Inculturation in Thailand:
Issues in Religious Education and Research

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Synopsis

Although scientific research in the modern world seems to be a leader in social change, the scientific study of religions, especially of congregational cultures in Thailand, is a relatively new phenomenon. How these congregations go about inculturation, participate in the production of this emerging wealth of data and make use of this in congregational learning is the point of my paper. I believe that practical theology provides a proper framework for religious reforms made possible by the conducting of religious research with an eye on its implementation through religious education. The practical matter of choosing research tools and theological and educational models that engage proactively in inculturation are considered.

Bringing Together Inculturation, Religious Education and Research in Thai Ministry

Relating inculturation, religious education and research is very much a challenge for the Church in Thailand as it searches for an authentic voice in its place in Thai society. I see the problem in my work at Lamp of Thailand, a unit serving 27,000 Bible correspondence students across Thailand. Students study through the content of the Bible in a sort of survey course for lay persons, receiving lessons, answering study questions to be sent in for marking by Lamp of Thailand staff based in Chiang Mai. A small percent of students graduate and get certificates vouching for their knowledge of the Bible. Like Lamp of Thailand, all manner of religious education in Thailand has traditionally been geared to communicate what the global church says about Christian faith and practice, without giving voice to what Thai Christians believe. This reveals itself in the formal programs operating in local churches that enhance Bible learning: Bible studies, intensive discipleship experiences, correspondence courses, revivals, seminars, conferences, Sunday Schools and even theological education. A national report on pastoral ministry in Thailand said, "the role confusion CCT pastors experience results from the tension between the CCT's structural, outward, un-Thai "foreignness" and its inner, unconverted "Thai-ness." [Swanson, *Pastoral Care and the Church in Thailand, 78*]; I also find the dissertation by Sang-Jan to show the struggle over global-local perspectives in the values of distance education students in Thailand.

At Lamp of Thailand we continue to emphasize the global, foreign nature of the teachings of the Bible (a potion concocted no doubt in the great German, English and American Bible laboratories) in the hope that it develops in our student body a personal discipline for daily personal Bible study and devotions that energizes each one's engagement in the mission of God. This was not well received by those who resist the Western-ness of Christianity. Like Dr. Koyama I too have become convinced that contextualization is happening quietly and incompletely among the people -- in Thai Christianity's "kitchen theology" (Koyama: 1990, 60).

The Historical Context for Discussion of a Theology of Inculturation

Inculturation is largely a discussion within the Church that has implications for our way of being a church. Inculturation as is current among Protestants today emerges from hermeneutical experiments. The WCC Theological Education Fund in 1972 under Shoki Coe published *Ministry in Context* to propose a missiological imperative emerging from the doctrine of the incarnation, and calling for contextualization. Faith and Order has

since continued this discussion under the rubrics of intercultural hermeneutics. The World Evangelical Fellowship in 1974 began to explore the relationship of "gospel and culture" (Willowbank) and later discussed "evangelism and social witness" (Grand Rapids) [Bruce Nichols, in Stott and Coote:49; WEF: Laussanne Occasional Papers #2 and 21].

The Laussanne Covenant states that "The development of strategies for world evangelization calls for the imaginative pioneering methods. Under God, the result will be the rise of churches deeply rooted in Christ and closely related to their culture. Culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture. ... Christ's evangelists must humbly seek to empty themselves of all but their personal authenticity in order to become the servants of others, and churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God." [WEF Laussanne Occasional papers #3:25] In connecting the issue of Gospel and Culture, Laussanne seems to view inculturation as cross-cultural communication or hermeneutics across borders. [WCC] In developing his argument for a hermeneutic of the transformation of culture, Lingenfelter brings expression to the difficulty many Thai churches have faced with this missionary communication:

"The social and cultural systems of a missionary and a local, indigenous community exert powerful pressure on new believers and churches, pressure to conform to habitual standards, values and practices. Christians cannot live apart from the social games of the church or the wider society, and therefore they are subject to these unrelenting forces. Further, Christian leaders teach and practice standards and values that are inextricably intertwined with those of their social world. Nevertheless the gospel may become a significant powerful force in the continuous restructuring of any social environment and worldview. As believers become mature in their faith, their interests reflect more and more those of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore Christians will experience tension and contradiction with old patterns of self-interest and greed, provoking them to contradict old social rules and judge many inadequate as they attempt to imitate the person of Christ in their lives and work. As believers increasingly obey the truth of the gospel, they will discover new ways of managing resources and relationships." [Lingenfelter:19]

Inculturation at Thai Community Church in Chicago
I discovered resistance to global tendencies in years of work with congregations in Thailand and sought to pursue it in my D.Min. research on Bible learning in a Thai immigrant congregation in Chicago. My congregational study of the Thai Community Church in Chicago (TCCC) brought to light the congregation's Bible learning in various formal and informal contexts within the congregation.

I carried out this research over the course of three months in a sort of rapid ethnographic assessment of the ways the congregation learns and brings expression to the Word in congregational life. The task force members under my direction engaged in 1. Participant observer discussions 2. One-on-one interviews 3. A survey sample 4. Presentation of study results/reflections with the community. This design seeks qualitative data on the congregation and was thought out in relation to LeCompte and Shensul's Paradigms of Research [Appendix B].

Where is kitchen theology if not in the oral tradition of the church. Oral Bible learning finds its place in the life of the congregation around dinner tables and home

worships/living rooms and youth journaling groups. I see this oral and informal education sector represent the half of the congregation engaged in "kitchen theology." The occurrence of kitchen theology leaves a deposit of a subversive tradition in congregational culture. The chief characteristic is that there is space in the community life to de-emphasize the Christian tradition in order to give voice to personal religious experiences of laypersons and for them to discuss cultural ideas, rituals or artifacts. This sets the agenda for their reading of the Bible and finding what they feel represents the best options for Christian practices in culturally defined situations. There seems to be a higher retention of Bible content learned in these situations among predominantly oral learners. Bible orality and aurality is related to the congregation's emphasis on integration of outsiders into the congregation with relatively less follow-up and support for those considered to be Christians already. Then there is the lagging issue of if and how we have brought the two identities of Christianity together in its global and local dimensions.

Another issue related to inculturation at TCCC is in the emergence of groups. The youth developed a format that emphasized journaling and prayer. The Saturday home study and Thai food groups developed a question and answer format that seemed to work well with adults. These are groups that satisfy the need of the group to connect their experiences and culture (lived local reality or praxis) to the teachings of the pastor (as voice for the global church and gatekeeper). But they offer a relatively secure place to engage in socialization and to explore social mobility. The problem in kitchen theology in the TCCC is the sense of security and official sanctioning. Some women found the meal in the fellowship hall after the church service to be their time to integrate their life, play out surrogate mother-daughter relationships and work at faith, Bible and religious traditions in relation to others, dealing with the collapse of Thai culture for Christians in Chicago, conflict over pastoral identity and roles resulting from traditional theology in Thailand and the tradition that treats insiders with assumed standards for holiness.

From the data I obtained at Thai Community Church in Chicago, I find that Lamp's agenda is superimposed on the internal agendas of TCCC. Formal programs like Lamp of Thailand can serve only small sectors of the community at TCCC and the likelihood of completion of the materials for most is highest among the group of prospective members for which the church is geared. Lamp's agenda may be well and good, and we can no doubt convince the powers that be in the church council to implement the course. But can we in any way imagine the course helping to serve the neglected segments of congregational life? How can we validate that our own or TCCC aims to promote Bible learning will produce the desired renewal in Thai culture or test to see that our efforts promoted Bible learning?

For these reasons and more the faith as expressed by the entire Body of Christ across all time and in all places cannot adequately inform the Thai Church's practice of ministry and bring about the positive changes the Thai Christians hope to see result from their devotional or group study. We require theological and educational reform in the process of inculturation.

The values I see and the Scriptures I hear used by the new generation of Thai-American Christians are significant for TCCC 's in the next 20 years as they seek to bring in a more clearly globalized Thai agenda. What is different is greater focus in this younger group of Christians on the "ministry of reconciliation" with less focus on atonement theology and the cleansing of sinners. This brings the future Thai Church

closer in line with the values held by the Thai society generally [See studies by Hughes and by Komin]. There is here a greater emphasis on individual freedom and secularization of the workplace. Finally we are seeing a counter-trend by the old guard of the Thai church to entrench themselves in church order and thereby withhold formal acceptance of others' experiments in inculturation and social ministry.

Inculturation happens. It is not a problem for insiders to a social situation. For insiders at TCCC, for example, the problem for the study originated in the Church Council, namely "we don't know the Bible." The suggestion was made to use Lamp of Thailand study materials. Bible knowledge. upon further inquiry, turned out not to be the problem either. What started out as an educational challenge to know the Bible (i.e., promote cognitive learning), soon became an issue of insiders finding a place in their social setting. The extent to which the church provides for mobility in this social continuum -what we call "socialization," is extremely significant to religious educators. I identified the continuum of Bible learning at TCCC using what Spradley in his book on participant observation calls "componential analysis" (Spradley:133) It is interesting that the course or curriculum of this church brings people in quickly only to change the pattern and provide for slower-mobility/recognition after conversion.

The task then is no longer to help the learners know the Bible, but to help the learners gain acceptance from other insiders, namely to be identified as Bible knowers or disciples. The problem is that with that acceptance comes new obligations for which these learners need to be consulted. If you demonstrate Bible knowledge at TCCC, do you really have such a commitment to the new status in the community? What would it take to help you achieve this learning and carry on that role at TCCC, given your background and cognitive and moral and other learning capacities. And here is how to nurture and cope with the results of both faithful and unfaithful service in that role in this place. One area for further research would be to follow persons who transfer from one Thai church to another to see the relative transference of Bible knowledge status in a new social setting.

There are certain controls that help to limit mobility along the continuum in TCCC. The typical response to the call for bible study is to target "inquirers" (essentially outsiders) to form a group. "Disciples" and "Bible knowers" variously are drawn in to this as a means of social mobility and group identification (for disciples) and status affirmation (of Bible knowers). Hence TCCC can boast of once having had 60 adults attending their "Seeker's Group". The pastor at TCCC mediates this curriculum. The employment in this sort of Bible study setting is marked by a high curriculum and lower clergy input providing for 1) quicker recognition and mobility and 2) less naming of group norms. This is compared to other groups in TCCC using fewer prepared material resources (low curriculum content/higher use of human experience) and high clergy input.

Given these observations and considering TCCC's priorities, how might the practice of religious education partner with the research to help fill out the need for Bible learning that fills the incomplete areas of socialization needed to help the post-conversion needs of insiders. I have come to have less hope than I started out with that the faith as expressed by the entire Body of Christ across all time and in all places cannot adequately inform the Thai Church's practice of ministry and bring about the positive changes the

Thai Christians hope to see result from their devotional or group study. We require theological and educational reform in the process of inculturation.

The values I see and the Scriptures I hear used by the new generation of Thai-American Christians are significant for TCCC in the next 20 years as they seek to bring in a more clearly globalized Thai agenda. What is different in this group compared to the dominant Chinese-Thai/Thai group is greater focus in this younger group of Christians on the "ministry of reconciliation" with less focus on atonement theology and the cleansing of sinners. This brings the future Thai Church closer in line with the values held by the Thai society generally that promote an image of unity and inclusion [See studies by Hughes and by Komin]. There is here a greater emphasis on individual freedom and secularization of the workplace. Finally we are seeing a counter-trend by the old guard of the Thai church to entrench themselves in patterns of conversion, revival and church order and thereby withhold formal acceptance of others' experiments in inculturation and social ministry and viewing education as development.

Possible Trends in Thailand

I have come to view the experience of migration as one of the important trends in Thai churches generally. How does this all too brief account of Bible learning in TCCC relate to the Thai Church as a whole? In church after church in Thailand has been a low view of curriculum, high view of the pastorate, low mobility or social change, high submission to group norms among insiders. See for comparison the many local church and presbytery-wide church studies [Srivichai; Suwnabubbha and PTCA] that show that kitchen theology exists in these environments, but that it represents minority voices for renewal and mediation of cultural and religious pluralism in the congregation.

We can expect kitchen theology in Thailand to gain increasing leverage in the middle-sized churches and others that reflect democratic traditions in the congregational culture. Small churches often exercise greater control over social mobility within the congregation, which is a contradiction with perception of some that small, rural Thai congregations will be the hotbed of kitchen theology because of their relative distance from forces of globalization. Scripture in either case continues to serve as a springboard into inculturation. Respected ethicists like Max Stackhouse (Princeton) shows how Christians tend to take up substantial issues by turning to and drawing conclusions with respect to the context or about the Word of God. [Stackhouse:29] Those conclusions of Thai Christians will not likely have a strong foundation either in their particular context for Christian witness. And the meanings they assign to the Word of God not from what Paul Ricoeur calls the sense "behind the text" [Goldingay:32] as the original authors intended the message nor "in front of the text" in terms of the vision of the modern world we gain from the sense of scripture, but Thai Christians will likely continue to read the Bible as a story (i.e., "the literary sense") without past or future historical reference beyond our immediate feelings and sense of selfhood.

The problem of inculturation at TCCC and elsewhere challenges us in two ways. First, it challenges the way we understand persons in cultural context (through use by church scholars of the 'social sciences"). Immigration makes old concepts of culture obsolete, as I will describe below. I believe secondly that we are challenged to provide religious instruction from within a culture communication flow. This requires a new

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vision of educational process and the role of the Gospel both in the transference and transformation of culture.

The Community as Primary Locus for Inculturation

From an anthropological perspective, inculturation is already happening, regardless of what programs exist in Thailand for inculturation. Anthony Gittins says that "inculturation" occurs not by "professional anthropologists nor professional theologians, so much as committed Christians seeking to live out or incarnate the Gospel simply and radically..." (Gittins: 89, ix). It is possible to imagine inculturation occurring every time people open the Scriptures. Gilliland says that inculturation or contextualization is a process that "requires the Spirit-led insight of the people of God and elevates the primary importance of the Word of God, rather than a "system" of theology. It requires, therefore, that the local people of faith be in a covenant relationship under the lordship of Jesus Christ. In carrying out this task they reflect upon the Word through their own thoughts and by way of their own cultural gifts in order to understand what the incarnate gospel means to them." (Gilliland, 13) That means that all Christians are responsible for this lively reflection on God's Word. It does not mean that outsiders to the Christian faith cannot participate in the process. The way outsiders to the Thai Christian community in Chicago can and do make valuable contributions to this process of inculturation is an example of this give and take in the formation of that congregation's culture.

Yet each congregation with all of its diversity in membership develops a cultus or local religious tradition in which to explore their faith and to put it into practice. New members are expected to learn the appropriate behaviors demonstrating faith in that situation. This tradition takes on new shapes and "reforms" over time as a result of challenges to the tradition.

Inculturation and Thai Developmental Niches

Another important issue for inculturation is the way that people mature into adults within their own cultural milieu, what cross-cultural psychologists like James Gardiner at University of Wisconsin describe as a person's developmental niche. [Gardiner:13] The concept of developmental niche "provides a framework for understanding how various aspects of a culture guide the development process by focussing on the child as the unit of analysis within her sociocultural setting or context." [13] He goes on to state that "every child's developmental niche consists of three components, including (1) the physical and social settings or contexts of everyday life (e.g., one's family, (2) the culturally determined customs of child care and childrearing (e.g., interactions with siblings), and (3) the psychology of the caretakers or characteristics of child's parents (e.g., belief systems and developmental expectations)." [14] Stage theories of human development when tested cross-culturally have shown variations not so much in the stages, as in the timing at which people mature within different cultures and their relative progress in cognitive, selfhood, moral and faith development at different ages.

Theological Method as Reflection in Praxis

Our theological method is the ordering of theological reflection in ways that promote learning in the context of intercultural flows in a community. Browning says that this has been dominated Plato said that learning occurs at the level of *theoria*, by post-

enlightenment fixation on the improvement of human life through the "increase of objective scientific knowledge that is then applied to the technical solution of human problems." [Browning: 297] The same is true whether we are learning to cook or if we developing a philosophical argument or developing human character and "right" behaviors. We are caught between theory and *techne* (skill). He calls for a recovery of a third method of knowing what Aristotle called *phronesis* (practical wisdom). [ibid]

Praxis-oriented theological methodologies (Whiteheads; Browning; Lonergan; Mudge; Ammerman) take up this discussion of improving our community by helping us "attend" to our complex local reality in relationship to the three poles of received religious traditions, the culture and the experience of the congregation seeking to reflect on its own life. Global forces will be seen in this first step in theological method as they play out in local reality. The people then attempt to "assert" [Whiteheads' term] a position of faith from the global Christian tradition and draw out from this dialogue the implications for our "practice" of ministry. [Whitehead:13]

Thai religious education from Sunday School to Seminary has not worked that way generally: theory and dogma are forced down onto pastors, lay people, students and situations without reference to their practice of being humans within their developmental niche, social situation or context. We often give little weight to the experience and culture that ministry students bring into their seminary experience. We continue this pattern in their field education cites where what reflection we do with the students-in-ministry often gives little attention to the exchange that goes on between the student and the congregation or ministry setting over the way to frame issues of ministry current in that setting. At Lamp of Thailand, we teach Bible content but do not integrate this with our learner's situation. Therefore inculturation is kept in the kitchen and out of the formal areas of religious learning in the Thai Church. People with biblical knowledge have divorced themselves from the people. What could model for us a new way to engage in religious learning (theological education, ministry instruction, biblical literacy/orality, etc.) that puts together the culture, the religious experiences of our learners, the religious traditions of our learners and the global theological resources?

While the current now in religious education in Thailand is still theoretical, beyond Thailand the theological methodology by which to improve human life has shifted to praxis-based learning. That translates into what we call "learning by doing." I think in terms of religious education, this is prone to cheap activism because it focusses too narrowly on *techne* out of context. It would be better named "in-ministry" instruction. For this learning to run it's course, we must reflect on our practice of ministry (for example) to identify patterns in our religious traditions and turn to the sources of Christian faith to seek transformation in line with the Gospel. Religious educators hoping to promote life-changing biblical learning had best learn about the learners. We must learn from Thai Christians how to understand their relationship to their own culture and religious experiences, and those who they consider to be the important players in their religious development. We must actively and critically discern cultural rules, and help students decide what to transfer and what to transform in their engagement in their developmental niche and in social institutions. We need to engage one another in biblical reflection that moves us on solid ground to renewed engagement in ministry in Thailand. We need to make space in the thought life of congregations to identify and develop the theoretical and practical behaviors and skills needed to try out new ideas.

Biblical discernment in practical theology is followed by invitation for particular role players in a congregation to reengage Thai society in new ways and to continually learn the Christian faith from within the praxis of ministry. For example, I would like to bring the fruit of theological reflection in Christian community to bear on our ministry at Lamp of Thailand and other educational institutions or programs or events. Cultural study will help us immensely. .

Semiotic Study of Cultures

In his chapter on intercultural hermeneutics, Schreiter expands on what exactly is entailed in the study of culture, which he does in terms of semiotics. "The semiotics of cultures may be defined as a method by which culture is studied as a communication structure and process." [Schreiter:30] Semiotics "views cultures as having three important dimensions. First of all, culture is ideational - it provides systems or frameworks of meaning which serve both to interpret the world and to provide guidance for living in the world. Culture in this dimension embodies beliefs, values, attitudes, and rules of behavior. Second, culture is performance - rituals that bind a culture's members together to provide them with a participatory way of embodying and enacting their histories and values. Performance also encompasses 'embodied behaviors.' Third, culture is material - the artifacts and symbolizations that become a source for identity: language, food, clothing, music and the organization of space." [Schreiter:29]

n.b.

Much of the social research done in Thailand since WWII whether sociological or anthropological in nature were influenced by the works of functionalist social theorists like Talcott Parsons. Ethnographic studies of Chitradub; Duongsaa, and Codman-Wilson seem to be the norm. The writing of local church history through oral history interviews as in Chinawong, Chaisri, and Pongudom, parallels this ethnographic work in choosing to limit the study on individual communities. The research tools employed and the relative involvement of the community differ in each. Komil (based in a national research institute) and Hughes (from an implicitly Christian perspective) have done Thai values research using cross-sectional survey tools. This research is valuable for religious educators as we consider the values we wish to emulate or make explicit in the curriculum and especially in the modeling done by teachers. Religious educators must be careful not to impose national Thai values, however, without holding them in tension with the meaning assigned to those values and the power issues present in each congregational culture. Mejudhon and Srisoontorn-Persons provide examples of Thai contextual models that Bevans calls translational models. Their weakness lies in the need to test these theories in praxis that is in real communities and allow that praxis to transform theory and practice. Nevertheless these models help in the search for authentically Thai forms of engagement in pastoral ministry. One of the greatest problems in the Christian learning community is the lack of a sustained critical reflection upon studies by Thais, whether Christian or not, theoretical or practical. We fail as religious educators to learn from others and rely on others' work in our instructional work. This shows up in our frequent lack of understanding of our learners and little depth in the resources used in curriculum development. My own study of Chicago is an application of the semiotic study of culture to a Thai congregation [See Appendix A].

Integrated Concepts of Culture

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The above studies were based almost exclusively on what Schreiter calls "integrated concepts of culture that depict culture as patterned systems in which the various elements are coordinated in such a fashion as to create a unified whole." The patterned nature provides a false sense of recurrence and sameness that gives to those who participate in the culture a certain identity. " [Schreiter, 48] This gives insiders to a culture a sense of home, security and organic connection.

Integrated concepts of culture lend themselves to greater organic unity. This serves as a basis for reinforcing values. In this framework, wisdom and inclusion of all elements are valued above analysis and picking things apart. Integrated concepts of culture have several important drawbacks or weaknesses, particularly that they often present a static view of culture. They also can create a myth of cultural integration, obscuring cultural dynamics. They also are prone to essentializing cultures (eg., the Karen Tribe "tends" to be patrilocal in its marriage patterns), giving it more solidarity than there in fact is.

Globalized Concepts of Culture

Let me continue to follow Schreiter's assessment. In response to these weaknesses, under the influence of postcolonialism and globalization, globalized concepts of culture emerged in the last part of the 20th Century. Globalized concepts of culture reflect the tensions and pressures arising out of the process of globalization.

The strengths in globalized concepts of culture are that

- These concepts try to reflect the experience of people living in a changing world today
- They treat the problems of power struggles within cultures more directly and centrally in the cultural equation. especially post-colonialist literature.
- Global concepts of culture assume the change and look for moments of disruption as clues to the movement in the culture, whereas integrated concepts of culture did not account well for social change.   *nb.*
- Cultures do have what Robert Young calls "incompatible, coexistent logics" [Schreiter:58] so history is not a single linear movement, but there are many movements at the same time.

Schreiter sees weaknesses in globalized concepts of culture are that they are still fairly new and still in formulation and that globalized concepts of culture in the postcolonial variety (e.g., as found in liberation theologies. some feminist theologies, etc.) assume that humanity is violent towards one another and that we are bound to a Hegelian cycle of dissent. Is there no way, especially theologically, to envision an ontological peace that can operate in human culture?

Conclusions

The Significance of Global Concepts of Culture for Inculturation

The significance of global concepts of culture for contextual theology are that they account for and look to points of asymmetry in culture and that they identify unreconciled voices in social situations, thus revealing the unjust exercise of power in many cultures and also revealing the various flows that contribute to the formation of that culture. For Schreiter it is the newly emerging, fluctuating communities in the globalized world: the

refugees, the migrants, etc. - that need to be studied order to discern the way that cultures arbitrate the cultural forces contributing to adaptation and change in each semiotic dimension of a culture.

We have seen so far in this article that inculturation is affected greatly by how we view cultures, our theology of cultures and by the practical tools of research and the needs of religious educators. A global concept of inculturation is a matter not of arbitrarily adopting "appropriate" and often archaic local cultural forms as illustrations in the communication of the gospel, but views the proclamation of the gospel in and through cultures as a global hermeneutic flow into which is injected the proclamation of the Gospel. For we have seen inculturation up to this point as the integration of the gospel within an integrated culture and endlessly harp upon the cultural damage done by Christian mission. But when we move to a global concept of culture, we begin to see the asymmetry between Gospel and culture as a creative tension within the natural communication of that culture. This uneasy coexistence of ideas, behaviors and material culture, when sifted biblically and ethically, provides cultures ultimately with new theological tools by which to adapt and find meaning through and sometimes even in spite of the great fluxes each culture experiences amidst globalization.

Our theology of culture is about how we believe God to be active in calling together and reintegrating uprooted communities as Jesus did in calling the disparate people to discipleship. It is also about how God disrupts the highly integrated, stagnant

	Research Transformed	Religious Education
Purpose	Find how the community(s) mediate(s) change and produces meaning	To instruct learners in light of God's Word concerning a congregation's assignment of meaning to cultural symbols
Researcher/Educator Roles	Works with insiders to formulate the research parameters	Call the people to conversion to Jesus Christ; Facilitate learner's mastery of ideas, behaviors and participation in the production of culture
Community/Learner Roles	Produce and Interpret own data; identify need and helps name objectives and use of study	Participate in making sense of and doing the Gospel
Methodology	Semiotic assessment of the culture flows. Enables comparative and global study of culture.	Instructional: project a trajectory leading the learner through their environmental niche

and oppressive communities in order to open them to forces of liberation and globalization, as the prophets came to interpret the disruption of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and their subsequent Diaspora experience. The multiple conversion of Esther to God, to her people and to her responsibility in society figures prominently as a biblical example of a globalized concept of inculturation. Jesus' disruption of the Temple activity, which lay at the heart of his society, is another illustration of the new community God

calls together. It is this God who opens us to forces of liberation, walks us through globalization and secularization, while at the same time experiencing with us the joy of Christ in our midst making us and all things new.

A global, semiotic understanding of inculturation affects research and religious education in particular ways (above). Our practice of religious research and education of congregations takes its cue from this emerging view of culture and inculturation.

Religious education stirs up the inculturation

In discussing inculturation, we are talking about transformation of Thai religious education. This reform is essentially in two areas that aim to inform Thai ministerial praxis. 1) Transform educational relationships in order to promote learner-based education in which lay persons relate their local tradition with the wider global Christian tradition. 2) Transform curriculum design that plans out learning activities that emerge appropriately from within the praxis of a living Christian community. I see the importance of religious research as serving and creating the optimal conditions for the educational mission of the Church by holding educators accountable to the educational environment they function in and the changes they are creating. In this paper will explore the theological basis for this proposed reform of the process for Thai religious education and assign a role and set boundaries for ethnographic and other research useful for feeding the educational process.

Religious education can promote and transform culture by putting together the kitchen theology and socialization needs of the congregation. I believe a curriculum that promotes formal exploration of the Word of God (the requirement for recognition is met here) and is done in light of the learner's praxis (the need of learners to integrate faith and life) and has standards acceptable for role variation/mobility among insiders in terms not just of socialization, but of the learners' developmental niche (the need for cultural exchange covering cultural approaches to crises and needs across the life span) is crucial. Building understanding of this educational reform and identifying and working with partners in education is very important. For example Bible knowers in a congregation need to come to terms with their status not as merely another obligation, but at the core being their chance to serve God among their own kin and to leave in their wake the fruit of Christian walk as evidenced by changed lives.
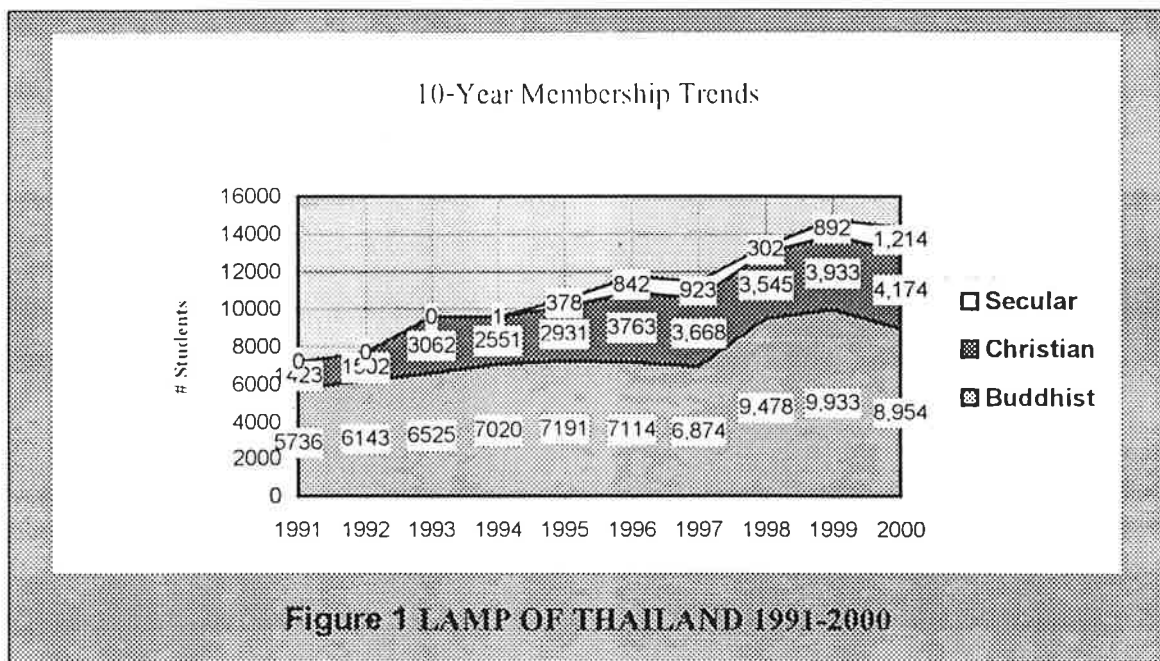
For inculturation to occur formally in education requires an educational theory that is learner focussed. Learner focussed education involves the learner in exploring and naming learning priorities and then designs learning activities that help them achieve the necessary cognitive, behavioral, affective and skill objectives. Learner-focussed education moves us away from Bible study as a means of revival and numerical church growth, but rather helps balance the congregational need for reciprocal learning about our praxis between kitchen and global theological reflection.

Developing the Proposed Involvement of Lamp of Thailand at TCCC

Reflecting on what we have to offer the TCCC, I submit that Lamp of Thailand needs to provide in its course of study more space for the particular experience and culture of the students in the context of their local congregation. Lamp of Thailand also add a component that facilitates dialogue between students on basic interreligious relationships that holds together competing expectations over knowledge of Bible, Bible

behaviors and the production of material culture. In another point, the preparation of materials has been handed on to experts in Bible. We should rather promote freedom among users to adjust instructional methods as needed and to draw on supplementary sources for which Lamp of Thailand might serve as distributor.

Where does research fit into this proposed reform? The research data we use to validate our ongoing efforts is a very weak link. As valuable as our efforts may appear to be for many schools and prisons and local congregations in Thailand, the data we keep to follow up on our students and make reports to the national church is like the graph below: quantitative data saying how much/how many. In their turn, the national church gathers data on congregations and units that emphasize the polity: who administers the church, how many attend worship, how much are the church's offerings and the size of its Sunday school.

10-Year Membership Trends

Secular: 423, 1502, 3062, 2551, 2931, 3763, 3668, 3545, 3933, 4174
Christian (... labels): 378, 842, 923, 302, 892, 1,214
Buddhist: 5736, 6143, 6525, 7020, 7191, 7114, 6,874, 9.478, 9.933, 8.954

Students

1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000

□ Secular
▨ Christian
▧ Buddhist

Figure 1 LAMP OF THAILAND 1991-2000

That data is not very useful for inculturation of Thai religious educational programs. Social research tools help us monitor inculturation As a religious educator I need to know how our students' study of the Bible plays out in their context or living environment. Does our curriculum help students through the process of socialization as found in their community? Do the values we encourage vary from accepted values there and do we have adequate ethical grounding for encouraging such changes? I am interested to learn what behaviors are encouraged or prohibited in each social situation. I must answer what cognitive and affective and other skills and traits will equip people to live together with others across their life span and exercise their gifts and take on roles to help form wider social institutions out of a religious perspective. How far along in socialization and human development are the prospective students? I believe that shaping our vision of inculturation will radically alter the way formal programs like Lamp of Thailand engage in data collection/research and that it will ultimately transform our approach to the learning of the Bible, faith etc.

Religious education stirs up the inculturation

In discussing inculturation, we are talking about transformation of Thai religious education. This reform is essentially in two areas that aim to inform Thai ministerial praxis. 1) Transform educational relationships in order to promote learner-based education in which lay persons relate their local tradition with the wider global Christian tradition. 2) Transform curriculum design that plans out learning activities that emerge appropriately from within the praxis of a living Christian community. I see the importance of religious research as serving and creating the optimal conditions for the educational mission of the Church by holding educators accountable to the educational environment they function in and the changes they are creating. In this paper will explore the theological basis for this proposed reform of the process for Thai religious education and assign a role and set boundaries for ethnographic and other research useful for feeding the educational process.

Religious education can promote and transform culture by putting together the kitchen theology and socialization needs of the congregation. I believe a curriculum that promotes formal exploration of the Word of God (the requirement for recognition is met here) and is done in light of the learner's praxis (the need of learners to integrate faith and life) and has standards acceptable for role variation/mobility among insiders in terms not just of socialization, but of the learners' developmental niche (the need for cultural exchange covering cultural approaches to crises and needs across the life span) is crucial. Building understanding of this educational reform and identifying and working with partners in education is very important. For example Bible knowers in a congregation need to come to terms with their status not as merely another obligation, but at the core being their chance to serve God among their own kin and to leave in their wake the fruit of Christian walk as evidenced by changed lives.

For inculturation to occur formally in education requires an educational theory that is learner focussed. Learner focussed education involves the learner in exploring and naming learning priorities and then designs learning activities that help them achieve the necessary cognitive, behavioral, affective and skill objectives. Learner-focussed education moves us away from Bible study as a means of revival and numerical church growth, but rather helps balance the congregational need for reciprocal learning about our praxis between kitchen and global theological reflection.

Inculturation in religious education has implications for Lamp of Thailand's practice of ministry. First we must see ourselves as providing resources for learning activities that respond to learning goals of our students. Therefore how the resources are used needs to be carefully thought out in partnership with insiders to each social situation with the total course of the congregation in mind. A turn to kitchen theological method does risk a boom bust cycle typical of continually conflicted groups. We need to see our presence in these communities as an opportunity for insiders to learn from kitchen theologizers so that the inculturation and developmental niche of Lamp of Thailand students can be formally acknowledged and fostered by the power holders - hence creating authorized movement and creative vitality in the congregational culture without a complete rupture and breakdown of the congregation's learning continuum.

Lamp of Thailand Bible study materials cannot avoid teaching cultural rules of engagement, even in something as simple as telling the story of Jacob. But the data needed to transform instruction is so immense that I do not know in what lifetime the curriculum might ever be fundamentally altered to promote inculturation in Thailand. We

must rather bear with the temporal nature of community theological reflection, help these communities to sustain a conversation within a set timeframes publish their reflection and promote discussion of these to identify their relative treatment of the elements of practical theology and the extent to which this holds true or varies from the experiences of other reflection-oriented communities. As we gradually replace our existing Bible study materials, we may, I believe, continue to engage in our ministry as it is: an educational series distributed by correspondence.

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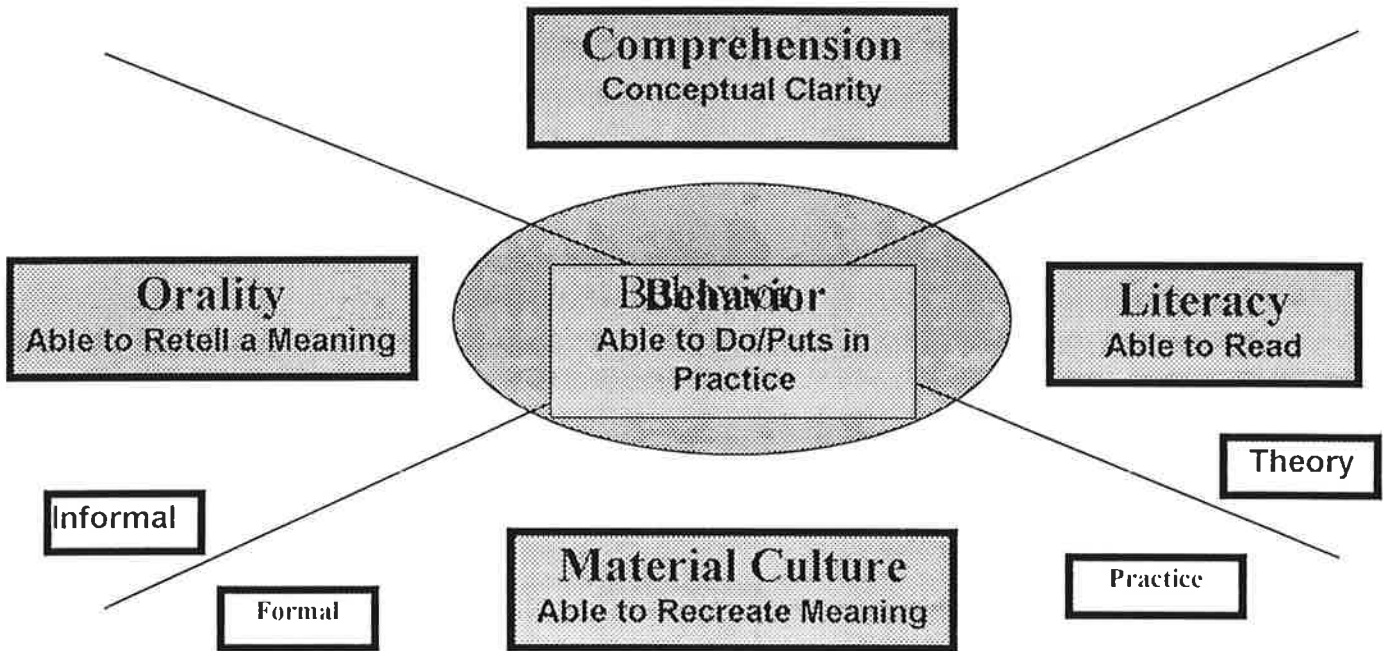
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Integration of Symbolic Meaning

Comprehension
Conceptual Clarity

Orality
Able to Retell a Meaning

Behavior
Able to Do/Puts in Practice

Literacy
Able to Read

Theory

Informal

Practice

Formal

Material Culture
Able to Recreate Meaning

Testing Congregational Culture for Biblical Literacy requires more than traditional literacy. Indeed it is a question of measuring the extent to which the Congregational culture integrates symbolic meaning.

Traditional Literacy requires an <u>ability to read and write</u>. For an ethnic community in America, that could be divided between English and the mother-tongue(s). So we might approach the task of establishing the level of literacy in a congregational culture in each of the respective languages by studying *reading levels.*

Educators also have developed standards for *reading comprehension* and *written expression.* Reading comprehension is tested usually by short stories where events or actors are identified in questions to the reader. Written expression could be tested, for example, by *oral citation* of a Bible verse to listeners who write what they hear. Written expression can be done through *essay* exams.

What do readers/listeners understand to be the meaning of Bible citations? This is a question of reading/oral comprehension. This can best be established by *domain analysis* of sample citations. Oral citation could be further tested for variations in inflexion and voice tone to determine word usage and cultural *implied meanings.*

Cultures resist absorption by dominant cultures. They do so by increased orality. Languages undergo a process of very intensive adaptation and word invention at the hands of the youth. In both cases, quantitative research that ignores oral culture in the study of ethnic minority groups and regional groups will have measures of a population's comprehension biased in favor of previous or normative language usage, rather than actual usage in congregational culture. *Comparative analysis* of language usage among different age groups could be very helpful here.

What could test a congregational culture's place on the *spectrum* between orality and literacy? We have dealt with formal literacy testing. Tests of orality are ethnographic in terms of the quality of reproduction of knowledge or citations or wisdom sayings between generations. Through *interviews* of the elderly, we might discover biblical sayings or proverbs that guide life in some way. We could then test for *discrepancies* by other generations in their memory and recitation of these sayings.

In a similar vein, we could measure meaning given to a congregation's material culture through *inventories* of the congregation's descriptions of items, exploration of *documents* and *spatial analysis* in places where people gather, make decisions, serve and celebrate, etc.

How then can we test a congregational culture's behavior for the change over time of formal and informal reproduction of meanings? This is a question of praxis. What do people really do? How does that relate to people's perceptions of the meanings they are trying to reproduce or to which they give their assent and fidelis/concensus.

What theologies of ministry and theological methodologies are revealed in these congregational cultural behaviors?

Appendix B: LeCompte & Shensul's Paradigms of Research

TABLE 3.1: A Comparison of Paradigms

	POSITIVISTIC APPROACHES	INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES	CRITICAL APPROACHES	ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES	NETWORK APPROACHES
CONCERN	Self as defined by society/form/social structure, i.e., what's going on outside individuals	Society/form/social structure as defined by self, i.e., what's going on within and between individuals	Self as defined by the structure of domination, i.e., what's going on within and between individuals as a consequence of their given material and historical conditions	Self as defined by social structures representing levels of influence, i.e., what's going on within individuals influenced by family, peers, school, work, community and society	Self as defined by interaction with significant others in specific cultural domains, i.e., what's going on within and between individuals as a consequence of social relationships
ORIGINS OF KNOWLEDGE	By definition, by deduction from laws or theoretical statements, from experience	From shared understandings, negotiation, historical and social context	From differential access to knowledge regarding historical context, political, economic, and social conditions	From beliefs and behaviors of individuals to knowledge of structural factors influencing their behaviors	From beliefs and behaviors of individuals to knowledge about their social interactions with important others
ROLE OF RESEARCHER	Affectively neutral, uninfluenced in the conduct of study by personal experience of the research	Involved, informed by researcher's personal experience in interaction with the study participants	Educative, analytic, transformative, active teacher/learner	Detached, uninfluenced in the conduct of study by personal experience of the research	Involved, informed by researcher's personal experience in interaction with the study participants; may also be detached and uninfluenced
ROLE OF RESEARCHED	Affectively neutral, objective	Involved, subjective	Educative, analytic, transformative, active teacher/learner	Detached, objective	May be either involved or detached; objective or subjective
FOCUS	Observable behavior. Measurement and quantification. Qualitative operationalization of variables. Controlling variance and bias.	Elicited meanings for observational behavior. Intersubjective understanding. Explaining variance and bias.	Structural asymmetries, critical consciousness, hidden meanings and assumptions, patterns of oppression. Exposing variance and bias.	Observable behavior and elicited meanings in relation to structures, policies, norms, behaviors typical of other levels in the system	Observable and measured behavior, both qualitative and quantitative and elicited meanings in relation to explication of social relationships

TABLE 3.1: Continued

	POSITIVISTIC APPROACHES	INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES	CRITICAL APPROACHES	ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES	NETWORK APPROACHES
PROCEDURES	Definition (by researcher); Description (by researcher); Classification/codification (by researcher); Enumeration; Correlation; Verification; Prediction	Definition (by subject); Description (by subject); Classification/codification (by researcher subject to member checks); Enumeration; Correlation/association; Interpretation (by researcher in conjunction with subject); Communication	Definition (by researcher and subject); Description (by researcher and subject); Classification/codification (by researcher subject to member checks); Enumeration; Correlation/association; Interpretation (researcher in conjunction with subject); Communication (by researcher); Action/transformation (researcher and subject)	Definition (by researcher); Description (by researcher); Classification/codification (by researcher possibly subject to member checks); Enumeration; Correlation/association; Interpretation (researcher in conjunction with subject); Communication (by researcher); Verification; prediction	Definition (by researcher); Description (by researcher); Classification/codification (by researcher possibly subject to member checks); Enumeration; Correlation/association (researcher in conjunction with subject); Communication (by researcher); Verification; prediction
PROCESS	Achieving control of behavior by modeling its study after procedures used by scientists studying the physical universe	Achieving understanding of behavior by analysis of social interaction, meaning and communication	Achieving change in structure and behavior by exposing hidden patterns of meaning, communication, and control	Achieving change in structure and behavior by analysis of levels and their interaction	Achieving change in structure and behavior by identifying influence of interaction among members of a social group on one another.
GOALS	1) Generalization of results to subsequent similar events and phenomena 2) Development of universal laws which govern human behavior in all settings	1) Comparison of results to similar and dissimilar processes and phenomena 2) Development of verifiable and shared understandings regarding regularities in human behavior in specific settings	1) Analysis of results to unmask inequities in processes and phenomena 2) Development of emancipatory stance toward determinants of human behavior	1. Analysis of results to identify relationships across levels in a local situation. 2. Development of local predictors influencing individual, group and social behaviors. 3. Inductive development of regional and larger patterns and laws	1. Analysis of results to identify social relationships among related individuals; 2. Development of predictors of social influences on individual behavior 3. Generalization from local to universal rules