

The Finnish Free Foreign Mission and the Origins of Pentecostalism in Thailand, 1946-1960

Herb Swanson

Introduction

In 1997, I undertook a study of mission groups and churches outside of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), which research soon fell by the wayside before the onslaught of more immediately pressing duties. My notes contain sufficient material on the founding and early years of the Finnish Free Foreign Mission (FFFM) in Thailand, however, to present a summary of and some reflections on the early years of the FFFM, which was the earliest of the Pentecostal missions in Thailand. Its early history is virtually the opening chapter of the history of the founding of Thai Pentecostalism. The purpose of this essay, then, is to describe and reflect on FFFM history from 1946 to 1960 in a somewhat preliminary way, drawing on three of the resources I used in 1997: Jouko Ruohomäki master's thesis on the history of the FFFM (1988), Robert Nishimoto's history of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Thailand (1996), and an interview I had with the Rev. Wirachai Kowae in August 1997. To these I've added a small amount of additional research from two other sources, namely, Jaakko Mäkelä's doctoral dissertation (2000) and a paper by Edwin Zehner (1987). See the bibliography at the end of the essay for complete citations.

Ruohomäki divides the history of the FFFM into three stages. He holds that the mission's pioneer era lasted for its first ten years, 1946-1956, and was followed by the "parent stage," during which time the FFFM related to its churches as a parent does to a child. This second stage lasted until sometime in the 1970s, although in some churches it was still evident when he wrote in 1988. The third and final stage in FFFM history was the stage of "partnership," being the period when the FFFM churches began to show more independence from the mission. (Ruohomäki, 143-145). To these stages, I would add a preliminary stage, which goes as far back as 1925. In the roughly twenty years before 1946, churches related to the Presbyterian and Baptist missions, which churches became part of the CCT in 1934, went through several stages of revival that prepared the ground for Pentecostalism. This earlier stage receives no attention from either Ruohomäki or Nishimoto, but in what follows it will

18

become clear that Pentecostalism in Thailand first emerged as something of a CCT reform movement. (see [Headwaters of Thai Revivalism & Pentecostalism](#) in [HeRB 3](#)).

The Pioneer Era

The FFFM began on 17 November 1946 when Verner and Hanna Raassina, its first missionary couple, arrived in Bangkok just fifteen months after the end of World War II. The Raassinas had something of a difficult start. They only chose to stay on in Thailand after their visa application for Burma was turned down, and when they first arrived the missionary and local Christian community gave them an uncertain welcome at best. No one quite knew what to do with them, either as Finns or as Pentecostals. (Nishimoto, 52-53; Ruohomäki, 25). By the standards of 1946, the Raassinas were certainly different from most other Protestant missionaries serving in Thailand. They came with a small budget that prevented them from engaging in the educational and medical work frequently found in other missions. They also arrived with the express intention to start fellowships of believers on the pattern of the New Testament church. Ruohomäki claims that this goal encouraged the Raassinas and those who later joined them to emphasize the preaching of the Christian message on the basis of Romans 1:16 {"For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." [NRSV]} (Ruohomäki, 27). It did not, apparently, encourage them to start church-

related medical and educational institutions.

The Raassinas and their eventual colleagues in this pioneer era faced unusual problems even in that most common of missionary enterprises, language study. Ruohomäki writes of FFFM missionaries generally,

Thai language studies were the first obligation in Thailand. But language study was expensive for Finnish missionaries. They could not use the services provided by language schools, but had to hire a private teacher. There were excellent language schools specially tailored for missionaries in Bangkok, but several of the Finnish missionaries even later have not been able to attend. This was a problem even in the nineteen eighties for some new Finnish missionaries. (Ruohomäki, 72-73)

Using private tutors was not an innovation, however; it marked, rather, a reversion to the original form of language acquisition long practiced by Protestant missionaries in

19

Thailand. Starting a mission with a single couple with limited resources also reflected the way the older missions often started, witness the McGilvarys' founding the Presbyterian Laos Mission in 1867. The FFFM in its early years, that is, was different from some of the other missions in Thailand not because it was innovative so much as because it marked a reversion to older missionary patterns. The FFFM more or less reinvented the missionary wheel, and we will see that the Raassinas' experiences in the 1940s replicated the McGilvarys' experience in northern Siam in the 1860s and 1870s in a number of ways.

Reinforcements for the Raassinas arrived in 1948 when Eukka and Maria Rokkas landed in Bangkok. The Rokkas evidently spent their first year in language study. Both Ruohomäki and Nishimoto, in any event, pass over 1948 quickly and quietly, indicating that the FFFM missionaries did not seriously initiate their work in Thailand until 1949 when two (unnamed) single women also joined the mission. (Nishimoto, 54-55). In 1949, the FFFM moved in two different directions at once. While the Rokkas started a preaching station in Thon Buri, across the river from Bangkok, the Raassinas moved in May to the town of Lom Sak in Petchabun Province to start rural ministry work.

Both Nishimoto and Ruohomäki emphasize that during this earliest phase the FFFM missionaries experienced many "signs and wonders," including the healing of hopelessly ill people, visions of future events, speaking in tongues, and moments where the missionaries felt that God spoke to them personally and immediately. FFFM missionaries believed that evil spirits attacked them a number of times, usually by seizing them by the throat. In all, both Ruohomäki and Nishimoto suggest that the FFFM felt itself involved in desperate spiritual warfare with evil powers. (Nishimoto, 54-57, Ruohomäki, 31).

The Raassinas' experiences in Petchabun Province, again, closely paralleled the experience of the McGilvarys in Chiang Mai in the late 1860s. In both cases, the mission families were the only *farang* living in the province, and people came from many miles around to visit them, never having seen a Caucasian face before. The Raassinas' missionary tactics, as well, followed very closely on the model of the McGilvarys. They engaged in daily evangelism, walking long distances to visit rural Petchabun villages, passing out tracts, and discussing Christianity with people. They

20

used Western musical instruments, a guitar and a mandolin, to attract crowds. They sold tracts in the markets and also held house meetings, which were well received. (Ruohomäki, 34-36). Ruohomäki writes of those meetings that,

After the meetings long discussions were held with the Buddhist audience. Sometimes discussions turned to debates and especially school teachers were eager to present their opinions, because the teachers knew the basic principles of Buddhism and how they clashed with new teachings of Christianity." (Ruohomäki, 37)

The McGilvays and other nineteenth-century Presbyterian missionaries in northern Thailand also debated religion with the local intelligentsia, in those years being mostly Buddhist monks; and they also presented a Christianity that was essentially at odds with the traditional local faith. In both Petchabun and Chiang Mai, those debates reinforced the sense of the missionaries being engaged in a form of religious or spiritual warfare.

It appears that when the Raassinas moved to Lom Sak in 1949 they relied on a "communication strategy" that mixed a contextual life style with an anti-contextual message. On the one hand, they intentionally lived as close to the people as possible, residing in a dilapidated old grass-thatched house that they rented for 60 baht a month. They consciously chose to live like the people of Lom Sak in order to build close relationships with individual people in the community that, as Nishimoto puts it, would "win the hearts" (*chana chai*) of the people for Jesus Christ. One point, however, at which they refused to contextualize their behavior was when their daughter died. They insisted that she be buried rather than cremated. (Nishimoto, 55-56). Nor did they extend contextualization to include the actual message they sought to communicate, which remained quite Western. They preached a miraculous, biblical Christ in public meetings, using long familiar missionary picture scrolls to tell the story. Eventually, FFFM missionaries and their Thai pastors also began to issue "altar calls" in FFFM churches, a practice still current in the late 1980s. (Ruohomäki, 40).

However their message was packaged, it did touch a responsive cord in the village of Ban Huey Swing, located some twenty kilometers, a day long trip, from Lom Sak. Raassina had heard that there was a Christian living in Huey Swing, and on 1 July 1949, he visited the village and met the person, Pho Thao (Old Father) Plaw,

who related how he had received a Bible portion thirty years earlier and long waited for someone to come and explain it to him. Raassina found great interest in Christianity among other members of the Huey Swing community, and after three days some 22 men converted; a second trip, in August 1949, saw another twenty men and women convert. They founded a congregation, built a simple church building, and evangelists working with Raassina began to visit them regularly. (Ruohomäki, 41). My understanding is that the Huey Swing Church was the first Pentecostal church in Thailand.

By 1950, then, the FFFM work in both Thon Buri and Petchabun was beginning to gain a number of converts. Prominent among them in Petchabun was a monk named Phramaha Maliduangchan, generally referred to by Ruohomäki as Maha Mali. After conversion he became a "diligent Bible student" and studied privately with Raassina for some time. He also eventually experienced a great deal of persecution and had to leave Petchabun for a period of time. (Ruohomäki, 38-39) Other converts in Petchabun included two young men who later became important leaders in FFFM churches, Ach. Sombat Supkasaetrin and Ach. Nirut Chankorn. Ach Nirut later paired up with another FFFM missionary, Elis Pehkonen, to establish a total of twelve

churches in twelve years in Petchabun Province. (Nishimoto, 57).

While the FFFM seems to have had generally little contact with non-Pentecostal churches and groups in Thailand during its early years, it did develop a close relationship with the Rev. Boonmark Kittisarn, the former General Secretary of the CCT. Ach. Boonmark left the CCT in 1948 when it joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) and founded his own independent church, the Bangkok (Thai) Church. He first met the Raassinas in 1946, not long after they arrived and before he left the CCT, and invited them to stay for a time at a school owned by his family. Mäkelä notes that Boonmark became very close to the Raassinas and the other FFFM missionaries, who came to consider him, informally, as something of a co-worker. (Mäkelä, 70-71).

Boonmark is one of the more fascinating figures in Thai Protestant church history and a person who from the 1930s through the 1950s had a great deal to do with shaping the future course of that history. (see Zehner, 44-65). His name is associated with that of Dr. John Sung, the famous Chinese evangelist who held a

landmark series of revivals in Thailand in 1938 and 1939. The Sung revivals designated the apex of the Presbyterian-Baptist-CCT inter-War revivalistic movement, mentioned above, and Boonmark was instrumental in seeing that Sung returned to Thailand in 1939. From that point on, Boonmark was a reformer and even a revolutionary in terms of his relationship with the CCT and with the Presbyterian Mission, which as noted eventually led to his withdrawing from the CCT entirely. In terms of the FFFM, Boonmark provided a point of contact with the Protestant past in Thailand and an early indication that Pentecostalism actually squared quite well with certain themes from Presbyterian and Baptist church and missionary history in Thailand. Zehner points out, however, that such links were not apparent in the FFFM's early years. (Zehner, 58). It was only in the late 1950s that the Pentecostal movement, still represented only by the Finns, suddenly became an ecumenical issue—and obstacle.

The Osborn Crusade of 1956 and Its Aftermath

The Osborn Crusade, which took place in 1956, is one of the most important events in post-War Thai Protestant history and also one of the least studied and understood. In a number of ways, it presents a striking parallel to the Sung Revivals of the late 1930s. Nishimoto provides some of the details of the Osborn Crusade (see Nishimoto, 172-177; and also Mäkelä, 71), which was held in Bangkok for fifteen days beginning, probably, on 5 March 1956¹. Although originally scheduled to be held at *Sanam Luang*, a large field in the center of Bangkok, the government suddenly withdrew permission and the evening preaching and evangelistic meetings were held at the Kittikhunwittaya School, which was owned by Kru Muan Kittisarn, Boonmark's wife. A second series of revival meetings were held in the CCT church in Trang, southern Thailand, later in March 1956.

T. L. Osborn was a young American Pentecostal preacher and evangelist of 33, born in 1923, who had a dynamic preaching style and was invited to come to Thailand by Verner Raassina. He was accompanied by his wife, Daisy, and by Don and Anna Jean Price. He drew crowds that are supposed to have numbered into the thousands, and several hundred people are said to have converted during the fifteen days of his campaign. An undetermined number of Christians also experienced a religious rebirth. The Thai Pentecostal movement generally marks its birth as an

increasingly dynamic force in Thai Protestantism from these revivals. The Prices stayed on in Thailand for a time and evidently played an important role in sustaining Osborn's initial impact.

There was an immediate impact on the FFFM's work, one that presaged the explosive potential of the Pentecostal movement in Thailand. In Ban Huey Swing, the FFFM had continued to work with the congregation that was founded there in 1949. Missionaries and/or Thai evangelists are reported to have visited the congregation on a monthly basis for some years. In May 1956, Osborn's colleague, Don Price preached at the dedication of a new church building; when people in Bangkok learned that Price would preach in Huey Swing quite a number of them traveled there to take part. Price preached on the subject of baptism by the Holy Spirit, and during the dedication service people began to speak in tongues. There was "an outpouring of the spirit," and membership in the church quickly rose to over 100. The FFFM put Maha Mali in charge of the church. Ruohomäki reports that the Huey Swing revival manifested itself in a strong anti-Buddhist stand, which soon provoked a reaction against and persecution of the church. This "time of testing" led, not long afterwards, to congregation's demise. Ruohomäki claims that most of the local Christians moved away from Huey Swing for economic reasons, but he leaves the strong impression that persecution was also a factor. He also reports that Maha Mali soon went over to the Churches of Christ mission and eventually became a Catholic, ostensibly for financial reasons. He concludes, "The end of the Hueswing church can be described as sad. Its good start as [an] indigenous people's movement was over." (Ruohomäki, 41-44)

The results of the Osborn Crusade were much more long lasting among the churches of the CCT's Second District, Chiang Rai Province, located in the far north of Thailand. It began with the visits of two young men, Samaan Vannakiat [ສາມັນ ວັນນະກິດ] & Chaiyong Watanachantin, [ไชยวงศ์ วัฒนจันทร์], who experienced a profound conversion during the Osborn services and were also members of CCT churches. They felt called to carry word of what they had experienced to other CCT churches, including those in Chiang Rai Province. In that same year, 1956, they toured the churches of the Second District, witnessing to the work of the Holy Spirit and holding meetings that stirred up some interest. They also stirred up controversy.

As small groups of Pentecostals began to form, tension arose in various Chiang Rai churches between the Pentecostals and those who remained committed to the older form of faith of the CCT churches. The result was that the Pentecostal groups left their former churches to found Pentecostal congregations. (Ruohomäki, 73, 75; Nishimoto, 68-69).

Subsequently, FFFM missionaries, along with Ach. Boonmark Kittisarn, began to visit the Chiang Rai churches. In 1958, Verner Raassina and Reino Vatanen visited the five groups that had formed independent churches up to that time. In three of them they found about 100 believers each, while in the other two there were about 30 to 40 members. Most or all of these members were evidently former members of CCT congregations. The following year, 1959, the Tynkkynens, new FFFM missionaries visited Chiang Rai and decided to make it their home. (Ruohomäki, 75-77)

Ruohomäki is somewhat defensive about charges of sheep stealing levelled against the FFFM by the CCT. He writes,

In the beginning of the work most of the converts came from a Presbyterian [i.e. CCT] background. Many of them were just nominal Christians without personal experience of regeneration. Also the Christian conduct of many of them was of low standard, use of tobacco and alcohol was accepted. Many of the nominal Christians who attended the meetings became convicted of their sins, repented and asked for water baptism.

He puts the CCT churches in the wrong, suggesting that they excommunicated those who were re-baptized as Pentecostals. He states that these "revived" Christians brought new life to the churches and became active witnesses in the larger community, which "irritated people who considered themselves as good Christians." (Ruohomäki, 75). In any event, he notes that the FFFM was not involved in Chiang Rai when the Pentecostal churches in that province broke away from the CCT. The mission never offered anyone any money or otherwise attempted to entice CCT members away from their churches. (Ruohomäki, 80-82). Ach. Wirachai, it should be noted, also criticizes the leadership of the CCT's Second District, Chiang Rai for requiring anyone who became a Pentecostal to leave its churches. He says that the Pentecostals were left with no choice but to form their own congregations.

Yet, a close reading of Ruohomäki suggests that blame for the antagonism that emerged between Pentecostals and their former churches ran in both directions. He, at least, betrays a clear sense that the Pentecostals felt that they had found a better way, a more biblical way. CCT Christians, accordingly, were not very moral and their churches not alive. The FFFM, once it became involved in Chiang Rai, also rejected the CCT's centralized system of church government as not being biblical. (Ruohomäki, 79-82). Acharn Wirachai, in his interview, noted that he too was converted to Pentecostalism by a visit by Samaan and Chaiyong to Nakhon Pathom, where he lived. In his home CCT church, also, the members did not accept the Pentecostals, who tended to be young, enthusiastic, and inexperienced. He admits that the Pentecostal group "overdid things" because they lacked wise, mature leadership. The Chiang Rai Pentecostals, according to Ruohomäki, also tended to overdo things; at least, he notes that the FFFM missionaries had to correct a number of misunderstandings and theological misinterpretations. The Chiang Rai group, for example, believed in faith healing and its members severely criticized FFFM missionaries for using medicines and visiting doctors. (Ruohomäki, 74).

Nishimoto lends further credence to the sense that the Chiang Rai Pentecostal churches went through a period of intense, impatient enthusiasm by his observation that they felt as if John Sung had returned to Thailand again, recalling the overwhelming enthusiasm engendered by the Chinese evangelist some 17 years earlier. Miraculous healings were reported. People felt that God had sent the original team of Samaan and Chaiyong. (Nishimoto, 60). It is likely, in sum, that the Pentecostal converts confronted the CCT traditionalists with an almost explosive, impatient intensity of faith, which the traditionalists combated with a stubborn, impatient intransigence. In the end, however we view the matter, the FFFM by 1960 had established a strong cluster of local churches in Chiang Rai Province, a cluster that soon spread to areas where there had been no Christians previously.

Beyond '56

It can be argued, then, that Thai Pentecostalism actually began in 1956, its moment of birth being the Osborn Crusade services of March or April of that year. The FFFM, as the only Pentecostal mission in Thailand at the time, was the most immediate beneficiary of the Osborn Crusade. Its work received new impetus, and it

began to have a growing number of churches. In 1957, the team of Samaan and Chaiyong visited Nakhon Pathom and held meetings for young people at the CCT's Bamrung Wittiya School. A number of young people joined the Pentecostal cause, including as noted already Ach. Wirachai Kowae, who eventually broke with the FFFM and was instrumental in founding the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG). Samaan and Chaiyong, in any event, continued to visit other

established churches as well as conducting evangelism among non-Christians. Raassina sometimes accompanied them on their evangelistic trips. (Nishimoto, 64-65). In 1957, Boonmark Kittisarn also founded the "Bangkok Church," which was consciously intended to become the home of people who converted during the Osborn Crusade. While this church was not under the FFFM, it was an allied independent church.

The following year, 1958, saw further advances. According to Nishimoto, the FFFM founded the Thon Buri Full Gospel Church during 1958. It initially had six members and considered itself a Chinese church. For a time it met in the Raassinas' home until it could rent a larger house of its own in 1959. The congregation did not build its own church building until 1964, and Nishimoto notes, perhaps somewhat critically, that the FFFM did not devote itself to developing this church into a strong congregation. Part of the problem was that the FFFM missionaries themselves found Thon Buri too expensive to live in. Most FFFM missionaries, furthermore, preferred working in rural areas where they met with a greater response. (Nishimoto, 64). In more recent years, the Pentecostal movement and its mega-churches ("mega" by Thailand's more modest standards) have met with its greatest success in urban centers. The Osborn Crusade might be taken as the birth of urban Pentecostalism as well, but it is important to remember that the FFFM itself focused on rural areas. The rural work in Petchabun Province, meanwhile, also saw some growth during 1958. In November of that year, the FFFM established the Lom Sak Church with 14 baptized members. At the beginning, the congregation did not have its own church building as the FFFM was not able to provide funds for one. Eventually the Pehkonens, the resident missionary family, and Don Price made personal donations so that a building could be erected, which was completed and dedicated in 1964. (Ruohomäki, 49-50)

By 1960, then, the FFFM had an increasingly strong ecclesiastical base in three locations, Thon Buri, Petchabun, and Chiang Rai. Nishimoto indicates that the

mission then began to feel the need for a Bible school to supplement the personal training of workers done by individual missionaries. In September 1960, the FFFM thus founded the Full Gospel Bible School in Bangkok, which initially held three-month training sessions during the rainy season (May-October) for rural church leaders. (Nishimoto, 65). This school was more commonly known as the Muban Sethakit Bible School, and was established because of a split among the Pentecostals, described below, that forced the FFFM to set up its own school. (see Ruohomäki, 111-114).

In the meantime, the financial situation of the FFFM missionaries was also improving. As we have noted earlier, during the first ten years or more of the mission's history members of the FFFM tended to be quite poor by missionary standards. Although Ruohomäki is not very clear on the matter, evidently the Bank of Finland gave Finnish missionaries working overseas special exchange rates or otherwise provided some form of financial benefits to those missionaries, which meant that the FFFM in Thailand had more money to hire evangelists and church workers and to build church buildings. The mission also began to receive more support from Pentecostal churches in the United States and Finland. (Ruohomäki, 51-52).

Only three years after the seminal Osborn Crusade, however, the FFFM had to face a major crisis, which was caused by Ach. Boonmark. In 1959, Boonmark had an opportunity to visit Finland and the United States, and while he was in the U.S. he came into contact with the United Pentecostal Church. The UPC, preaching the doctrine of "Jesus Only," rejected baptism according to the triune formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and taught that only those who are baptized in the singular name of Jesus can be saved. Boonmark accepted the UPC's approach and was accordingly re-baptized. After he returned to Thailand, he began to preach the Jesus Only doctrine and, evidently in 1960², he led the Bangkok Church out of its association with the FFFM, established formal ties with the American UPC, and created a new, independent denomination. In

the meantime, he also visited the FFFM's Chiang Rai churches, and in an almost bizarre replay of the visits he had made earlier with Samaan and Chaiyong, he went around to the churches preaching against the FFFM as he had just three years earlier preached against the CCT. The FFFM missionary in

Chiang Rai, Aleksi Tynkkynen, tried to counter Boonmark's Jesus Only message, but when he left to go on furlough in 1961 many of the Chiang Rai members left the FFFM to form United Pentecostal Church congregations associated with Boonmark. (Ruohomäki, 105-106). Evidently, in both Bangkok and Chiang Rai a number of the rising stars in the Thai Pentecostal movement joined Boonmark, whose name carried immense weight in that movement.

The split in Chiang Rai exposed what some critics of the FFFM in Pentecostal circles consider to be one of its central weaknesses, namely its unwillingness to establish a denominational structure for its churches. According to Wirachai, the FFFM wanted the church in Thailand to be a movement rather than an organization, and its members resisted strongly the idea of setting up a church organization. They also found no warrant for denominational structures in the New Testament. The result, Wirachai argues, was that the FFFM churches lacked unity, while the FFFM itself still worked an organizational way while refusing to admit that it did so. One practical consequence of the FFFM stand against denominational organizations was that it had no legal body that could hold title to church properties. All of those properties were in the names of private individuals, usually local church leaders. Nishimoto notes that there was at least one case where an FFFM local leader followed Boonmark and, since he held title to the church building, forced the FFFM congregation out of their own building. The real impact of this event was that it led other FFFM churches to begin to distrust the members who legally owned their churches, and some even began to call for the establishment of a legal foundation (*muniti*) for FFFM churches, something the FFFM itself refused to entertain. (Nishimoto, 79).³

By 1960, the FFFM had been in Thailand for fourteen years, but its work had only just begun to grow in the previous three or four years. Some of its achievements seemed to be quite solid, and it is clear that many of its members gave themselves in a sacrificial way to the work. We have not included those personal stories of sacrifice and struggle—including the loss of several family members—here, but they are a real part of the early history of the FFM. Still, the FFFM horizon in 1960 was perhaps less bright than might have been expected, primarily because of the tensions between Pentecostals themselves. Those tensions, in the years after 1960, would result in an

increasingly large number, almost bewildering array of independent Pentecostal missions and groups. Clearly regretting the situation that evolved, Ruohomäki asks,

Unfortunately Western Pentecostal divisions were established in Thailand. We may ask if this was really necessary. Were there any possibilities to avoid this? In which areas had a compromise been necessary? Were the Biblical principles the most difficult obstacles or was it a question about power? Who should have given in and in what areas? (Ruohomäki, 124)

These were questions that were not yet being asked in 1960, but the conditions that led to the Pentecostal divisions were already emerging, and the FFFM had already begun to lose members to another Pentecostal group.

Conclusion

It is difficult to estimate the significance of the FFFM's role in the history of Protestantism in Thailand. An important part of that significance, surely, has to do with its relationship with Ach. Boonmark Kittisarn. The FFFM, evidently, provided Boonmark with an alternative home to the CCT, one to which he moved within two years of the Raassina's arrival in 1946. If the FFFM had never been established in Thailand, he probably would have found a home with some other of the several evangelical missions that were appearing in Thailand in the late 1940s and early 1950s⁴; so, it cannot be said the FFFM's relationship with Boonmark changed the course of Thai Protestant history. Yet, it did change the course of Boonmark's thinking, and without his prestige and dynamic leadership, it is not likely that Pentecostalism could have grown as rapidly as it did. It is also possible that the Pentecostal movement in Thailand might not have fragmented so quickly, if Boonmark had not taken up with Jesus Only Pentecostalism and drawn off FFFM members to his new denomination. However things might have worked out otherwise, in any event, the Boonmark-FFFM partnership of the late 1940s and the 1950s was an important one for Thai Protestantism. It opened the door for the widely influential Pentecostal movement and provided something of a "third way" for Thai Protestants, an alternative which stood apart from the ecumenical, mainline CCT and the evangelical missions, such as the Southern Baptists, World Evangelism Crusade (WEC), and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) among many others.

Along this same line, the FFFM made a major contribution to the development of Thai Pentecostalism when it invited T. L. Osborn to hold his crusade in Bangkok in 1956. If the Osborn Crusade did not have the decisive impact of the Sung Revivals of 1938 and 1939, it is only because Thai Protestantism had become a much more complex and divided phenomenon by 1956. In a real sense, furthermore, Osborn was working over ground already plowed by Sung and other revivalist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Osborn was not a new story for Thailand, and Pentecostals found in Thailand groups of Christians who were already sympathetic to their approach to the Christian faith.

In a larger sense, then, it may be claimed that the FFFM did not represent as significant a change in Thai Protestant history as it might seem. Certainly, in terms of missionary methods and attitudes about people of other faiths, the FFFM's members followed in the footsteps of the older missions. At the same time, they were but one of a number of new missions that appeared in Thailand after World War II, many of which refused to work under the umbrella of the CCT and were even antagonistic towards the CCT. Like the old-time Presbyterians and Baptists and the new-time post-War missions, the FFFM came with what it felt to be a unique vision for the Gospel in Thailand. It went through a period of "orientation," and eventually established a number of churches that contained a few thousand communicant members. It quickly became, that is, one piece of the intricate, still largely uncharted puzzle of Protestant history in Thailand. When one reads the FFFM story as told by Ruohomäki and Nishimoto, one cannot help but be struck again by the way events bend and warp the best of Christian intentions, leading dedicated and faithful people off down blind alleys and dead end streets as well as providing moments for celebration.

A Statistical Postscript

The sources used for this essay, provide various statistics for the FFFM. Ruohomäki states that as of 1983 the FFFM had ten churches in Petchabun Province totaling 482 communicant members. He says that the Thon Buri Church had 320 members in 1981. In Chiang Rai Province, in 1983, the FFFM had 15 churches with a total membership of 1,062. (Ruohomäki, 63, 71, 78). These figures suggest a total of 26 churches with something between 1,900 and 2,000 total members in 1983.

Smiths claims that the FFFM had 3,600 members in 57 churches in 1978, but that revised memberships statistics showed a total membership for early 1982 of "just over 2,800." (Smith, *Siamese Gold*, 251). Writing more recently, Nishimoto records that as of 1996 the Full Gospel Churches in Thailand (FGC), the denominational organization of the FFFM churches, had 77 churches and 4,200 members. (Nishimoto, 103). The 2003 *Thailand Christian Directory* lists a total of 103 churches for the FGC.

Bibliography

In English:

Mäkelä, Jaakko. Khrischak Issara: *The Independent Churches in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, Thailand, their Historical Background, Contextual Setting, and Theological Thinking*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2000.

Ruohomäki, Jouko. "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission in Thailand in 1946-1985: A Descriptive History." Master's Thesis, Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary, 1988.

Zehner, Edwin. "Church Growth and Culturally Appropriate Leadership: Three Examples From the Thai Church." Unpublished paper, School of World Mission, 1987.

In Thai:

โรเบิร์ต นิชิมโตะ. *ประวัติศาสตร์ของคริสตจักรอิสระในประเทศไทย ค.ศ. 1946-1996*. กรุงเทพฯ: บริษัทร็อกคอมพานี, 1996. (Nishimoto, Robert. *Pentecostal and Charismatic History in Thailand, 1946-1996*. Bangkok: The Rock Company, 1996).

วิรัช ไกรวงศ์ (Wirachai Kowae). Interview with the author at Ach. Wirachai's office, Rom Yen Church, 8 August 1997.

¹Nishimoto is confusing regarding the dates of the Osborn Revivals. In one place, he states that the revivals began on 5 March 1956 and lasted for fifteen days. (page 173). In another place, he states that the revivals took place in April 1956. (page 59). The earlier date looks to be the more correct one.

²The exact dates of Boonmark's visit to the United States and of subsequent events in Thailand are not clear. Ruohomäki states that he visited the U.S. in 1959. (page 104). Nishimoto reports that his break with the FFFM took place in 1960. (pages 65-66).

³A number of newer missions in Thailand have shared the FFFM's doctrine that there should no church structure over the local church. In the course of my research in 1997, someone told me that the Thai churches formed by such missions have generally been unhappy with this

doctrine. First, people in Thai society find part of their identity in the formal organizations with which they are affiliated, and it is important to them that their organization have legal standing. Second, the missions have not applied their doctrine of no organizational structure to the missions themselves, which means that effectively a mission such as the FFFM retains power over the churches while denying Thai church leaders any platform for the exercise of authority. Unfortunately, I cannot recover the source of these insights, but they are still worth passing along-for possible future testing, if for no other reason.

*Boonmark, for example, developed contacts with the first World Evangelism Crusade (WEC) missionaries to Thailand, the Overgaards, who arrived in 1947. Wilf Overgaard, interview with the author at the Payap University Archives, 12 December 1990.