

CONVERSION



**Discovering the conversion of Thai Buddhists
towards Christianity**

Jurjen de Bruijne
Supervised by Dr. M. Visser, OMF Thailand

Discovering the conversion of Thai Buddhists towards Christianity

Author: Jurjen de Bruijne
Bachelor of Theology, Christelijke
Hogeschool Ede

Commissioned by: Dr. Marten Visser, Church planter OMF
Thailand

Supervisor: Alie van Dalen, supervisor Bachelor of
Theology

Januari, 2010

Contents

1. Introduction.....	- 3 -
1.1 METHODOLOGY	- 5 -
2. Comparing statistic results	- 7 -
2.1 COMPARISON OF OLD DATA AND SURVEY FINDINGS.....	- 7 -
2.2 FINDINGS OF NEW DATA.....	- 9 -
3. Themes in conversion stories	- 11 -
3.1 ATTRACTION.....	- 12 -
3.2 POWER.....	- 18 -
4. Medium	- 24 -
4.1 BOOK.....	- 25 -
4.2 BIBLE.....	- 26 -
4.3 TRACTS.....	- 27 -
5. Obstacles in conversion	- 30 -
6. Being Christian.....	- 33 -
7. Conclusion	- 36 -
7.1 FINDINGS	- 36 -
7.2 OTHER CONCLUSIONS	- 38 -
Bibliography	- 41 -

1. Introduction

Conversion is complex. It is about the change in the life of someone, which includes all aspects of being. The way to explain conversion is therefore even more complex. Through the ages, and especially during the last centuries, psychologists, anthropologists, theologians and sociologists are discussing about the definition of and reasons for conversion, and in particular religious conversion. These reasons were seen in social pressure, forcing, marriage, free will, etc. The starting point in this research is to look mainly for reasons of conversion which were mentioned by the converts themselves. With this starting point I will not discuss the question about how deep the conversion goes, or what 'conversion' means for the Thai. Later in my study I recommend further research about this subject, closely related to the phenomenon of falling back.

But whatever the starting point is, this discussion is about the religious behavior of a person, as part of a group, but most of all as an individual. In discovering these paths of conversion there are different ways to assess information. This research is not about quantitative information on conversion, but mainly about qualitative information.

This study is about the religious conversion of Buddhists from Thailand who converted to Christianity in the last eight years. The reason of doing this research is directly found in the promotion thesis of dr. M. Visser. He works in Thailand as a 'church planter' for the organization OMF (Overseas Mission Fellowship) and in 2008 he promoted on the subject of conversion growth of protestant churches in Thailand.

I will give a short summary of his thesis.

In his report dr. Visser writes about the reasons for conversion to Christianity by ethnic Thai people from an ethnic Thai background to Christianity and about the growth of churches in Thailand. Today the protestant churches of Thailand have a number of 325.000 members, which is 0,3% of the total population of the country. But the churches are growing, 3,5% faster than the growth rate of the total population

of Thailand. The reason cannot be biological. Most of them are not growing up in a Christian family. Two thirds of all the church members are first generation Christians. This means that the church is mainly growing because of conversion and not because of biological growth.

In these churches, there are more women than men, and a great percentage of them comes from tribal people from the north of Thailand (40%). There is also a high percentage of high educated and urban people. Dr. Visser shows that the reason for this is not that they are more open for the gospel, but they just have more opportunities to hear about it.

As said, the church is mainly growing because of conversion. But, what is the reason for this conversion? Dr. Visser's research shows the importance of relationships. For example, Thai people who have a Christian family member are hundreds of times more likely to become a Christian than those without Christian family members. The same can be seen in the media: research shows that 60% of all the converted people mentioned pressed media as one of the most important media in their conversion, which is mostly related to relationships. This is an unexpected outcome because pressed media seem to be more effective in evangelism than TV, radio and internet. In the research of church growth in Thailand can be found that young churches (pointing at the age of the church, not of its members) grow faster than older churches and that charismatic churches grow faster than churches that are more traditional.

The church is growing, faster than in all previous years. This research is about the qualitative data of the converts and therefore this research can be seen as the story behind the numbers. It is about describing the factors in the pathways of converts during their change to Christianity.

Therefore, the main question of this research is:

Which factors play a role in the conversion of Thai Buddhists to Christianity and what does the pathway of their conversion look like? I will try to find this answer with interviews and personal story's of the converts. With this method I hope to find which aspects are playing an important role in the conversion of Thai Buddhist towards Christianity.

This research is meant for all those who want to know more about the paths of conversion. I will not give recommendations on how to convert Thai Buddhists

(which is, to begin with, not possible), but just present the information I found and I will try to give an understanding of Thai Buddhists. I assume that there already is knowledge about Buddhism and Thailand and therefore I will not present basic information about these phenomena.

1.1 Methodology

Presumptions

In order to make the research not too big and to get a good reliable view on conversion growth in Thailand some presumptions were made for this research.

- It is about the conversion of all converts to the *protestant* churches in Thailand of *all kinds of denominations*.
- The interviewed converts are ethnic Thai and born in Buddhist families.
- It is about the conversion growth of the last eight years (people baptized in or after the year 2000).
- It is about all of Thailand so people were interviewed from three main regions in Thailand: Isaan, Chiang Mai and Bangkok.

Sampling

In the years during which dr. Visser did his research, he made a database which contained all the churches of Thailand. In the last years the TCRC (Thai Christian Resource Centre) took care of this database. These data were used to select parishes for the interviews with converts. In every region (Isaan, Bangkok, Chiang Mai) I selected churches randomly, forming a sample of nine churches per region. A Thai worker in the office of dr. Visser called these churches to plan a day of visit (I do not speak Thai) and asked if I could interview people who were baptized in the last eight years.

Interviews

The interviews have two parts. The first part is a questionnaire about conversion and some personal information. I copied this questionnaire from the research of dr. Visser. I do this in order to have the possibility to compare my information to his to see how valid my data is. The second part of the interviews is a list of questions, which depended on the answers the respondents gave at the questionnaire. In these

interviews I tried to get the story of their conversion clear and to know more about their motivations and inspirations to become a Christian.

I worked with a translator, which was not always that easy. Because I could not hear the information directly, some information was lost and getting a clear picture demanded many more questions than the ones that I had prepared before. The structure of these interviews was therefore also changing during my research. But at the end I had 76 interviews with Christians who where converted in the last eight years. Not all of these interviews will be used. Some of the interviews I did were with people who grew up in Christian families and of course even though they can be converted, but they do not fit in the presumption I made. So after a selection of interviews I come up with a total of 63 useful interviews.

2. Comparing statistic results

One of the reasons to do the statistic part of this research about conversion was to see how reliable these data are. Because I had the same questionnaire as dr. Visser, I also have the same kind of data. In this chapter I will compare my statistic results to dr. Visser's to see if my research is significant and to see if there are big differences. Because my results are only about Christians born in non-Christian families I can only compare data that describe this group.

2.1 Comparison of Old Data and survey findings¹

In this part I will look at the 'standard' data that are related to conversion and the factors of it. The reason to do this is to get clear how valid my own data are, compared to dr. Visser's. As said I did this research among 63 people, all born in non-Christian families and baptized in the last eight years (since 2000). 41% of them were men and 59% were women. This equals dr. Visser's findings and shows the openness of women to the gospel. Another number illustrating this openness is that, according to my research, in 61% of the marriages the woman is the first who became Christian, as opposed to 26% of the marriages in which the man was first, and in 13% of the cases both converted at the same time. The difference between sexes is bigger than can be seen in the research of dr. Visser, but the ranking is still the same.

In 81.5% of the cases the spouse is also Christian, almost the same number as found by dr. Visser. The numbers on Christian and non-Christian family members are a little bit different. 40% of all the people I have interviewed (all from non-Christian families) said they do not have Christian family members, while this number was 7,6% according to dr. Visser's study. This is a huge difference and therefore I compared the interviews with the survey. Six people were found who said in the interviews that they do have Christian family members, even though they filled in that they haven't. Another five said they don't have Christian relatives, while they also filled in on the same survey, that their spouse is a Christian. So these 11 persons didn't give valid information about this subject and therefore I keep them out of the results of this part.

¹ All the data of dr. Visser that I refer to can be found in his study: Appendix 2.3, P. 173

Without these people, the percentage is much lower, 20.6% of the converts do not have Christian family members. So, for some reason, people do not count all their relatives as 'relatives' and that can explain the difference in the answers that they filled in. But 20,6% is still more than 7,6%. There is no further explanation.

On the question about how many non-Christian family members they have, the ranking is similar to dr. Visser's. I found some more people with non-Christian family members, but looking at the previous question about Christian family, this is logic.

The rest of the data is about some factors that influence conversion. I will tell something about the differences in data.

There are some findings on who was the *first person to tell* the respondent about Jesus. I have got some different data than dr. Visser but the biggest difference is in the percentage of the people who filled in *spouse* and *missionary*. In my research I found 8% less people who filled in *spouse* (1,9% in my research; 9,6% in dr. Visser's). In the interviews I found that many people named that their spouse was already a Christian but another person told them for the first time *meaningfully* about Jesus, or that they knew already about Jesus before their marriage.

Another difference is that I found 8,3% more people who filled in 'missionary' in the first contact than dr. Visser did (15,9% in my research; 7,3% in dr. Visser's). The reason for this difference can be found in the high percentage of people from SuarnapumChurch (3.4) of Bangkok who gave this answer. This is a young church, founded by a missionary from OMF and a lot of the people I have interviewed became Christian through his work. On a small research that can make a big difference.

The category of *most important persons* in conversion shows a smaller difference. Most of the numbers are the same. Surprisingly now the number of people who filled in *spouse* is almost the same as in dr. Visser's findings. The difference is that in my research there are less other Christians who are important in the conversion (4,8% in my research; 10,5% in dr. Visser's.) Another difference is that in my research 14,3% mentioned *friends* as important in the conversion, compared to 10,7% in dr. Visser's. The numbers about the age of the evangelist shows the same ranking as dr. Visser and no special difference were found.

Some differences can be found in the category of media. Because of these differences and because I interviewed people about this subject, a later chapter will elaborate this further. While the ranking in importance of the different media is the same (which can

support the unexpected outcome of dr. Visser, see introduction) the percentages are a little different. For more data, see chapter 4.

About the category of experience. The most important difference comparing to dr. Visser's research is the exposure to miracles. 33,3% of all the respondents filled in that a miracle was the most important factor in their conversion, in the research of dr. Visser this is 20,9%. About this subject I will say some more in chapter 3.2. On other aspects there are no big differences in this category. 14,3% of the respondents filled in bible studies, to 19,7% in dr. Visser's data. And 17,5% filled in the attraction of the Christian life of other people to 15,8% in dr. Visser's data.

So far this comparison. There were of course more data to compare, but not all of them had a meaningful link with this research. The data I compared here with the data of dr. Visser showed great similarities on most of the subject. While this research was done among just 63 people, the data are similar to the data of dr. Visser and therefore they underline the validity of other parts of this research.

2.2 Findings of New Data

In the interviews I did I found some more new and important data that I will present here. Some of them I present later in the research (like data about media, chapter 4). All these data are linked to the subject of conversion.

The first thing I will elaborate here is about the initiative of conversion. I asked people about the first time that they had serious contact with someone about Jesus and I asked them who had the initiative in this talks. 13% of all the respondents said that they had the initiative in the talks and 87% of them said that the other person started talking about Jesus without being asked by the respondent. This shows that even though people are open to the gospel, most of the time they are not actively looking for it.

Another thing I wanted to know was if people already knew something about Christianity before their first serious contact about Jesus. 58,7% says that they heard of Christianity before and 41,3% says they did not. This was a question about *if* they heard about Christianity but I also asked about *what* they heard. The answers were really differing. Many mentioned that a missionary told them something about prosperity and others mentioned things like tracts, movies, and religious lessons at

school. The other 41,3% did not know anything about Christianity before their first serious contact.

I also asked about another factor that can play a role in conversion of people: family. I asked to people if there were Christians in the family before their conversion. 42,9% says *yes* and 57,1% says that they did not have Christian relatives before their conversion. Even though family is very important in Thailand, this is not necessarily a factor of the conversion of Thai Buddhists to Christianity and a great percentage of people dare to take a first step into a 'foreign' religion.

The last statistic new finding I have is about the time between conversion and baptism. Conversion does not always occur at a specific moment. I asked people how long they have been a believer. After they filled this in I asked them if this was also the moment of their baptism. For some of them this was the same but for many it was not. After collecting all the information, I found that the average of the time between conversion and baptism is eleven months. 31,7% of all the respondents said that their date of baptism was the same as the date on which they became a Christian.

To all the churches I visited, I asked information about the baptisms of 2008. The results were that 40.4% of these people were men, 72.8% was born in a non-Christian family and 91% of all those who were baptized in 2008 are still attending the church. With this number, these results of 2008 are almost the same as the average of the last eight years and show the high percentage of women. Moreover, they show that the protestant church of Thailand is a fast growing church with a lot of first generation Christians. Within these churches a lot of members are talking about the reversal of Christians to Buddhism. Looking at these data, this cannot be more than 9%, and most probable this number is not (only) illustrating reversal but it also includes the number of people that have moved to another church or another place.

An explanation of why people believe that many reversals occur can be that people too easily see something as 'conversion'. In Thailand, conversion itself is a far more 'important' happening than baptism (see chapter 7.2), so therefore people with a 'conversion moment' count as 'converts', even before they are baptized.

3. Themes in conversion stories

In this part I will try to find an answer to my major question: which personal factors are important in the conversion of Thai Buddhists to Christianity?

During the interviews I found some major themes which were mentioned frequently. These themes can be seen, according to this research, as the major 'reasons' of conversion of Thai Buddhists to Christianity. The accent of this chapter is on what I found in the interviews and not what I read in literature or found in statistics of others.

During the interviews I heard many reasons or factors which were important in the conversion of Thai Buddhists to Christianity. I categorized all of these reasons in themes giving an answer on the question: what made you decide to become a Christian? I found two main categories that play an important role in conversion: attraction of the life of others and the aspect of power.

The number of people that are in one or both of these categories is high. The most important reason for conversion is attraction (49.2%), and the other important reason is power (46%). While I categorized them, often the respondent could be put in more than one category. Therefore, there is also another 26.9% that named something else than attraction or power. Sometimes in combination with one of the major aspects of attraction and power but also sometimes without these. In some cases, this 'other' means that people named their own decision as the most important reason. Some other things that people mentioned were bible studies or sermons.

But for now we will take a closer look at the major reasons of attraction and power.

3.1 Attraction

The first big reason of conversion is attraction of the life of other Christians. This 'reason' is by far the most important reason for conversion, according to this study (49,2%). In this category I placed all the people who said that what they saw in the life of a Christian attracted them to Christianity, provided that there was a personal relation towards this person, such as family, friends, neighbours or acquaintances. There were also many people talking about testimonies that they heard about things like healing or quitting an addiction, but in most of these cases there was no personal relation to this person and it was not the main reason for their conversion. In this chapter that is about attraction of the life of others I see three main reasons of this attraction: Change, Love and Happiness.

Change

The change of a person from a religion to another is a big thing. In Thailand this change is more than something between you and God: it is also something between you and your family. Even though Thailand is a land of religious freedom, the social pressure can be a hard factor in changing religion. It can be seen as throwing away your Thai identity and accepting a foreign religion and foreign behaviours. During the interviews I also talked with people about their being Christian and reactions of people nearby. A lot of the respondents told that it was hard for their neighbourhood to accept their being Christian, because they do not take part in traditional Thai/Buddhist rituals like merit making. Where these reactions can be difficult to deal with, the behaviour of people who become Christian is also an attractive factor for people in changing their religion. Sunisa², a girl of 17 years old, told about her aunt who was the first in the family who changed to Christianity.

When my aunt became a Christian she was kicked out of her house because of her being Christian. When I saw that my aunt found God more important than her family I started thinking: what is it that she has?

² Interview Sunisa 1.2.3

The perseverance of people who showed how much their new belief means to them brings surprise. This is an old truth, already shown by the early Christian church. This reaction to a remarkable change is something more people said during the interviews. In many ways they talked about the change of morals and values. So not only the change itself but even more the change of morals and values forms a big part of the attraction for people to become Christians. Pae³, a teenager of 16 years old, talks about his friend who became a Christian:

I saw that her life was really different than that of other teenagers. She behaved better and didn't drink. The same with her friends. This was for me a living example [of truth]!

Another testimony is from Pon⁴, a 53 year-old man. The first in his family who became a Christian was his son:

When my son was a teenager he became a Christian. His life changed and we saw that his life was so different from the life of other teenagers!

But while he saw the change, he did not see the need for such change. His wife did and she became a Christian and he remained Buddhist. But:

On a day I realised that the life of my wife was far better than my own and I started to study about it [the bible].(...)I decided that I wanted to quit my life of smoking and drinking and I prayed to God if God wanted to make me free from all these things.

A lot of these living testimonies are about people nearby. Also for PhooLa⁵, an old woman of 73: her son became a Christian. And not only for her, but also for her husband and for a lot of older women in the village, who know their son since he was a kid, were surprised by the change in his life.

³ Interview Pae 3.3.3

⁴ Interview Pon 3.3.4

⁵ Interview PhooLa 1.4.3

*My son, who lived at home, had many troubles and especially with himself.
But when he went to church [and became Christian] he changed enormously!
That change was so big that we as parents were astonished!*

In this village I did interviews with several people who became Christians, and all of them were pointing to this young man; his change impressed them all!

Love

As said, not only seeing a change toward Christianity, but also meeting with Christians (who were already Christian when they met for the first time) is a major reason for conversion. During the interviews the behaviour of Christians they met is mentioned as an influential factor for conversion. A lot of times they spoke, like above, about the morality and values of Christians they met. Of these values, 'loving each other' was coming back frequently during the interviews.

Naiyanan⁶ is a woman of 38 years old. When she was a kid, her father was already a Christian.

When my father had any problems, his Christian friends helped him and I was interested why they did it.

But the most influential person was my classmate. We actually never talk about it [Christianity] together but my classmate was a real-life example. And not only he, especially his family. I saw real love! They loved each other and they talked to each other without arguing. That impressed me!

The love of the family impressed her. It is interesting to see that she says that she did not talk about it, but just saw his life. Nan⁷, a young girl of 15 years old, grew up in a non-Christian family. Her experience is similar.

*A friend of mine really showed the love of God in his life and was therefore a great example for me. We didn't talk that much, but his life was enough!
Important in my conversion was what I saw in other [Christians]!*

⁶ Interview Naiyanan 2.3.2

⁷ Interview Nan 3.2.3

In several other interviews people named love as an important factor. It is not only the love they see in the life of one Christian, but many times they talked about the church as a loving factor. In many interviews people are telling about the great love they found when they entered the church community. A woman of sixty years old⁸ talks about it.

The most important thing in my conversion is the gentleness and love; a love I had never seen before! My own family is not even an example of it, the love in the church is enormous.

The last ‘factor’ in the life of others is a factor which is related to their original religion, Buddhism.

Happiness

Happiness is a subjective concept, but an important one for Thai Buddhist people. Therefore it is not strange to hear this as one of the reasons for conversion. In several interviews people were telling about the attraction of the life of others and the happiness they saw. Like Nisamon⁹, a woman of 41 years old. She was baptized two years ago and talks about a friend who was important for her conversion.

The most influential person in my life was a friend. I saw in the life of this friend real happiness and I wanted to experience that too! I knew this friend already for a long time (...). So I asked to my friend why she had so much happiness in her life. My friend told me that she had ‘tasted Jesus’ and there she found happiness!

Happiness is something that can be seen in many things. In all the cases I found it had nothing to do with material fortune. In the case of Nisamon it is not directly clear what the happiness, that she wanted to experience, was about. But that friend seems to have happiness which was seen in his whole life. The next example is more about the

⁸ Name unknown 1 1.3.1

⁹ Interview Nisamon 2.4.2

happiness in moral behaviour, or the way of living. Narapon¹⁰ is a man of 48 years old and he got in contact with a missionary.

The life of the missionary was a great example of the Life. Therefore the missionary was a real living witness about Jesus (he does not smoke, drink, or gossip, and he works hard!). That made me want to become a Christian as well. I tried to follow this example and became a Christian. Now I'm really happy and have happiness in my life!

Whatever the reason can be, the attraction of the life of people who are Christian or who became Christian is an important factor of attraction. For what I found in the interviews, this is also the most frequently mentioned reason of the conversion of Thai Buddhist towards Christianity.

While I found many converts talking about attraction during the interviews, this cannot be linked to the statistic data. In the survey people were asked about the most important experience in coming to faith (see table 3.1.1.). Just 17,5% of the people filled in that the Christian life of another person was the most important experience in their conversion, while I found in the interviews something really different. There are different ways to explain this deviation.

Experience	Own research	Dr. Visser
Miracle	33.3%	20.9%
Bible study	14.3%	19.7%
Testimony	25.4%	26.4%
Christian life	17.5%	15.8%
Other	9.5%	6.4%

First, there is a difference in what people named as a life example and attraction in common. Attraction does not always mean that it is about the life of only one person. For example, sometimes people talk about love in a group, like a church or a family. The attractions they feel are not in the life of one specific person, but in the behaviour of a group.

Second, the experience of seeing a Christian life, is not the only part of the attraction. The second important experience in the path of conversion seems to be, according to the data, testimonies. And in the data of dr. Visser, this category is even the biggest group. Testimonies are not always a story that can be heard. Just seeing something

¹⁰ Interview Narapon 3.4.4

happen in a Christian life, can also be named a testimony. So then, it is not the attraction of one whole life in particular, but just one happening that can be named as a testimony. When people are telling about such testimonies in the interviews, I count them as an 'attraction', because people are telling their experience, which is the most important reason in their conversion.

For what I have found, these two explanations are the best to explain the deviation between the data and the interviews. When I count the experience of testimonies with the experience of the Christian life, I come to a number of 42.9%, which is closer to the number if 49% of people who named, according to the interviews, attraction as the most important reason. This percentage stresses the important role that attraction plays in the path of conversion in the life of Thai Buddhists to Christianity.

3.2 Power

Another very important reason of conversion can be found in the category of power (46%). Many people named it in different ways, aspects of something that can be seen as intervention by God. Also in this chapter I distinguish several 'aspects' of this power: Healing, Spiritual experiences and God is answering.

Healing

The number of people who mentioned healing as an important reason is smaller than the number of people who talked about the attraction of the life of others, but it is still a big group.

For many people who have an experience with healing, Christianity was not unknown. Most of them got in contact with Christians and talked to them about Christianity. Therefore, for most of them it is not the first contact with Christianity but it is the last step they need to come to believe and therefore it can be seen as an important reason for conversion. I will give three stories of people talking about healing as the turning point in their conversion. Kiang Lum¹¹, a woman of 42 years old, Wong¹², a woman of 59 years old and Home¹³, a woman of 36 years old.

In this first story the healing is coupled with the conversion itself. Therefore, the healing is not the direct reason for conversion, but a direct result of it. And this result was also important in her getting stronger in faith.

(...)Another thing was probably the most important in my conversion to Christianity. For many, many years I was sick because of a blood illness and sugar illness. We were poor because we needed a lot of money for all the research. The day I started believing, my illness disappeared. Exactly on the moment I started believing! Jesus has given me a new life, everlasting life but also a new life now here.

¹¹ Interview Kiang Lum 1.1.2

¹² Interview Wong 3.3.5

¹³ Interview Home 1.3.3

For the other two stories the conversion is also directly linked to healing. But here the healing is a direct cause of the conversion.

I was at the big C (a shopping centre) and met a Christian there. While I was shopping in the big C, my child was sitting outside. This Christian saw my daughter and went to her and saw that my daughter was ill, she had a kidney disease. When I came back from shopping, this woman told me that I had to pray for my child to God and that He can heal. This woman invited me for the church service and after praying my daughter was healed. (...) God used this woman to lead me to Christ.

My husband was ill. I went to the church because my kid was part of a compassion program of the church for poor children. Later on I took my sick husband to the church and there we met the pastor who said to us: "Hand over your problems to the Lord, he will help". We prayed and my husband became healthy again (...) In that time I had an HIV infection and I was healed as well. At that moment I thought: it is time to become a Christian!

These three stories give examples of how miracles can be an important reason for conversion. All of these women talked about the healing as a 'proof' of truth and linked their conversion directly to this 'proof'.

Not for everyone their healing is the direct reason. For many of them it is a part of the sequence of things they experienced. Pong¹⁴, a boy of 19 years old tells about his dad during the interview. In his conversion his dad played a very important role and he was a real example of love for him. He tells about a moment of healing.

Important in my conversion was the moment that my foot was broken. I had a lot of pain and my father came to me and prayed with me if God could heal the foot. A day later my foot was healed! The pain disappeared and that was really important in the growth of my faith!

¹⁴ Interview Pong 3.4.6

Nupai¹⁵, a man of 74, also experienced the healing power of God. During the interview he tells many stories that happened at the time of his conversion. One of them is this one about how God healed him in a for him unexpected way.

I was in the hospital and I needed a surgery on my heart. I was really sick. While I laid there in the hospital a pastor came in my room; he did not know me! This pastor had heard from God that he had to enter this room and so he did. He started praying for me and the next day, the day of the surgery, the doctor came and said to me: you are not ill anymore, and you are free to go. First I didn't believe it, but after a few days I became sure and was impressed!

Spiritual experiences

Some of the people I interviewed were talking about experiences with God which were not directly related to the healing of illness or something else. Siriphon¹⁶, a woman of 40 years old, tells an emotional story of how God intervened in her life on a moment she really needed it.

My conversion started when my life was a mess and I felt hopeless. On a day I was riding on my motorcycle and screamed to God: 'If you are real, please show yourself!'. Five days later somebody of a church came to my shop to buy something. He turned on a Christian music CD. On that moment it touched me and I started crying. The man talked to me about the music and about what they were singing. I did not really listen to what he was telling but something happened inside me. I felt a stream of happiness coming from inside of me; I didn't know what it was but something happened.

Most of these experienced happened 'on the right moment'. When people are in need, spiritually or physically, God helped. That people experienced this in many different ways can be seen in the following stories. I interviewed an old couple, living in the rural lands of northeast Thailand. Their daughter started believing when she lived in Taiwan. She called her parents multiple times to tell them about the gospel, but they

¹⁵ Interview Nupai 1.1.4

¹⁶ Interview Siriphon 2.4.4

both did not want to know about this foreign religion. But for both of them this changed in a special way.

Somphaan¹⁷, a woman of 68, was her whole life a spiritual medium to the ghost world.

My daughter called a pastor of the village nearby and the pastor came to our home, which I did not know. The night before the pastor visited me, I dreamed. I dreamed that someone came into our home and that this person was singing. I didn't understand it. But the next day this pastor came, and without telling it, the pastor started to sing Christian songs. That was a sign for me! I became a Christian. But I also had many amulets en spiritual things. I threw it all away and I felt that all the spirits left my house. A few days later I dreamed again. I dreamed about God carrying me in His arms!

Her husband is sitting nearby when she tells her story. After her conversion he became more persevered in his critics about this religion. His name is Taakloohn¹⁸, a man of 65 years old, he was a monk for all of his life. For a long time he was against this new religion. But his life also turned radically after a special experience.

On some moment I had a dream, a vision. I saw many bodies. The people were burnt from the lower part of their body and they changed to ash. Then God came and brought all the ashes back to life! I also saw myself burning, and I was scared. God came and made me alive again. I was a monk for many, many years, but when I dreamed this I started doubting. On a day I had some wound on my leg. I prayed to God; 'If you can heal me, I will believe!' The next day I woke up and I was healed. From that moment I became a Christian.

For Somphaan and Taakloohn it would be difficult to get in contact with Christians. They only knew their daughter as a Christian, but she lived far away and moreover there wasn't a church nearby. Yet for some reason it seems to be that the people who are most difficult to reach, have the most extraordinary experiences with God.

¹⁷ Interview Somphaan 1.4.4

¹⁸ Interview Taakloohn 1.4.5

God is answering

A large group of people named the importance of Gods answer in their life. For some it was the final proof that God exists, for others it was the most important thing in their conversion. Central theme of these stories is that people have questions, dilemma's and problems they face in their life. They brought it to God and found an answer. Like Priow¹⁹, a young girl of fourteen years old.

The most important thing in my path to conversion was that I prayed for my problems and things that where difficult at school. I prayed to God and He helped me. After that I also prayed for a good atmosphere at home and so it happened! Also I prayed a lot for my friends, for health and I saw time and time again that God helped me!

Nat²⁰, also a young girl of 15 years old, saw the same in her life. During the interview she told me that she is the only Christian in her class and that it is sometimes very hard for her to find ways to speak and to find solutions for her problems.

Many times when I have problems I pray to God and God shows a way out, a way which I never expected, especially at school, in my friendships when I talk about Jesus. A few weeks ago I was sick. So my mother came to me and put her hand on me and prayed. Soon after the prayer I was healed!

The importance of prayer was mentioned many times. This study shows the big influence of prayer. Repeatedly people were talking about the large role that prayer played in their conversion. View²¹, a woman of 27, experienced the power of prayer during her search for satisfaction.

My parents are divorced and I was sad, disappointed and depressed. I tried to pray and felt that God was real! I felt that He was giving His peace to me. Before I became a Christian I was a real Buddhist. I gave food to the monks and did other 'good things'; but all the time I felt that it was not satisfying.

¹⁹ Interview Priow 3.4.7

²⁰ Interview Nat 1.4.2

²¹ Interview View 2.1.6

When I saw that God was with me in the prayer I felt satisfied and became a believer.

Chat²², a man of 47 years old, experienced this power also in a concrete way. While his brother was already a Christian he was trying to form an opinion on it.

One day I was walking and saw that there was a boy who was almost drowning. I jumped in the water to save him, but then I realized that I couldn't swim! I prayed to God if God wanted to help me, and so it happened! That was for me the moment I started believing. In the months after this I saw that God helped me with my problems and I prayed to God many times!

This chapter about power can help realize again that conversion is not something you can force, plan or organize. In this last chapter the dependency on God as the key factor in a conversion is shown in many ways. For some it was a healing or a dream, and for others it became clear that the only thing they could do was pray.

²² Interview Chat 3.4.1

4. Media

In this chapter I will elaborate my findings about the role of the media in conversion of Thai Buddhists to Christianity. In the research of dr. Visser some interesting data were found and I tried to expand this data set.

Dr. Visser found in his research that printed media are more effective for evangelizing than television and radio. He calls it one of the most remarkable results of his research. My data confirm this outcome. This is shown in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 : Most influential medium in conversion		
Medium	<i>Own research</i>	<i>Dr. Visser</i>
TV	6.3%	6.6%
Radio	0%	3.0%
Book	48.4%	43.4%
Tract	9.5%	16.8%
None	33.3%	30.2%
Other	1.6%	
NA	1.6%	

The ranking of the named media is the same as used in the data of dr. Visser. Among the 63 people I have interviewed, none of them filled in 'radio'. The percentage of people who mentioned tracts is smaller than dr. Visser's, but it is still bigger than television and radio together! The percentage of people who filled in book is even higher than dr. Visser, and it is the most important medium of all. A question which dr.

Visser also asked in his research is: what is meant by 'book?'.

To all the people who talked about books as a reason for their conversion it was asked which book they meant. Was it the bible, or something else? The following data were found (table 4.2).

These results show that for a large group of people this book is the bible, but for the same amount of people this is another book, and for 21% the bible as well as another book is meant.

Interesting would be to know what the role of books and tracts is in conversion: how important is it? Because I asked more about this during the interviews I can show some of these stories here.

Table 4.2: What meant with book?	
Bible	39.28%
Other book	39.28%
Both	21.43%

4.1 Book

As shown, 'book' can have different meanings. Some of the respondents mean the bible while others were thinking about another specific book. For both of these I will give some examples of what their role can be in conversion.

First about books other than the bible. I found many different stories about books. For some it was a book that they received in their youth, but they just read it when they were older, for others it was an addition to a tv program that they saw. The first story is from Sunisa²³, a young girl of 17 years old.

Somebody gave me a book. A book with a story about a giraffe and a monkey. They fell in the mud. An elephant came by and saw them. So the elephant started helping them and became dirty as well. I understood that God became dirty by helping us! This parable was important for me.

She read this parable when she was younger. Because the gospel was explained in another way, she understood what it was about. One of the aspects of the books that the respondents mentioned, is that they make them understand more of what Christianity is about and that the message fits their context. Like Perapat²⁴, a boy of 21 years old. The aspect of happiness is important in the book that he received, as this quote illustrates.

The first person who told me about Jesus was a YFC (Youth For Christ) worker. I became a friend of the people of YFC. They talked to me and gave me the book "Tapster Stone". It was not a tract but also not a book. It was a mini book that explained the Christian faith. It was about how to have happiness in your life so that was important for me because I wanted to have happiness!

²³ Interview Sunisa 1.2.3

²⁴ Interview Perapat 2.1.3

In this story of Perapat there is more to see. Dr. Visser suggest in his research that written media are often used in relations and that therefore they can be an important medium. That is what can be seen in the interview with Perapat and others.

But this is not always the reason. Fluk²⁵, a boy of 13 years old, tells about a far more impersonal way of receiving a book, with help of a tv program.

The first time I heard about Christianity was in a tv program called “Strength for living”. A program full of testimonies. It provided an easy possibility to call to the program and ask for a book. Especially for teenagers is it very simple. This book and the program had a big influence on my conversion.

The reasons for the importance of a book in conversion are different. I found too few stories to conclude what kind of books, or in what ways they are most often used. A list of the books that people mentioned can be found as appendix.

4.2 Bible

In the following interviews you can see some more examples of people telling about the role of the bible in their conversion. The story of Nitnarin²⁶ is about both the bible and another book. The story of this woman of 34 years old shows similarity with the bible story of Philip and the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26-40.

When I was in university someone of Campus Crusade gave me a bible and a CD. I started reading, but I did not understand and I was interested. On a day I took a bus and I saw a Christian friend. I told him that I did not understand what the bible was about, and I asked him about it. My friend told about Jesus. Another important medium was a book with the topic ‘when you ask, you receive’. The title of the book is: How to make friends among influential people. Most important in my conversion was the bible: I was impressed when I read it for the first time, even though I did not understand everything.

²⁵ Interview Fluk 3.3.1

²⁶ Interview Nitnarin 2.2.1

In another village I found a similar story. Naisalon²⁷, a man of 39 years old, told me about the importance of reading the bible for his conversion. Like Nitnarin, he also mentioned the role of another book.

From a Christian friend I got a bible and because I like reading I started reading the bible. One day a missionary came into my shop and I asked the missionary about Jesus and the bible because I did not understand what I was reading. The missionary explained it to me and therefore he was also the most influential person in my conversion. He explained about Jesus and redemption. The missionary recommended me to go to a church and I was baptized there. There is also another medium that influenced me: a book called 'God is Truth' from Elan Ewbank. It was about the life of a missionary; I was impressed by it. But most important for my conversion was the bible. I read it by myself and I really wanted to understand the bible and what is written in it!

Again a story of someone reading the bible who is impressed by it. I found this kind of stories many times. For the most of these people, reading the bible means the beginning of their conversion. Impressed by the bible they looked for contact with Christians who explained it to them. Some of them even named that they did not want to convert to Christianity because of their friends or family, but because of their own decision while reading the source of knowledge about Christ, the bible.

4.3 Tracts

Lastly I will give some examples of people who mentioned that tracts had an important role in their conversion. The first story is from Kambaang²⁸, an old man of 86 years. With that age he was the oldest person I have interviewed. When he was a teenager his mother started to believe in Jesus but he did not. His mother gave him tracts about Christianity but he stayed Buddhist and grew up as a Buddhist. One of the villagers lived in Germany for a few years and came back with her husband who was a German missionary.

²⁷ Interview Naisalon 2.3.1

²⁸ Interview Kambaang 1.1.1

What the German guy told about Jesus sounded more logical and I started believing. Everything became more valuable. I also started reading the tracts that my mother gave to me when I was young and I was interested more and more. Because of the tracts I started asking about the goodness and trustworthiness of God, which I read about.

Throughout the years he kept the tracts and while reading them (again) he understands what they are about.

That it can take a long time before people started to read their tracts again with new attention, is also illustrated by the story of Kiang Lum²⁹, a woman of 42 years old. When I asked her about the first time she heard of Christianity she said:

There were missionaries who gave tracts to the people in the village. Also my teacher at school told about Christianity. All the times I heard about Christianity and Jesus, I was really interested.

But when the years went by she did not do that much with her interests. Meanwhile her aunt became a Christian and she started talking about Christianity.

My aunt invited me for the church, but I did not go at the time. But at the same moment I read a lot in all the tracts I had received from the missionaries when I was younger. I found it good what was in it. Especially the parts about being honest.

For both it means that the tracts were kept somewhere all those years and did their work not immediately but after many years.

Of course it would be interesting to know why tracts are such an effective medium (compared to others like tv and radio). Of course many reasons can be found, but Nat³⁰, a young girl of 15 years old, explained easily why these tracts were that good for her.

²⁹ Interview Kiang Lum 1.1.2

³⁰ Interview Nat 1.4.2

My mother gave me some tracts about Jesus; the bible was too big so the tracts were easier to read. The tracts were about Jesus who takes away our sins and who created the world.

It is still difficult to say exactly what role written media play in conversion. This chapter shows stories of people who mention that these media can explain the gospel in a simple way. The stories of Nat and other people explained that because of a simplification or a parable of the gospel, it is easier to understand. Whatever the reasons can be, the surprising outcome of the research of dr. Visser is also found in my data and it is worthwhile to pay attention to the role of these written media in the conversion of Thai Buddhists towards Christianity.

5. Obstacles in conversion

Many missionaries in Thailand found out that it is difficult to reach Thai Buddhists with the gospel. In this study I searched for incentives that make people change their religion from Buddhism towards Christianity. These people know more than anyone else what the obstacles are for becoming a Christian. Therefore I asked people what they see as obstacles in their conversion to Christianity. Not all the answers were clear. Some mentioned what they see as obstacles for all Thai Buddhists in general in becoming Christians, and others named personal obstacles. From all of these reasons, personal or general, four main obstacles can be distinguished for Thai Buddhists in becoming Christians.

1. Thai people are supposed to be Buddhists

This obstacle is named most often. Thailand has an old and ancient history in which Buddhism is important. It is one of the major Buddhist countries in the world. Moreover, the monarchy is intertwined with Buddhism. Everywhere in Thailand thousands of temples and images of Buddha can be found. The history of the country makes the Thai proud of their Thai identity. Becoming a Christian, accepting a farang religion, can be seen or felt as a break with your Thai identity.

2. You cannot break the rules of the family

This second reason is linked to the first one. Thailand, as Asiatic kingdom, is a land with a strong family community and hierarchy. This makes it very difficult for people to become a Christian. By changing your religion to Christianity, you say goodbye to your family and traditions. This is a common fear for many people that I have interviewed, especially young people (interview Pae 3.3.3).

3. You do not take part in rituals anymore

Breaking with traditions is seen in obstacle number two, but it is more than only the family. Especially in rural villages, people named time after time that it is hard that they cannot take part in feeding the dead (Merit Making), gambling, and other rituals which take place around the temple. Becoming a Christian is much more than changing views: it also means that you step out of your social environment. In rural

areas people were struggling with it and therefore it is not strange that many people named this an important obstacle for becoming a Christian.

4. Buddhist never *really* heard of Christianity

The last obstacle is simple: they never really heard of Christianity. In Thailand just 0,3% of the people is Christian. That means that there are millions of people in Thailand who never heard of Christianity. But there are also many people who do know Christianity but in a false way. Many people I have interviewed told that they always thought that Christianity was about being rich, or becoming rich. When they saw that Christians were not always rich they thought that this religion could not be true. Therefore these prejudices can be an important obstacle in becoming a Christian.

The 'solutions' that people found in their lives, can be found in the previous chapters about the factors of conversion. In these chapters, people tell what their reasons were for becoming a Christian.

I asked to people what they do to 'reach' other Thai Buddhists with the gospel. Not as an advise but as personal attitude to these Thai Buddhists. In general they named two attitudes.

1. Give (the right) information

The people that I have interviewed feel an enormous incentive to tell other people about their religion. That is also what they said during the interviews: they want other people to be able to make a choice, by giving them information about Christianity (for those who know nothing), or by giving *correct* information (for those who have incorrect prejudices).

2. Share your life

As another attitude, they mentioned the importance of sharing your life with other people. That is exactly what many of them experienced (see chapter 3.1). They try to take care of people in need, show to all that they found happiness, and they try to show to everyone the change that has occurred in their own life.

Looking at these two attitudes, we can see that witnessing occurs both in words and in acts. It is impossible to establish a fixed strategy in reaching Thai Buddhists with the gospel, except for just to practice what is preached and to preach about your practice.

6. Being Christian

In this final chapter I will have a look at how converted Thai Buddhists live their Christian lives. What happened after their conversion? What does their conversion mean for their daily lives? It is difficult to give a complete and comprehensive image of this, but I will try to show some of the stories that people told on this topic.

Before the interviews I asked people to fill in the questionnaire. Based on the answers in this questionnaire I interviewed them and I found some new data compare to dr. Visser's data, that I will show here.

First about their family's reaction to their conversion. 94.6% of the respondents says that their relatives accept their being Christian, as opposed to 5.4% whose relatives do not accept it. Of course it is difficult to find out what this 'accepting' means. For some of the people that I have interviewed, it meant that their family ignores them. There are also many respondents who said that their family agrees with their being Christian but the convert is not allowed to speak about his new religion or to disturb the rest of the family with it. Therefore I think that this 'accepting' does not mean that their family 'agrees' with it. Still, this percentage is remarkable compared to the obstacles they face when they talk to Thai Buddhists about Christianity.

Church Attendance	<i>Own research</i>	<i>Dr. Visser</i>
Every week	80.7%	74.8%
Every two weeks	9.8%	8.9%
Every month	5.5%	8.5%
Less than once a month	2.8%	7.7%

Furthermore I found some data on people's experience with being part of a Christian community. How often do they go to church and to other activities? First about church attendance. As we can see in table 6.1, most

of the interviewed people are often visiting a church. The data are similar to the data of dr. Visser and therefore confirm that people remain active in visiting the church services after their conversion. The same similarity in data is found in the question on the frequency of their visits to other church activities throughout the week (table 6.2). Compared to dr. Visser, I found more people who visit the church two

Church Activity	<i>Own research</i>	<i>Dr. Visser</i>
Twice a week	19.7%	11.6%
Weekly	49.2%	48.5%
Every two weeks	9.8%	7.3%
Monthly	9.8%	16.4%
Less than once a month	11.5%	16.1%

times a week. In my opinion, this is an incidental difference.

One of the questions of dr. Visser was about *what* kind of activities people visit throughout the week. I tried to answer this question and found these data (table 6.3).

Most of the people are visiting a bible

Activity	Percentage
Biblestudy/cellgroup	32.4%
Prayermeeting	8.8%
Worshipservice	10.3%
Other (teaching and staffwork)	22.1%
NA	26.5%

study group or a cell group. The second largest group exists of people who are working in a church as teacher or as staff worker. Some of them work in the alpha course, others teach teenagers. The third group entails people who visit other worship services during the week. I found several churches who had such extra services every week, usually combined with a prayer meeting.

Finally I found some data and stories on the way people evangelize in their daily lives.

How often do they talk about Christianity and how is it going? First some statistical data. How often did they talk about Jesus last month? As shown in table 6.4, most of the people talked to more than six people last month about their Christian faith. There is no clear explanation of the fact that dr. Visser found lower numbers here. I will give some examples of the stories that people told about this.

People evangelised	Own research	Dr. Visser
0	12.7%	22.2%
1,2	27.0%	28.6%
3,5	23.8%	27.3%
6+	36.5%	21.9%

People express their Christian identity in many different ways. One of the most important reasons for conversion is the change that people see in the lives of Christians. That is also what they want to express. They are full of their new identity and speak of it whenever they can! And people also ask them to tell about it! They were even asked to pray for those who are in need, also when these are not Christians. I heard many stories of people who just go out to the street on a normal day and tell every person that they see about their being Christian. Like Takhoon³¹, who wants to express it to show it to his children.

I talked a lot about my faith with my child and other people. I think that my child looks at me to see if I'm really happy with this 'new' religion. So

³¹ Interview Taakloohn 1.4.5

therefore I do not only talk, but I also try to show my happiness with my 'new' religion. I express my life.

Another thing that I heard many times during the interviews is that people show their Christianity in their regular activities. At school, teenagers invited other teenagers to come play the guitar in church, on MSN teenagers talked to their friends about their faith. Owners of shops close their shop on Sunday, just to make people ask about their behaviour. Two of these stories of being Christian in work are from Pon³², a Saengtaew (taxi) driver, and Pen³³, who sells pancakes to evangelize.

I talked to people about faith and Jesus and I invited people to come to church. I tell everyone who sits beside me in the taxi that I am a Christian and Jesus changed my life. Come to the church and pray!

I talked a lot to my friends about Jesus. I sell pancakes and every time people buy pancakes, I give them a tract or a folder about Jesus. Last month I spoke to many customers and just people on the street about Jesus and I gave them papers and tracts.

Their attitude and the fire they have for their new identity is inspiring and therefore it is not that strange that the church in Thailand is growing fast.

But despite all these good and inspiring stories, there is also another side. Various people told me about the phenomenon of *falling back*. Not everyone seems to realize what it means that they have to change their life. With prospects of healings, happiness and sometimes fortune it can be easy to become a Christian. But after a few years, when it is not that 'new' anymore, several people fall back to Buddhism and their traditional lifestyle. I could not find out how large the percentage of these people is and it would definitely be worthwhile as a topic for further research. But it remains important that people have correct information when they face Christianity, and that they realize what their choice implies and how different their life will be.

³² Interview Pon 3.3.4

³³ Interview Pen 3.1.2

7. Conclusion

The stories behind the numbers: that is what this study is about. Dr. Visser started by collecting all the data of the Thai church and the people who were converted throughout the past eight years. The data that he collected are saying something about converted Thai Buddhists, but what do they say about the conversion itself? And what is their story? The starting point for this research was to find an answer to the following question: *which factors play a role in the conversion of Thai Buddhists to Christianity and what does the pathway of their conversion look like?* In the remainder of this report I will formulate an answer to this question.

7.1 Findings

I designed an interview to find the reasons of conversion of Thai Buddhists towards Christianity. I found two major themes that were coming back frequently in different types and forms. Firstly, people were talking about attraction of the life of others and secondly they named the importance of power.

Firstly, the attraction of the life of others. This does not concern the life of all other people than the respondent, but only the life of other Christians. People frequently spoke of different aspects that they saw in the life of Christians they knew, be it either a characteristic of this life or a change in someone's behaviour. Different aspects were mentioned, from which three categories could be distinguished: Change, Love and Happiness.

Conversion is about change. But not all conversion cases are characterized by similar changes. To some, a conversion is spread over a long period of time, and for others it can happen in the wink of an eye (Zehner, P.83). But all converts change in some way, which makes other people curious. "*What is it that she has?*", "*How can she change so enormously?*" People notice a change in the life of a convert, which makes them attracted to Christianity.

Another theme is love. People noticed a love in the life of Christians that they have "*never seen before*". This love is experienced in many ways, varying from the way Christians treat others, to the way they treat their own Christian community.

Many respondents say that they noticed a difference before they were Christian, when they compared their concepts and ideas of good behaviour and they saw a large difference between the Christian's life and their own.

Lastly people were talking about the aspect of happiness. In this phenomenon, the same idea of attraction to the life of others is embedded: people see something that they want too. Happiness is also a real Buddhist concept and therefore it is not strange that people mentioned it. It has to do with fulfilling the purpose of your life and to find such an important phenomenon in Christian lives is therefore a highly attractive aspect.

The concept of power is the second major 'reason' for conversion towards Christianity. The importance of this reason illustrates that conversion is not something that happens because of human factors, but because of God. In this concept I also defined three categories: Healing, Spiritual experiences and God is answering.

Healing came back many times and was mostly mentioned by people who were already in contact with Christians. In those cases, healing formed a direct proof of truth and encouraged them to take the final step to become a Christian. I only counted people who experienced this healing by themselves, but there were also many converts who named testimonies of healings as an important incentive for their conversion. This shows the double importance of healing as one of the major reasons for conversion.

Another category of power consists of experiences of the spiritual world, of God. Several converts spoke of dreams, visions, feelings and experiences of God. In a Buddhist society, full of animistic traditions, experiencing this spiritual reality is very important. I discovered slightly higher numbers of this kind of experiences in rural and unreached areas, like Isaan in rural parts of Chiang Mai region. But this research is too small to make this hard.

The last category is also an often mentioned reason for conversion. The experience of God's power through answers to prayers or help in times of need was clearly present in the interviews. I heard dozens of stories. Sometimes short and concerning small things, sometimes long and about greater things. However, the experience that "*Jesus helps with problems*" is very important as an experience of God's presence. Converts see it as the 'proof' that God is real and that He supports them in their conversion.

So far the concepts of attraction and power that I found in the interviews. Interesting is that I am not the first who finds these reasons for conversion. Prof. Zehner did his dissertation research among Thai converts about the reasons for conversion³⁴. His research was done in an evangelical church named Hope of Bangkok. His main result is that there are two main reasons which were coming back frequently; Love and Power. While his research was done in only one denomination of Christianity, I found similar evidence in a more differential group. However, the similarity can only support the outcome of this research and I hope that therefore my research can be helpful in a better understanding of the process of conversion among Thai Buddhists.

7.2 Other conclusions

When I started with this study, dr. Visser requested some specific questions that he wanted to be answered. These were questions dealing with specific issues that he was unable to clarify in his own dissertation. Here I will formulate answers to these four questions.

1. Which media are playing a role in the conversion of Thai Buddhists and on what scale?

As dr. Visser himself found in his research, the role of the written media is unexpectedly high. I found the same in my research (see chapter four), while I found a slightly lower number of people who mentioned tracts as an important medium. But still there were some more questions. What kind of books do the converts mean when they mention 'books' as an important incentive for their conversion? 40 % of the respondents were talking about the bible, 40% about a 'normal' book and 20% about both. So written media still play an important role.

Most of these books (and tracts) were given in a relational setting, while the examples of television were more impersonal. The importance of these written media is to be found in their ability to illustrate and explain the gospel in a simple way.

³⁴ Zehner, *Unavoidably Hybrid: Thai Buddhist Conversions to Evangelical Christianity*, Cornell University, August 2003

2. What is the role of family, friends and church workers in the conversion of Thai Buddhists?

This question has been answered in the previous conclusion about reasons for conversion. The role of family, friends and church workers should be seen as part of the ‘attraction’ aspect. Whatever the exact relationship to this person may be, when there is a close relation (which is usually found between relatives and friends) converts are attracted to the life of Christians because of change, love and/or happiness.

3. How long did it take from the first faith content contact with Christians till their baptism?

Many people do not remember when their first contact was. Usually it was a long time ago and these first encounters seem not to be that impressive to most of the respondents. At the time of people’s first encounters with Christianity, there often is a lack of knowledge about Christianity and people have many prejudices. So when they have ‘real’ contact with Christians, they do not link it to a new religion, but just think that it is another ‘concept’ or vision which is either part of Buddhism or can coexist with it. Another explanation of why they do not remember their first contact, is probably because they did not link this contact to their conversion, so it was not an important event to them.

0 Months	31.7%
0 - 3 Months	9.5%
4 - 6 Months	7.9%
7 - 12 Months	15.9%
13 - 24 Months	9.5%
24 < Months	11.1%
NA/NY	14.3%

Another thing that dr. Visser wanted to know is the amount of time between conversion and baptism. The average time between conversion and baptism is eleven months. 31% of the converts locate their conversion at the same time as their baptism. In table 7.2.1, the results are given in months between conversion and the baptism.

4. To which extent do these converted people participate in their parish?

In chapter six I wrote about the way people take part in their parish and how often they visit the church services. This shows that 80% of all the people are still visiting the church every week. I asked the same question to the church leaders and they even reported that 90% of all those who were baptized in 2008 still visit the church.

Apart from visiting church services, people are also active in other church activities. For 33% of the converts these activities consist of bible studies or house groups. 22% performs staff work or teaching and 20% of the respondents visits extra worship services or prayer meetings. 25 % did not respond.

So, in which way do people participate? According to my research they participate a lot and they are active in evangelizing (they talk to other people about Jesus with an average of six people per month).

Other people, however, tell about falling back to Buddhism. This is a subject that is worth to have a closer look at to get a better understanding of how conversion works and especially of the depth of their conversion.

Bibliography

Books

Visser, M., *Conversion Growth of Protestant Churches in Thailand* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2008) 298 pp.

Zehner, E. R., *Unavoidably Hybrid: Thai Buddhist Conversions to Evangelical Christianity* (Cornell University, August 2003) 286 pp.

Welty, R., *Thai Culture and society* (Bangkok: Asia Books, 2005)

Holmes, H., Tangtongtavy, S., *Working with the Thais* (Bangkok: White Lotus, Co, 2003)

Baker, T., *What is conversion?* (n.p., 1991)

William, S., *The Sociology of Conversion*, (Bainbridge; n.y.) 13 pp.

Part of: Newton, H, *Handbook of Religious Conversion*, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1992. Edited by Malony and Samuel Southard. Birmingham) (p.178-191)

Articles

Lim, D., Spalding, S., *Sharing Jesus holistically with the Buddhist world* (California: 2005)

Mejudhon, U., *Evangelism in the New Millenium: An intergrated Model of Theology Anthropology and Religious Studies* (n.p, n.y)

Johnson, B., *Wrapping the good news for the Thai* (n.p, n.y)

Internet

Falkenberg, S. (Eastern Kentucky University: August 31, 2009), *Psychological Explanations of Religious Socialization. Religious Conversion*, <http://people.eku.edu/falkenbergs/psy397/chapter6/>>

www.vissers.me

Other

63 interviews

NewChurchDataLessThan10Years, *Thai Christian resource centre*, Bangkok May
2009 (Exelsheet with church data from TCRC)