corrective needs to be introduced for better understanding. The war dealt the Churches in Thailand a severe blow. The Christian West seemed finished. The Buddhist East seemed triumphant. Chinese were treated as aliens and some of their churches were uprooted from areas of military sensitivity. All this caused a sharp decline during the years 1942 to 1946 and varying degrees of recovery in the next ten years. The city churches, especially in the south and center, have not yet fully recovered. The Chinese are back to prewar numbers and have progressed greatly to self-support and independence. The Mai-Rais have doubled what they had in 1946.

McLeish gives slightly more than 10,000 as the communicant membership of 1938. I estimate about 18,000 communicants in 1955. These totals conceal more than they reveal. In most of the country, the growth is Mission Station Approach growth, small in number and geared more or less to employment in mission institutions. The Chinese churches on a small scale have arrived at real independence and real churchhood. The Mai-Rais and the Karen country demonstrate an indigenous naturalized Christianity where great growth is possible.

f/n The World Christian Handbook for 1968 gives 23,367 as the communicant total for Thailand. Since this is 5,367 more than my estimate in 1955, it is readily seen that the Church in general is growing at about 22 per cent per decade, which is less than the growth rate of the general population.

If the resources available to these four areas of life--Chinese, Chiangmai, Chiangrai, and Karens--were to be greatly magnified, significant church growth might occur soon. It is a pity that the Southern Baptists do not connect their work here with that in Formosa and Hongkong, and really work the Chinese field. They could readily get trained workers from Hongkong and Formosa. Their direct evangelism would appeal to the Chinese.

Roman Catholics are said to number 60,000. If this figure is divided by two to get what roughly corresponds to Protestant communicant membership, there would be 30,000 communicant Romans in Thailand. Roman Catholics have been here long and have a large investment of men and money and as yet a small membership.

As long as work is largely confined to the cities, as in the center, the Church has shown inconsiderable growth. When the Church has broken out into villages then the story has been different. However, in addition to the city handicap, work at Bangkok and Nakhon Pathom suffers from being carried on at the heart of the Buddhist system. It is a little like Protestant work in Rome.

It would be erroneous, however, to judge that if we in central Thailand would turn to the villages we would get church growth. The village organism is a closed corporation. Individual Christians are frozen out.

In the north, churches have been started in the villages partly through the fortuitous circumstance that unused arable land was available. Churches started up around Christian immigrants. There were also other reasons. Now with a large number of really rural churches, organized and unorganized, the closed

corporation has been entered. Resources poured in there--poured into church multiplication--could readily secure large growth. But in the villages in the central plain, where land is all occupied and expensive and there are no thousands of sturdy Christian peasants, and no Christian leadership glad to live in remote villages--can the Church grow here? No one knows.

The detailed picture of church growth in the Nakhon Pathom area which follows, may be considered accurate for that one area. It may also be true for central Thailand as a whole, with doubtless certain differences in this district and that.

## II

# The Institutions at Nakhon Pathom

OUR WORK centers around seven acres of land divided by an east-west street into two plots. On the north side are the hospital, boys' school, and Crockett missionary residence. On the south are the girls' school, the church, two missionary residences and the doctor's residence. The Chinese church, manse, and school are located on a half acre, one-half mile distant from the main compound.

Four acres at Sam Yek with two missionary residences and two school buildings provide the beginning of another mission station.

At Ban Pong a double-story building 30' x 30' on a prominent downtown corner provides a street chapel and workers' residence. A three-acre plot at the edge of town has been purchased for a missionary's residence and church site.

At Nakhon Choom we own a conference site. At Hua-pai we "own" a dilapidated shed. The people say they are going to give the land under it for a church site.

This distribution of land and buildings corresponds to the actual present emphasis of the work.



Progress through the years is indicated by the figures found in Table 3.

TABLE 3

|                              | 1924   | 1934 | 1939 | 1949 | 1954 |
|------------------------------|--------|------|------|------|------|
| Churches                     |        |      | 2    | 3    | 3    |
| Other places of worship      |        |      | 2    | 1    | 3    |
| Communicant members          | c. 250 | 428  | 528  | 602  | 250  |
| Sunday schools               |        | 2    | 2    |      | 3    |
| Scholars                     |        | 140  | 150  |      | 100  |
| Missionaries                 |        | 4    | 3    | 3    | 12   |
| Teachers in schools          |        |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Christian</i>             |        | 8    |      | 12   | 16   |
| <i>Non-Christian</i>         |        | 5    |      | 14   | 28   |
| Nurses and medical personnel |        |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Christian</i>             |        | 8    |      |      | 7    |
| <i>Non-Christian</i>         |        |      |      |      | 9    |
| Unordained evangelists       |        |      |      |      |      |
| <i>Men</i>                   |        | 6    |      | 2    |      |
| <i>Women</i>                 |        | 2    | 3    | 4    | 6    |
| Scholars                     |        | 270  |      | 735  | 1200 |
| Hospitals                    |        | 1    | 1    |      | 1    |
| Dispensaries                 | 1      | 1    | 1    |      |      |

Worth special note are: growth of the schools which requires hiring many non-Christian teachers; the decline of evangelists; and the addition of non-Christian staff to the hospital.

The large numbers of communicants in 1939 and 1949 are due in part to counting non-residents. The drop to 250 in 1954 reflects both elimination of non-residents and real wartime losses. These latter were

carried for some years hoping they would turn up. Of the 250 now listed, at least 50 are quite casual Christians and practically never come to worship.

Our school system is part of a general mission pattern in Thailand. The Presbyterians have gone in for education in a much bigger way. The Church of Christ in Thailand has recently conducted a frank, thorough, competent evaluation of its school system. Since our schools were included in the study, its findings are of interest to us. It finds six major problems: runaway enrollments, untrained staff, schools which have broken down as training centers for Christian workers, subject matter poorly taught, staff relations poor, finances not well administered. Typical sentences are: "The motivation which started the Christian schools has vanished in the business of running the mill of private education . . . . In practice we are conducting educational work as if operating schools were an end in itself. Having the school is the thing. Having the students is proof of success. Few seem to understand how to impart an education or to care if teaching is done at all, so long as the masses of students are received, processed, and emitted in the manner prescribed by government regulations . . . . We have 15,000 students in our schools, but only 11 men in our seminary and only 20 in teacher training. What does this horde of inexperienced teachers know of treating the student as a potential child of God? Where is their concern to make Christ known in all this?"

In 1939, Alexander McLeish visited Thailand. His summary then included the following sentences.

*"The growth of the Christian community has been steadily declining. There was an increase of 3870 between 1911 and 1925, but in the next fourteen*

*years the increase was only 1,841 . . . . The school in Thailand has not proved vitally evangelistic. It is hard to justify all the present educational and medical work if the Church continues to decline or barely to hold its own. There is no doubt that educational work has grown beyond the resources of the missions, making proportionately too great demands on money and men, thus seriously crippling the growth of the Church. Education monopolizes the attention of the missionaries and seriously, if not fatally cripples church growth . . . . Nothing is more urgently needed than widespread rural evangelism with the maximum staff . . . . The best policy of missions would be to concentrate on those classes in Thailand which have shown the greatest response, namely, the people of the northern provinces, the Chinese, and the Thai-Chinese. The establishment of strong churches among these might in the long run be the best and quickest way of reaching the more strongly opposed Buddhist population."*

These words could have been penned in 1956. The doubling of membership in two northern provinces should not be allowed to obscure the issue. This doubling has occurred independent of any mission or churchwide shift of attention, prayer, and resources. The significant church growth in Chiengrai, for example, has not occurred because the number of full-time, eleven-months-a-year missionary or national evangelists has been quadrupled, given transportation, and told to multiply churches. Had that happened, or were it yet to happen, the small natural increase in those districts might grow into a mighty Christward movement and spread to other provinces.

McLeish's words are germane to our own Nakon Pathom situation and should be reread at the close of Section

V, where their pertinence will be increasingly clear. That the system which McLeish described should have continued and indeed increased in strength for nineteen years indicates that we shall have to do more than recognize its weaknesses. To eliminate them is difficult. They will remain, unless the boards, the missionaries and the national leaders concerned make a united and conscious effort to achieve conversion and church multiplication, and to measure success not in terms of mission work done, but of men and women who have found the Saviour. Only if our Board cooperates in this, is furnished with monthly reports of progress in this field, appoints missionaries who work gladly for these goals, and is itself deeply concerned that success *in this area* be obtained, will the system be changed.

### III

## Our Churches in Thailand

THE FIRST missionary of the British Churches of Christ, Alfred Hudson, came overland from Burma following the Mauns. He tied up at Nakon Choom and the first man he met there was at once converted. The missionary felt that God had guided him to this place and he settled there. But very few other Mauns became Christian. Hudson's strategy in hunting for a responsive people was correct. His error lay in digging in too soon. One convert does not make a responsive people.

The Percy Clarks and Miss Esther Halliday moved to Nakon Pathom in 1906. Till 1942, they worked through village evangelism, schools, and hospital by river boat, by foot, and by cart, to win men and women to Christ. They had about 900 baptisms, including those whose parents were Christians. By far the largest number of converts were Chinese. One, hearing from Dr. Clark the same message as he had heard in China, was instantly converted. Many patients of the hospital accepted the Saviour as well as healing. The converts were reinforced by some Chinese who had come to this country as Christians.

In 1942 came the war. The Clarks were interned.

Four Chinese congregations were moved by the Japanese out of a sensitive area. Many of the members scattered never to return. Then came the postwar days with Dr. Clark an invalid, followed by the turnover to the United Christian Missionary Society, with a new team of missionaries coming in and having to learn the language. Out of all this came two small organized churches, four unorganized worshipping groups, and scattered Christians. Each is described below.

#### THE CHINESE CHURCH

Of the Chinese baptized, many went back to China. A few stayed in Hua-pai and Lumpia. More gradually formed the Chinese congregation at Nakon Pathom. It has 98 resident members. Of these, three or four families are employed in the hospital. The balance are in business in the town. They keep their shops open on Sunday sending one member of the family to represent them at church. They give enough so that the church is self-supporting. It has no pastor at present but will have soon. The church has a number of members in Bangkok and also in other towns. This church runs on its own steam though the presence of the two doctors in the congregation has been of great help through the years. At Wednesday night prayer meeting, though they expect no missionary to be present, and usually there is none, fifteen to twenty assemble, and carry on a devout orderly meeting.

This church gives the definite impression of being able to carry on whether the mission remains or not. It is dependent on no institution and is here to stay. It has a good building and parsonage half a mile from the mission compound. The young people of this church can lead their own meetings, and under the leadership of Rev. Philip Lee, now unfortunately not with us,

have developed a fervent, positive Christian faith. They are interested in evangelism and selling scriptures. For the most part, the congregation is composed of couples, but there are a number of cases where the mother is Christian and the father is not. In such cases the children all become Christian.

Of Chinese baptisms since 1945, 12 have been from the world--mostly husbands and wives of Christians, and patients from the hospital. The first Sunday I attended, there were 26 adults and 15 young people and children at church. The next time, there were slightly more. A robed choir of 9 girls and 4 boys sang well.

Just back of the sanctuary there is a school run by the Chinese church. It has a non-Christian staff, save for the head teacher. It is difficult to get Christian Chinese teachers. I cannot help but wonder what would happen if the staff were all radiantly Christian.

#### THE THAI CHURCH

This stands in front of the main mission house, on the main mission compound, in front of the girls' school, across from the hospital and the boys' school. It has 49 resident members (excluding Sam Yek, Hua-pai, and Lumpia Christians). Of the forty-nine, 34 are employed by school, hospital, or missionaries or are dependents of these so employed. Fifteen are employed independently or are dependents of such.

Of the thirty-four, 11 are women married to Buddhists. Of the eleven, five now have no husbands--theirs ran away. Six are living with Buddhist husbands--one as one of two wives.

Twenty-four of the congregation were baptized before January 1, 1945, and 25 after that date. Of these latter, 14 are from Christian parents and 8 are from non-Christian parents but have come under Christian influence in the school or Christian homes. One such from a Christian home is Kru Chalut Kimhachan.

A considerable number of non-resident members of this church live in Bangkok or down south. Some of these send money back to the mother church.

Several of the present leaders have become Christians through being reared in the Clark home. At present Kru Chalut has eight young people, some of them his own nephews, living with him. Four of these have become Christians. The others are likely to do so.

There is an attractive young people's group. Under Mrs. Margaret Cherryhomes' and Dr. Edna Gish's leadership they sing well and go out to Hua-pai and Lumpia with the missionaries in the car to teach and help in the singing. They also help in the Daily Vacation Bible School.

On an average Sunday, church attendance runs about 32: three men, seven boys, ten girls, and twelve women. The boys and girls are from Christian homes or are staying with the Cherryhomes, Dr. Gish and Kru Chalut.

I have been told on good authority that this general picture holds for the Thai churches of Ratburi and Petchaburi. "All depends on the school. If we did not have the school here, we could not hold the church," said one leader. The church consists of faithful Christians employed in the school and forming a school community. Membership is not limited to



those employed in the mission and their dependents, but these form the backbone of the congregation and are its regular attendants.

Out of 26 teachers in the boys' school, only 9 are Christians. Out of 18 in the girls' school only 7 are Christians. One obvious way to prosper the church is to replace Buddhist teachers with Christians--but this means rearing and training Christian teachers and then having two out of four leave for Bangkok or marry Buddhists or grow cold in the faith.

#### THE HUA-PAI GROUP

A Thai couple at Hua-pai were converted and became outstanding Christians. They had many daughters. Chinese converts who married these girls settled in Hua-pai. The children and grandchildren of that one Thai couple make up the unorganized congregation. The old lady still lives, a firm Christian at 94.

#### THE LUMPIA GROUP

Two Christians from China took Thai women and settled in Lumpia. A Chinese living there was also converted and took a Thai woman who was converted. The children of these three men form the unorganized Lumpia congregation.

Christians of both these villages are counted as members of the Nakom Pathom church. Only a very few of the more devout walk in four miles to worship.

The spiritual condition of these rural communities is not good. The young men, not finding Christian village girls, have married Buddhists. Children grow

up unbaptized. Weekly visits are carried on from Nakon Pathom but the communities are not deeply Christian. When the missionary goes out there, Christians assemble in small numbers. They send some of their children to Sunday School, if the teachers or missionaries from Nakon Pathom come to conduct it. The village Christians do not meet on their own. Mrs. Clark in 1945, loaned them \$500 to keep them from losing twenty-five acres of their land. This has all been faithfully paid back. These rural groups have been greatly served. At present, there are about 24 members in Lumpia and about 30 in Hua-pai.

#### THE BAN PONG GROUP

There are 12 Christians here as follows:

- (1) Dr. Heng, who was converted in the Nakon Pathom school. His wife is a Roman Catholic. He has two Protestant sons living in Bangkok and seven Roman Catholic children living in Ban Pong.
- (2) Mrs. Sunong, Dr. Heng's sister, and (3) her son.
- (4) Mr. Ting and (5) wife and (6) sister. The three Ting children are in Roman Catholic school, and are not yet baptized in either Church. The Tings were patients in the non-Protestant hospital.
- (7) Dr. Wan Koxion, who became a Christian in China, has a non-Christian wife.
- (8) An old woman whose parents were Christians in China, married a non-Christian here. (9) Her daughter is an unmarried woman of 35. She has also a daughter of 29, not baptized. (10) Her son, 25. She also has a son of 40; neither he

nor his wife are Christian.

- (11) Tan Ensi and (12) wife (several children--none Christian) came in through the non-Protestant hospital but are now cold in the faith and never come.

An excellent building has been obtained on a central corner downtown and was dedicated on March 25, 1956. It serves well as church and street chapel and will house a minister upstairs. There is strong Roman opposition in Ban Pong and priests have pulled their members out of our meetings.

Dr. Chen, Kru Chalot, and some others believe that earnest personal work in Ban Pong will result in conversions from the world and consequent increase of church membership. I do not wish to be pessimistic, but it is worth noting that none of the present twelve were converted in Ban Pong. Still, there are lots of Chinese in Ban Pong and I would like to believe that earnest work can win them.

#### THE SAM YEK GROUP

There is no organized church in the Sam Yek area. The Jose Estoyes, Kru Bamrung Adipat and his family, Kru Tanong, and thirteen Christian students, however, live there. Sunday meetings are held and also meetings for worship and instructions through the week --both with the small group in boarding, and those who live at home and come to school.

Nine student Christians come from nine different villages of the Sam Yek area. These have been baptized during the past two years. Presumably others of this kind can be won. Most of the converts are of

mixed Chinese-Thai ancestry. There is only one Thai student convert and he is a boy of 13 picked up half-starved in a wat, 44 kilometers from Sam Yek. He is being reared as an orphan.

What is the meaning of these youthful student converts for church growth? Some experienced leaders, Thai and missionary, to whom I talked said, "If these young people are employed under Christian influence, they will be conserved and grafted into the Church, otherwise probably not." Certainly, before they become firm members of the Church they have to pass two hurdles. First when they graduate, if they go to the city to work or to non-Christian schools, they will be lost to Sam Yek, and probably to the Church. Second, when they marry, the chance of their linking up with Christians is not great; and if they marry non-Christians there will be considerable wastage. Single young people living with non-Christian parents in non-Christian villages, where they have to walk several miles to church? Some of the missionaries and nationals here express doubts as to whether this will continue past the days when they come in to school. Student Christians in Thailand from non-Christian parents show a considerable amount of back-sliding.

Is it possible then, to start village churches around these Christian young people? They have been baptized without opposition on the part of their parents, some of whom actually came to observe the ceremony, and said, "Christianity is a good religion." I would fain believe that this was the case. However, it is an untried field. Thus, there is no way of telling whether we can look forward to village churches springing up around these converts. It has not happened anywhere in central Thailand. But I believe it is possible.

## SCATTERED CHRISTIANS

There are about fifteen Christians living out from here, but in none of the above groupings. These are seldom, if ever, visited and seldom, if ever, attend church.

Thus, all told, the figures run something like this seen in Table 4:

TABLE 4

| UCMS Churches in Thailand | Resident Members |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| Chinese Church            | 98               |
| Thai Church               | 49               |
| Lumpia Group              | 24               |
| Hua-Pai Group             | 30               |
| Ban Pong Group            | 12               |
| Sam Yek Group             | 17               |
| Scattered Christians      | <u>15</u>        |
| Total                     | 245              |

Probably another fifty, maybe more, could be listed who are non-resident members, good Christians, contributing to this Church from time to time.

In Mrs. Clark's *History and Early Beginnings* she says,

*"On the 29th of June, 1924 on a very special occasion the church was filled to overflowing with 186 communicants from all outposts--Nakon Choom, Bampong, Tah Rua, Tah Muang and Pow Lom."*

Presumably some communicant members had stayed at home even on this important day. If so, the resident membership in 1924 was close to what it is today.

In A. C. Watters' survey of 1934, he gives a membership of 420 total. The scattering of the war and development of Bangkok had not occurred then, so most of these are residents. Some, he says, were isolated Christians--say 350 resident members--about 100 more than today.

What degree of church growth has there been in the last ten years? Firm figures of resident members are difficult to obtain. The confusion of the Japanese occupation adds to the difficulty. It is probably fair to say that there has been definite decline rather than growth since 1946.

## IV

### A Basic Decision

WHAT DEGREE of church growth is there likely to be in the future? Before this question can be answered, a basic decision should be taken by the field.

Either it should say to the Board, "Our field is in Buddhist Thailand where conversions are few and far between. It is quite unrealistic to expect these churches to grow. Mission work here is laying the foundations for a later possible church growth. Our function is to commend Christianity by our service, to let in as much light as possible through educating a part of the young life of this district, and gradually by conversions here and there, as we are able, to increase the churches. If we make an increase of 30 percent in ten years we shall have done well. That is what mission work means here. The Board must understand that. The task is not easy. It is a difficult field."

Or it should say to the Board, "Thailand is in the midst of great and fundamental changes. The Asian revolution is going on here. The Church of Christ in Thailand has increased by 100 percent in the last ten years. Young people from homes previously not Christian are baptized in our churches with the consent

of their parents. Some of their non-Christian parents attend the baptismal service. There is no ostracism for becoming Christian. The Chinese community is especially open. We have two good, sound churches. We have at least five potential churches: Hua-pai, Lumpia, Ban Pong, Banglee, and Sam Yek. There appears to be an opening among the Karens. We get encouraging response in many villages. We are earnestly interested in conversion. We believe it can take place. We need further workers. Missionaries and workers need to form evangelistic teams. Our scattered efforts need to be focussed. As these things are done and our missionaries having learned the language, swing into action, we believe that church growth can be had and we are willing to be judged on the degree of church growth we shall obtain."

We shall call these two positions, Statement I and Statement II. After six weeks in Thailand, I find that both statements are defensible. A good case can be made for this being a hard field with little opportunity for church growth. A good case can be made that there are real opportunities for church growth here, which if tried, would yield fruit. Which is the position this mission takes?

This basic decision should be taken carefully. Statement I would undergird the present general setup and would give a reasonable justification for a gradual approach. If Statement I correctly describes the situation, then there is little use for anything else but a quiet commending of Christianity by service, a sharing of educational light, and a slow growth of the Church chiefly by an increase of births over deaths. This judgment as to *the kind of field* we face has a determinative influence in later decisions as to what kind of work we approve and into what kind of work, workers, institutions, and missionaries we put



our money. If the churches cannot multiply, then to dedicate ourselves to church growth might be a good way to face major defeats and loss of time and life. The assumptions on which this mission has so far done its work, drawn up its five-year plan, recruited its missionaries and started its institutions, are assumptions underlying Statement I.

In my judgment, however, Thailand is a land where conversions can be had and churches can be organized, but with difficulty. There is no people movement here. But conversions occur from Thai and Chinese, city and country, by this method and that, wherever they are earnestly worked for. This is not Illinois corn land, nor is it Utah desert. It is rather like western Kansas. Harvest can be had only be specialized dry farming, where every activity is bent toward obtaining a crop, and general farmers and experimenters go bankrupt.

The determining factor is what the Church and Mission intend to do. The present program carried on will give the present result--inconsiderable church growth. But it is possible that a radically revamped program which was ready to work for conversions and church growth, and measure its success in terms of conversions and the development of Christian groups into organized churches, would break through into significant church growth. It would not be easy, but a certain kind of mission could achieve it.

As I describe the possibilities of church growth, I wish to emphasize that whether they are real possibilities or not depends on what this Church does.

V

WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHURCH GROWTH?

THE CHINESE COMMUNITY

MRS. CLARK, WHO considered herself a missionary to the Thais, summed up forty years of experience by saying, "The Chinese are more likely to become Christians and make better Christians than anyone else in Thailand." The 900 baptisms during the period of the Clarks' service were largely those of Chinese. Had many of them not gone back to China or Malaya there would have been a large Chinese church here.

There are still scattered Christian Chinese to be found, unaffiliated with any church--such as the 8 at Banglee. That they have not been visited for many years and yet remain Christian is a testimony to the staunchness of their faith. That they do not assemble for worship is a testimony to its limited nature.

Many Chinese have married Thai women. Chinese of mixed parentage now rapidly becoming Thai comprise a large community. There are three million Chinese in Thailand. They are foreigners in this land. There is upheaval in their lives. The old moorings are gone. Yet it must not be assumed that they stand ready to espouse the Christian faith. There is no movement here such as there is in Formosa.

Nevertheless, Chinese have been won, are being won, and can be won. It is unfortunate that the Chinese work has seemed a sideline. The missionaries have always lived one-half mile from the Chinese church. None of our missionaries have yet learned Swatow. It is fortunate that we have two Chinese missionaries in David and Mary Luo. But I regret that they will be living after language study so far from the Chinese church. I wonder if this cannot be remedied.

The staunch faith of the Chinese church, the up-standing character of its members, their willingness to contribute, their self-respect, and recently the fervency of the prayer life of the younger group, all combine to make me believe that if there is any church which can be fanned into a spreading flame, it is the Chinese church. Once established, its congregations are self-supporting, self-directing, and free of dependence on mission or institution.

Also, an important fact is that the Chinese are becoming Thai citizens. The second and third generation speak Thai, are educated in Thai, and in all matters of importance are Thai. The present Chinese congregations in another twenty years will be congregations of Thai-speaking, Thai citizens. If the Church grows mightily amongst the Chinese, a mighty Thai Church will be the result in another generation.

I, therefore, believe that the attempts to increase Chinese workers are well-based and strategically sound. They should be stepped up. The matter is urgent. From the beginning it should be clear to the little groups to which workers are assigned, that they can only be kept there *if converts are won from the world in a steady stream*. Workers are not there to look after the Christians whether the Church grows or not. Part of the Chinese opportunity lies in Ban Pong,

Banglee and other outlying Christian groups.

There are 12 church members in Ban Pong. There are 8 adult Christians in Banglee. There are other groups of Chinese Christians in other towns and villages. Some became Christians in China, some in Nakon Pathom. Some have been visited again and again, like Ban Pong where a chapel was dedicated on March 25, 1956. Others have been visited very occasionally if at all. Two outlying congregations, Ban Pong and Tah Muang, were war casualties. Ban Pong has made a limited come-back. The other has not.

It is heartening to drive forty miles to a town like Banglee. This is a market town of several thousand Chinese merchants and their families. We found there a dentist, wife, and grown daughter, all good Christians. There was a cloth merchant and his wife. His father had been an elder in China. We had prayer in the house of a Chinese lady who had been praying for ten years that we would come and establish a church. There were also one or two others.

Yet the distances involved are great and the receptivity of those not Christians is so relatively small, that to visit once a month for a day or two will not convert enough Chinese from the world *to boost the congregations of 10 and 12 to congregations of 50 and 100*. That can happen only be extra special effort dedicated to that end. General mission work will never do it. What will?

- (1) We might locate resident workers in several such places. The workers would have to be men of considerable ability, for these communities are made up of hard-working, successful, ingenious people. Such workers are not available in Thailand. If imported from Hong Kong or Formosa,

they need to learn Thai and maybe Swatow, at our expense. If they do not work out, they would have to be sent back, at our expense.

- (2) If a man of great ability, possibly a missionary, were to go and stay in each of these places for about three months, covering four such places in the first year, visiting, preaching, persuading, and teaching vigorously in each town, using the contacts which the Christians have, he might establish four congregations of from 20 to 50 members, each carrying on under its own elder and deacons. Such a missionary would be a veritable Paul. Congregations once established, and men and women once converted, would carry forward on their own. During the three-month residence, the missionary would add to the little flock, stamp in a habit of assembling for worship, train a local leadership, rent or buy a chapel, *train the congregation in soul-winning and giving*, and move on. In places he might stay less than three months, in places more.
- (3) We might set up a strong evangelistic Tent Team, made up of good Swatow speakers and one good Thai speaker. If such a team could be put into twenty centers for two weeks with a powerful program every night, much visitation of inquirers every day, a mandate from the Pak to start a church there, the entire Pak praying for conversion as the meeting went on, the best preachers in Bangkok invited in for special evenings, and leading laymen and laywomen, boys and girls coming there for special witness--if all this could be done in twenty such communities each year, surely churches would arise in at least some places. We might find a church springing up every place the tent was pitched!

These outlying groups of Christians in solid Chinese communities are an attractive but unexplored field. Whatever degree of visitation has been carried on in the past has taken what it has found and held services for it. In the last fifteen years at least it has not converted others and welded them into a church. Can this be done? We don't know. We have yet to try.

#### THE KARENS

There is a wonderful open door north of Nakon Pathom where 1000 Karen Christians in twenty self-governing little churches, some of which date back to 1880, have suddenly come to life and are on their way to a vigorous people movement. The American Baptists are throwing in a commendable number of missionaries. But the Karens also exist scattered down the border, west, north, and south of Nakon Pathom. This is the mountainous jungle country which lies between the great Thailand plain and Burma. Peaks rise to 3000, 4000, and 5000 feet. No one knows how many Karens live there or what the concentrations are. The Baptists, after a partial survey in 1953, decided to concentrate their work in the far north. West Thailand is a difficult country in which to travel. The Karen villages directly west of us are scattered. In some cases they are separated by thirty miles of jungle. The people are also reputed to be Po Karens, who have yielded only about 20,000 Christians in Burma--while the Sgaw Karens have yielded 100,000.

However, to counterbalance this we know, before our survey starts, of four groups of Christians in those scattered villages. They are Christians without having any shepherding at all. They apparently are a church ready to be adopted and expanded. Such a beginning is valuable. Mr. Estoyes reported that in

the one village west of Kanchanaburi which he visited, there were eleven houses and 5 Christians. Of these, one had been headman and still had much influence. Whether our Churtion should put a missionary to work in this field depends on two considerations: (a) how scattered the villages are; and (b) whether "the world" in each village readily becomes the Church, or stubbornly continues in its sins.

An American anthropologist reported that "the largest concentration of untouched Karens anywhere in Thailand" lay 100 kilometers west of Nakon Sawan, which is 200 kilometers due north of Nakon Pathom. In Bangoon, the Christian Karen leaders told me of a sect of Karens called the Telakhon, which was found in the mountainous country of Burma just west of the section of Thailand described by the anthropologist. This sect is made up of those who hold to the old way. They have become neither Christian nor Buddhist. They have the old traditions, which stress that a white man was coming with the true book. Since white missionaries cannot get into this area from Burma (political restrictions), the Christian leaders were most anxious for us from Thailand to send white missionaries into this *rough* country. They firmly believed that if we were to do so, this sect which stretches across the border into both lands would espouse the Christian faith. Mssrs. Sams and Estoyes explored the fringe of this country and report that there are about 30,000 Karens of this sect in Thailand, that the head of the sect lives 7 miles inside the Thai border and wishes to meet an American or British missionary, and that the story of the white man with the book is very prevalent. This appears to be a wonderful opening.

In exploration, the essential question is, "Will they become Christians?" If the people will become Christian, it is abundantly worthwhile to overcome the

difficulties of travel and residence.

The way in which the Karen citizens of Thailand will become Christians will not follow the Bangkok-Nakon Pathom system. But it will be good for Thailand to have some solidly Christian sections of the country. That backward, hill country is going to be developed. In an expanding population, its villages cannot remain isolated. How excellent if the villages developed there were solidly Christian villages.

Growing a Karen Church will take courage, dedication, labour, and conviction that missions means primarily multiplying churches.

THE "UNCHURCHED VILLAGES"  
IN THE NAKON PATHOM DISTRICT

By "unchurched villages," I mean those in which there is not wat, or the sections of big villages out of touch or sympathy with the wat. The people of Thailand are no more uniformly Buddhist than the people of Puerto Rico are uniformly Roman, or the people of California are uniformly Christian. There are numerous villages north and south where the people are very nominal Buddhists. Indeed, their actual religion is spirit worship--a basic animism--over which there is a thin surface layer of Buddhist ethics and philosophy. The two group decisions in Chiangmai District where 65 persons and 36 persons respectively were recently baptized, were villages without wats. Our villages of Ko Tan and Paihuchan are "unchurched." There must be many such.

Sam Yek, with its 9 Christian boys and girls from villages within a six-mile radius, has access to a number of "unchurched" villages. The receptivity of



the people is multiplied by two additional factors. First, admixture of Chinese blood. Eleven of the 12 converts among the students are Chinese-Thai by race. Second, the existence of separate peoples in the general population. Paihuchan, for example, is a Lao Song village, and the Lao Song may be specially responsive.

In Paihuchan and Ko Tan the villagers gave a cordial reception to the gospel. The preaching and witnessing was frank and perfectly clear. We were inviting people to become Christian. They listened with interest. There was no hostility. At Paihuchan in an after-meeting, four Lao Song adults gathered. One had a gospel of John which he read and believed, he said, even though he could not understand it. The Chinese-Thai family which lives in the Lao Song village and from which one daughter is already a Christian at Sam Yek, could probably be baptized. Possibly a group of the Lao Song could be won. Kru Bamrung conducted an excellent evangelistic meeting. The testimonies of the boys and girls were clear and brave. This was the first time they were telling their village people in an open meeting that they had chosen the Christian way. Kru Bamrung is a gifted village preacher and held his audiences in the hollow of his hand.

I formed the definite impression that if the good news were to be preached regularly, passionately, with faith in the outcome, with the intention of converting men and women with a methodology of not taking an individual convert except as a last resort, but seeking to get him to bring a band of his friends and relatives, and helping him to do so with meeting after meeting and visit after visit--if all this were done in the most favourable villages of the plain (and they might not always be the ones without wats) village churches might arise here in central Thailand.

However, though these villages lie all round Nakon Pathom, Hua-pai, Sam Yek, and Ban Pong, they are a territory almost as unexplored and unevangelized as the Karen villages, 150 miles away from here. A favourable reception to your son's head teacher and his party does not mean that you and your villages are going to rush into the Christian faith. If converts can be won from villages, what is called for is missionaries themselves devoting days each week to evangelization, skillfully planned meetings, much prayer for conversions, much sheer hard work in getting to and from villages, the recruitment of workers out of what we now have (the peasants, the youth, the new converts) to the most favourably disposed groups we can find, the absolute urgency of their becoming Christians. Salvation is not a luxury to be taken if convenient. It is an essential. There is a God. There is a Saviour. There is salvation--and there is eternally losing salvation. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we may be saved. No man comes to the Father but by Jesus Christ. He who has the Son has the Father, and he who does not have the Son, does not have the Father. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul! Conversions and church growth involve this kind of conviction on the part of the whole team, missionaries and Thailand Christians alike.

#### THE VILLAGES OF HUA-PAI AND LUMPIA

Here is a Christian community of about 120 souls--of which 50 or so are minor, unbaptized children and 20 or so unbaptized adults. Yet this is the second most important community in our field when it comes to church growth. It is less important than the Chinese Church. It is considerably more important than the

Thai Church.

It is made up of typical Thailand peasants, sharing their hazards, their vices, and their virtues. Its members earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. They are independent and self-reliant. When the Church spreads in the villages, it will spread among people like these because they are typical, rural, Thai citizens.

These people are Christians. During the war, when they could easily have reverted and become solidly Buddhist, they did not do so. The active faith of a few amongst them is outstanding. The faith of the majority is nominal but at the same time stoutly Christian. They are not ashamed of being called Christians.

They have been greatly served, in a manner which was at the time absolutely necessary, by the mission and the missionaries. This degree of spoon-feeding has made necessary a period of weaning, which now is drawing to a close. During the war, they got nothing. Since 1951, they have gotten little in material gifts. Much spiritual care is required during this weaning period. The wise mother makes sure that the child, especially when angry at being denied the breast, knows that it is loved.

Hua-pai and Lumpia are the only possible source of village workers. None but villagers will live happily in villages, know the village custom by heart, and count being a preacher in an interior Thai village on a low salary a high privilege.

Hua-pai and Lumpia should be organized as separate congregations, each with one elder and one or two deacons. They should be given a resident evangelist,

most of whose salary, perhaps 90 percent the first year, would come from the Field Committee, and the rest from the Christians. Special meetings following a period of preparation will bring in the unbaptized adults and his children. Since the Field Committee pays the salary, it will direct the work of these evangelists (though in close contact and agreement with the two churches) and see to it that the villages round about are reached by the evangelist, often accompanied, we would hope by volunteers from the four nearby churches. The resident worker will build up the Christian community by every possible means (young people's work, women's work, volley ball club, baby contests, church choir, prayer meetings, visiting with the sick and dying). He will also train as many young men and their wives as possible to be informed Christians, knowing how to present the gospel to non-Christians. Courses suited to village people will be worked out, whose first purpose it is to heighten knowledge of and certainly concerning the Christian religion.

The best of these young people will make pastors and evangelists when we need them.

The animist sons and daughters-in-law of the present Christians will naturally be won to Christ, and provide bridges to their families. Some of them may be hard, but others will be definitely approachable.

Here again is an unexplored field--of such importance that to put a missionary here would be an excellent use of his time. But he should live here. He should not live in Nakon Pathom and work here--occasionally. If a missionary is not available, a good national worker should be secured, preferably a lay leader of some Christian village in the Chiengrai District.

## NAKON PATHOM ITSELF

Here we have two well-established churches made up of good Christians--one 98 and the other 49 in membership. The Christians of these churches have been greatly blessed. The redemption of Christ is something to which they can bear clear and convincing witness. Robed choirs, beautiful singing, sincere prayer, financial security, educational advance, and now with the merging of the Church and mission these Christians are given a large band of missionaries and foreign funds to use, as they see fit, for the expansion of the Church. Truly how great a salvation!

Both churches are in touch with the world. Christians live immersed in the non-Christian population. Some Christians are even married to people of the world. It is the recognized custom, when a Christian marries an unchurched person, for the wedding to be held in the mission bungalow, not the sanctuary.

Under circumstances like these, as long as the church program remains at the church and in the hand of a small number of professional Christian leaders (those employed in school and hospital and missionaries), I do not anticipate much growth from the world. Occasionally some patient, some student, some husband or wife, will be converted, but by and large the non-Christians will not come to the church buildings--at least they are not coming now, nor have they in the past. And the professional Christian leaders will give most of their time to the existing Christians.

But adult non-Christians would come to neighborhood meetings for prayer and Bible study if such were being actively promoted by earnest, enthusiastic, lay Christians. Our great San Juan Church in Puerto Rico,

which now numbers 600 members and has grown 50 a year for the last six years, has won 80 percent of its membership from the world--there, nominal Roman Catholics. It attributes its success very largely to its twelve "upper rooms." These upper rooms are meetings of laymen in twelve parts of the city in private homes. The leaders are laymen and laywomen. The pastor and his wife circulate from upper room to upper room. The twelve teams of soul-winners, entirely unpaid, meet at the main church once a month. Some 40 people get together. The entire membership of the church is assigned to one upper room or another. Not all attend, but a proportion do. In some upper rooms there are 20 and in some, 80 adults, largely depending on the excellence of the lay leadership. These upper rooms, where there is warm friendship, straight Bible teaching, and fervent prayer, are where people of the world come and are converted. They then start going to church with their friends from the upper room, and in due course are baptized.

Visitation evangelism also might be pushed to good effect here. In Dr. Kosaki's church in Japan, Buddhist country, visitation evangelism has yielded excellent results and is now spreading to many other churches. The heart of visitation evangelism is training 20 to 60 percent of the membership to go out two-by-two and call on their friends and to instruct and convert them. The average Christian does not know how to speak to adults about Christ. He is scared to death to do it. Some missionaries and board secretaries are in the same position. I was once myself. But as the average Christian learns and then engages in visitation evangelism, a great field opens up.

However, it is possible that the field would not open up. No tragedy could be greater than that of concentrating the missionaries on the Christian

community in Nakon Pathom, where the mission bungalows are, to develop the Christian community, to teach visitation evangelism, to help develop upper rooms, and then if little or no growth occurs--to keep them there whether church growth results or not. There is no error in modern missions, which results in greater loss of power, than keeping large numbers of missionaries tied up with non-growth churches in the hope that some day they will start to grow. In Great Commission missions, the principle is followed of concentrating resources on that section of the Church which reproduces. If *during the first year*, the Thai church becomes reproductive while the Chinese church remains static, then resources should be withdrawn from the Chinese church and concentrated back of the Thai church, and vice-versa.

If neither becomes reproductive, then resources should be moved from both, and put in where the Church *is* growing. This is not to abandon any church, but rather to assist lightly those congregations which find themselves unable to grow.

All the way through this report I have been describing direct present efforts to make the Church grow now. I do not describe these as "evangelism," for evangelism has come to be a departmental activity, and in certain minds to have unfortunate connotations. I am not advocating evangelism as distinct from, let us say, education. I am advocating *all direct present efforts* to make the Church grow now. If some method does not work, it should be promptly jettisoned. It should be jettisoned whether it is departmentally evangelism, education, or what not. Conversely, any activity, be it called what it may, should be cherished and nourished with budget and missionaries, if it makes the Church increase in numbers.

I set forward this plan in clear contradistinction to the unconscious assumptions on which much mission work in some countries is based. First, that Christian missions mean educational, medical and rural reconstructional activities, which are ploughing the fields for a much later harvest. The idea is that what we do now may result in church growth generations later. We are ameliorating social conditions, purifying Buddhism, commending the West as a genuinely friendly country, planting seed ideas in young minds, stamping out leprosy, elevating the status of womanhood, and a thousand other things. All of which, it is held, are good in themselves and will commend Christ and His Church, so that at some later date, in a manner not yet clear, the Church will start to grow.

The second unconscious assumption is that our main task is to improve the existing Church, believing that if it is improved enough, it will begin to multiply. Stated theologically, this comes out thus: "If enough of these fine people, especially the young people, can become born-again Christians, full of the Holy Spirit, living together in love and unity, nothing can keep the Church from growing. But we cannot expect the present Church so imperfect, so full of faults, so often a cause of ridicule to the Hindus, Moslems, or Buddhists, as the case may be, to increase at all." Stated socially the assumption comes out this way: "The present Church is culturally in two camps, with divided allegiance. As it becomes part of the world culture, the ecumenical Church, and enters the lists on behalf of brotherhood, peace, and economic justice, it will be so far ahead of the rest of the population, and will so obviously set the pace, that major church growth on a really Christian pattern will sweep this nation. We must give this younger Church a social conscience, a modern outlook, a revolutionary ethic and then it will ride the crest of



the wave of the future. It will lead its nation."

Both underlying assumptions unfortunately, are not supported by the evidence. Gradualism is not necessary. The Church can increase. We should try every way to bring that increase now. If the "direct present efforts to make the Church grow now," which I have described, do not fit this area, or for some reason are impractical here, then other "direct present efforts to make the Church grow now" should be devised and put into operation.

All this does not mean, and must not be made to mean abandoning the schools, hospitals or other institutions. The gradualism we have described and the tendency for missions to care for what they have is not an essential part of school or other institutional life. These institutions should engage in direct efforts to make the Church grow now. If they can do this, the institutions might become a chief agency of church growth. "Instituio sclerosis" is fortunately somewhat more easily cured than the "arterio" variety.

## VI

### THE HEART OF THE MATTER

WE HAVE discussed all kinds of situations and all kinds of methods. Let us now turn to the people who will carry these out. Whatever is done is going to be done by the present team. We cannot count on the future. We do not know what it holds. Nor is it desirable to depend on missionaries and workers not yet recruited.

We have ourselves. We need to face the fact that no situation described and no method set forth will yield converts of itself.

Any church growth depends on *winning converts*. Churches grow from nothing but converts--people who believe on Jesus Christ intensely enough to break with their past and cleave to Him as Lord and Saviour. Converts are not picked up lying loose on the beach. They are won by men and women whose own faith blazes hot enough to kindle faith in others. In all this, I am saying nothing but what our leaders already know and believe. I am merely underlining it as of vital and critical importance.

Converting of existing Christians, enlisting of inquirers, teaching of a clearcut, definite, eternally true gospel, personal work of dedicated men and women seeking out friends and relatives who can be won,

conviction that it makes an eternal difference whether one is a Christian or not, fervent preaching, a resolve to reduce activities which do not advance church growth and to magnify those which do--if all this seems reasonable and right and inevitable, then the Thailand field, I believe, will display gratifying church growth. If on the other hand, all this seems biased and one-sided and "gone to seed on evangelism," then the Thailand field will display no significant church growth.