Prologue

In his letter written from San­
ciam, South China, on 13 November
1552, shortly before his death, the
Apostle of the East, the Jesuit Francis
Xavier, said, "If I cannot get to Canton
directly this year, I shall go to
Siam." 1

Like China, Siam was seen as a land of
mystery, unspoiled, heathen and there­
fore ripe for Christian conversion. Be­
tween 1511, the date of the first visit of
the Portuguese to Siam, and 1662, it has
been reckoned that approximately two
thousand foreign Christians, mostly
Portuguese, were residing in the Sia­
mese capital of Ayutthaya. 2 To minis­
ter to these and in the hope of convert­
ing Siamese to Catholicism, there were
also four Jesuits, two Dominicans, two
Franciscans, and three secular priests. 3

On August 22, 1662, the first
missionaries of the newly established
Missions Etrangères de Paris (The Paris
Foreign Mission Society) arrived in
Ayutthaya. 4 These were Bishop Pierre
Lambert de la Motte and two French
priests who had planned originally to go
to China and Cochin China (South Viet­
nam) but because of current persecu­
tions of Christian missionaries had de­
cided to remain in Siam. 5 Seven years
later, in 1669, the new mission was made
into an Apostolic Vicariate. 6

Possibly as an antidote to these
brusque and voracious traders and pos­
sibly because the French missionaries
posed little economic threat, King Narai,
through his Chief Minister, the Greek­
born adventurer, Constantine
Phaulkon, 10 sent an embassy in 1684 to
the court of Louis XIV of France accom­
panied by a French priest. This embassy
was entrusted with the duty of inviting
France to send an ambassador in return
to Siam with the hope that a treaty of
friendship would be concluded between
the two countries. 11 The next year, 1685,
saw de Chaumont arriving in Ayut­
thaya, bringing with him in his suite six
Jesuits, en route for China. 12

During this period, Catholic
communities began work in the coun­
tryside around the capital and as far
away as Lopburi and Bangkok, in which
latter city the church of the Immaculate
Conception was built in the suburb of
Samsen, in 1674. 13 In such a strongly
Buddhist country King Narai had little
fears of wholesale conversions to Chris­
tianity, and indeed there were only
about six hundred Thai Catholics. At the
same time there were Catholics of other
nationalities, Portuguese, Annamites
(from the region of the Imperial capital,
Hué, in Vietnam), and Japanese, al­
though there are no records as to the
exact numbers of these converts. 14

But in 1688 a palace revolution
occurred on the death of King Narai and
the former indulgence given to the
French was swept away. 15 Almost all
the Christian communities were sup­
pressed. Perhaps the only encouraging
mark was that refugee Catholics from
Annam who had fled to Siam to escape
persecution were allowed to settle
in Chanthaburi in 1701. 16

With the beginning of the pres­
ent Chakri dynasty in 1782 the climate
for Catholic—and later for Protestant
missions became more favourable. 17 It
is recorded that in 1785 there were 413
Catholics of mixed Siamese-Portuguese
blood in Thonburi, and 379 Catholics of
mixed Cambodian-Portuguese origins
in Bangkok together with 580 Catholic
Annamites. 18 It is obvious from the
above figures that conversions came
slowly and that they appear to have
come not from the indigenous Siamese
but rather from the Eurasian quarter of
the population. 19 Thus the M.E.P. con­
continued to grow slowly. What has been
called the "evangelisation" of the North­
east of Siam began in 1881 under the
auspices of the M.E.P.20 This zone
became in the twentieth century the Catho­
lic dioceses of Ubon Ratchathani, Thare
and Udon Thani.21

Yet the greatest work of con­
solidation was probably undertaken by
the famous Bishop Pallegoix between
the years 1841 and 1861. He compiled a
two volume Thai-Latin-French-English
dictionary and, perhaps more impor­
tantly, struck up a friendship with a
young Siamese prince-monk who began
to take lessons in Latin from the
bishop.22 This prince-monk was later to
become the great King Mongkut, Rama
IV, from whom and from his successors
the Catholic Church was to receive
friendship and tolerance.

It is significant that when the
Bishop died in 1861, Rama IV ordered a
royal palanquin to be used for his fu­
neral, ordered all the flags in the capi­
tal, Bangkok, to be flown at half mast,
and poured holy water over the coffin
which was being taken for burial by
river. Not content with this signal fa­
vour, the king lighted candles and joss
sticks, said prayers for his erstwhile
friend and gave a substantial sum of
money to be distributed to the mourn­
ers.23

Under the king who has been
called the founder of modern Thailand,
Chulalongkorn, Rama V,24 the first
modern Catholic school was begun in
Bangkok by the M.E.P. in 1885 and sub­
sequently passed to the care of the Broth­
ers of St. Gabriel, a Teaching Order,
when they arrived from France in
1901.25

As in other missionary areas
throughout the world and particularly
in Southeast Asia, the Christian churches
have seen as one of their first priorities
the founding of schools and the care of
the poor: two very necessary adjuncts
to the preaching of the Christian gospel
and without which the evangelical
message might well be vitiated.26

Therefore the thrust of this ar­
ticle will be the socio-economic de­
velopments undertaken by the Catholic
Church in the Northeast of Thailand by
indigenous clergy (as well as members
of the M.E.P.), with the financial aid of
overseas donors, bearing in mind that
throughout the whole of Thailand the
numbers of Catholics are probably no
more than 230,000 (0.4%) from a nation­
wide population of something over 57
million.27 As in Thailand, so in the
nearby Republic of Indonesia with its
overwhelming population of 161
million, most of whom would call them­selves Muslims of some kind, the Catho­
lic church and the various Protestant
Churches see themselves now as neither
"conversion machines" nor their clergy
as "sacrament coolies."28 Rather the
churches see their vocation in terms of
ministering to the "whole" person—
body, soul and spirit—through educa­
tion, the lifting up of economic sights
and rural values so as to provide a cli­
mate in which the things of the spirit
and the values of Christianity may be dis­
cussed.29

Socio-economic develop­
ment: Ubon Ratchathani

Many of the difficulties associ­
ated with rural development in Thailand
are similar to those experienced in
Indonesia, in particular the eastern islands
of the province of Nusa Tenggara
Timur.30 Adat, traditional laws and cus­
toms of a clan or tribe or village com­
munity, govern how people view the
world, using this perception to
strengthen group solidarity so as to be
in harmony with the forces of nature as
well as those unseen spiritual forces
which need so often to be placated.31
The practitioners and the keepers of adat
hold an honoured place within the
community: a place of honour and a
place of power. It is these adat chiefs
who often influence the village or local
community into accepting or rejecting
new agricultural programmes, more
advanced house-building projects or
indeed any programme whereby the
economic sights of the people may be
lifted in order to give them a better
chance to live happier and more fruitful
lives. Where some village keepers of
traditional law see these new ways as a
threat to their own importance they will
either denigrate them or dissuade their
people from co-operating.32 Where they
have their peoples' best interests at heart,
then they use their not inconsiderable
influence in a positive way.

In the diocese of Ubon, in the
northeast of the country, verging on the
border of Laos, the Diocesan Social Ac­tion Centre was established in 1973.33
Before that date, any funds for socio­
economic village developments came
from individual donors, rich Thais or
perhaps friends of the individual parish
priest.34 There was always a feeling that
such help, necessarily imposed "from
above," was paternalistic. Under the
new Social Action Committee, village
people have a role to play in any discus­
sions concerning projects which, after
all, will have a bearing on the way they
live.35

There is a priest, designated
Disac36 in each of the ten Catholic dio­
ces in Thailand, who is the co-ordina­	or of rural development projects. In
Ubon the emphasis seems to be on ask­
ing village people the question, Why are
you poor?—and getting them to find the
answers. In the beginning, when the
Church as a whole began to plan its
development strategy, many of the ris­
ing middle class amongst the Thai
Catholics and those who were rich saw,
or thought they saw, Disac and his com­
mittee as a Communist front. When this
development agency began to talk about
social injustice these comfortable Thai
Catholics saw a Marxist interpretation.
37 It has taken a considerable while for
such suspicions to be set at rest.

Perhaps they believed that
because they are such a tiny minority
and Ubon only two hundred kilometres
from the Laos border, where Vietnam­
ese influence is strong, any policies
which might bring the spotlight of no­
toriety on them, as well as possible
awkward questions from the authorities,
were to be denounced. Or perhaps
underneath their Catholicism, the some­
what fatalistic Buddhist philosophy that
each person is responsible for his own
life in this regeneration, coloured their
objections.38
Whatever the reason, the fears of the Catholic lay elite seem to have been put to rest. And they appear to support the action of Disac in establishing rice and buffalo banks and in building access roads where necessary from small hamlets to the larger centres in order to open up new markets and to improve local communications.

Perhaps fifteen years ago development in the Thai Church was not properly understood, even though the Indonesian Church particularly in the province of N.T.T. had organised its socio-economic development strategy efficiently and successfully under the Flores-Timor Plan for over twenty years. In Ubon in these early days there were the usual mistakes when well-meaning Church "innovators" told the village people what they ought to do in a given situation rather than asking them what they believed they saw as their first priority in upgrading economic life in their community.

Not surprisingly this "haughty" approach created tensions within Catholic and Buddhist villages (as it had created similar tensions in the villages in Flores in the early sixties) together with in-fighting and recriminations instead of the desired end: cooperation. All this meant that the Social Action Board of the Catholic Church had to review their methods, coming to the conclusion that development did not necessarily mean consumerism nor material development—rather, the development of the whole person.

The Bishops Institute for Social Action (BISA), which draws upon Catholic bishops from Pakistan in the west to Japan in the east, has put the emphasis on religio-cultural values. From simply being a concern for socio-economic development, emphasis is now placed on the religious and cultural values of people—that is to say, on those values which are important to them as members of a community, village, district, province and even nation. Interwoven in this is a determination to educate people to their cultural/religious responsibilities. In a strongly Buddhist country like Thailand evangelical values must be dominant, with the Church promoting a moral economy, moral political values at the base level, so that the foundation of society, and a society ready for socio-economic development, must rest firmly on religio-cultural values.

As a concrete example of what might otherwise be considered specious rhetoric, when a rice bank was formed, the people and the church had to approach this development together. Teams were sent to villages to investigate projects, not to criticise but to evaluate, to help and to give judgements when asked for.

Ubon Ratchathani (2)

The diocese of Ubon covers six provinces in Thailand: Ubon, Yasothon, Sisaket, Surin, Roi Et and Mahasarakham. These provinces are all in the northeast and always seem to be drought-affected. The great drought of 1930 affected most of the above provinces and is still talked about as one of the great disasters of modern time by the rural inhabitants of the areas. Between 1976 and 1977 these provinces experienced another severe drought during which the Overseas Aid Agency of the German Bishops' Conference, Misereor, granted relief funds from a special antidrought fund. These funds were distributed by Disac in the form of rice, fertiliser and medical supplies.

Donor organisations

Disac receives money from Misereor, and in turn makes loans available to villages, Catholic or Buddhist. People are asked the obvious questions: what they need, how long the loan is to be for, and how many years will be needed for the loan to be repaid. And indeed, in what month of each year they will send the repayments of the loan. When these agreements are kept then Disac believes that there is evident a cultural-religious development of responsibility. If, however, there are floods, rust in the growing rice, drought or some other natural disaster, or even an economic disaster because of faulty planning, then these loans are written off.

The provincial and district governments are not always helpful. As in many other countries (for example, Indonesia), by the time money from the province or the central government has seeped down to tambon, district and ban (village) level, so much has often been siphoned off that there is little left for ban projects. The local Buddhist temple hierarchies usually are not interested in economic development. Since Buddhism urges a detachment from worldliness, any involvement in socio-economic development means that it must retract one of its basic tenets, a move which understandably the temple is not willing to do. On the other hand, when it promotes the building of walls around the temple complex and even the building of the temple itself, this is seen in an entirely different light. Thus practical economies and practical details of socio-economic development must be left to that group which sincerely desires to assist people to live happier and more fulfilling lives. And here in Northeast Thailand, this group is the tiny group of Catholics.

Whilst individual Buddhist monks occasionally mobilise their people to improve their material status, when another organisation steps in to assist, the local sanggha or temple never blocks these moves. It would appear then that the Catholic Church in the northeast of Thailand at least, under the cloak of socio-economic development, takes much more of the Ghandian approach than does the Catholic Church in Indonesia. The Thai church encourages village women to begin weaving their own garments, using good Thai cotton, on traditional hand looms. Cotton already dyed is bought commercially through Disac and given to the weavers, who are in turn guaranteed by Disac fifty baht per day (about A$2.50 or US$2)—a sum they could never earn under ordinary circumstances. It is true that the finished product—sarongs, shirts, blouses—of 100% cotton are much dearer than those items bought in the market and made from artificial fibres. But it is said that the advantage of a cotton garment is that it lasts longer and is...
cooler to wear because it soaks up the perspiration.

The underlying conviction here is that in any form of what is called Human Development, culture must play a large role. As Disac sees it, modern technology has destroyed many of the people’s traditional values, their habits of moderate consumption and their village style of self-help. Before the advent of textile factories, women in the ban knew how to weave and during the time between planting rice and harvesting it, they made clothes for their families. But with modern technology, home-made clothes, ropes, ploughshares, and paddy husking tools have all but disappeared from rural communities. The only remaining thing in rural life which intensifies rural life is the struggle for money.

So the argument goes, and whilst much of it is true, perhaps it is too late, or almost too late, to promote hand-crafted products when even the Thai peasant economy is now a cash economy in most areas. And with a cash economy, consumerism begins to trot, then canter and, as in the West, finally to gallop. Bright new colours in sarongs, skirts, blouses are eye-catching; and if the garments do not last as long as handmade ones, with cash to buy new ones, the question might be legitimately asked: why go to all the trouble to make one’s own?

Perhaps the real answers are that with the hand weaving of products the old skills instead of being lost may be taught to the new generation of villagers, thus giving them a greater sense of continuity with their own past as well as providing an interest and a small source of income to those village grandmothers and mothers who might otherwise believe their useful productive lives to be over.

**The First Three Year Plan—1983-1985**

The main aims of Disac in this first Three Year Plan were to assist the ban people to institute rice and buffalo banks, small dam projects to help in the growing of vegetables which might then be sold in local markets, the provision of good drinking water supplies, and the raising of money so that the community—tambon and ban—could have access to the rural electrification scheme of the provincial government.

**The Second Stage: 1986-1987**

Under the Disac planned development strategy this period was given over more specifically to loans to small urban traders with weekly stalls in the market; to loans for small business projects such as the provision of lavatories and washrooms in the market place.

Between 1983 and 1987 the infrastructures for many small development projects were in place and loans were given to individual subsistence farmers to enable them to buy fertilisers for their new quick-growing rice and for various irrigation projects in villages. Loans made to housewives or to vendors in the daily markets are made by Disac in order to keep them out of the hands of loan-sharks who charge an exorbitant rate of interest, thus binding the people into the cycle of poverty even more strongly. The loans made by Disac using Australian currency as an example would be about five cents per day on a loan of A$5—thirty-five cents per week or interest at 5%.

Early in 1988 Disac organised a group of housewives in a rural slum near Ubon into a Credit Union. Each member placed 3 1/3% of the loan received back into the Credit Union every month. After four years it is estimated that the capital can be subtracted and the group continue to operate then with its own common fund. In this way, with tiny interest repayments the members can begin to save for school fees, to lease another parcel of ban land so as to increase their rice production. The thrust then is to make rural dwellers more economically self-sufficient and to raise the estimation of their own worth.

**The Proposed Budget of Disac**

For the period 1988-1990 in the diocese of Ubon has been estimated at B3,285,874 (A$164,293), with the Church’s component being B250,000 (A$12,500). The majority of the proposed budget requirements will be drawn from Misereor to the tune of B3,035,874 (A$151,793). These sums of money are extremely modest in Australian terms yet with them Disac hopes to be able to provide a financial base from which to continue with its up-grading of ban resources and developments. For rice and fertiliser banks and the raising of cows and calves (later to be sold as fat cattle) B650,000 (A$32,500) has been estimated; water resources, upgrading of hygiene facilities and tapping into the rural electrification scheme will cost another B400,000 (A$20,000). Under the Mother & Child Care Programme, and the Community Health Programme, both of which are organised by two Sisters of the Indigenous Order, Servants of Mary, the costs will amount to B273,000 (A$13,650). Under the Education portfolio Disac has budgeted for the five diocesan primary schools—something in the region of B500,000 (A$25,000). All of which does not mean that there have been no negative results coming from ban socio-economic developments.

Whilst the socio-economic development of Buddhist and Catholic villagers might have been increased, in many cases the new sense of prosperity engendered has caused, not surprisingly, enmity between neighbours and between the successful and the ban or village leader. Thus a conflict of interests has in some cases brought about disharmony within the community, thereby, it would appear, contributing to situational regression rather than economic progression.

The idea of Social Action with a cultural/religious emphasis goes back to the Documents of Vatican Two and even before. With these in mind the Asian Bishops Conference in its statements has said that:

Most of Asia is made up of a multitude of poor: poor not in human qualities and values, but in being denied access to material goods and resources which they need to cre-
ate a truly human life for them. They are deprived because they live under oppression, i.e. social, economic and political structures which have injustices built into them...Our task is to bring about social justice in our societies, i.e. to seek changes and the transformation of social structures.63

The Bishops Institute for Social Action (BISA) has also said that culture, religion and society are interdependent, interacting and mutually transforming. “In our Asian continent, culture and religion are integrated. Religion is a dynamic element in our culture.”64 Therefore it would seem that the above form a cultural-religious system which interacts with the socio-economic political system of society, able to permeate every sphere and facet of human life. If this is so, then it also follows that cultural-religious values are the essential coefficient factors of the economy, of politics as well as of society in any and all human-development activities.

Ubon Ratchathani (3)

It has been stated earlier that the Catholic population is small. Because of this, the Buddhist sangha has no difficulty in accepting what is still called the Catholic Mission. There is no undercurrent of latent or nascent hostility as there is often, for example, from Muslims towards Catholics and Protestants in Indonesia,65 or perhaps more obviously, in Malaysia. Neither is there the veiled hostility which is becoming more evident towards the Catholic Church from the government of Singapore. Buddhists appear to recognise Catholics and Protestants as men and women of goodwill and are content.

As in Indonesia, and in other Asian countries, the Catholic Church in Thailand has some very prestigious schools which are open to all.66 In Central Bangkok the Assumption School, which is staffed by the St. Gabriel Brothers, is expensive, prestigious, occupying part of a whole city block. In Ubon there are two Catholic schools, Ave Maria, staffed by the Sisters of the Religious Order, The Servants of Mary, and the Assumption School, again staffed and run by the St. Gabriel Brothers. The diocese of Ubon has only five parish primary schools, in glaring contrast to the thousands of Catholic (and Protestant) primary schools (Sekolah Dasar) in Indonesia.67 There were once seven Catholic primary schools, but since the diocese could not staff them they were forced to close two. These schools are all situated in villages; the provincial government will not now give permission for any more to be opened, their reason being, perhaps, that it is better for the State to have the education of village children at such a fundamental level, even though these ban are Catholic.68 Or perhaps it is a case of some deep down anti-Catholic feeling coming to light within the provincial administration.

On the other hand, there are good relations with the sangha. Some Thai Catholic priests make their annual retreat with Buddhist monks in a monastery near Ubon, living as one of the temple family whilst they are there, yet keeping to their own private devotions, although if they wish to join the monks in worship or meditation there is no bar to them doing so.69 Occasionally a Buddhist monk will give a series of meditations to a gathering of Catholic priests. Thus on the surface at least there would seem to be complete equanimity.

If “Thailand” means the Land of the Free, no less is freedom of religion guaranteed, although it is worthwhile repeating that because of the small Catholic community in Thailand, Buddhists have no fear of being “converted.” Education, socio-economic development is therefore in reality for all Thais/Buddhists. Certainly these activities serve people “made in the image of God” and serve the “whole” person.

Yet as in Indonesia and in other areas of Southeast Asia, where the Christian presence is, if not exactly tenuous, then the religion of a minority, it is the schools which carry any hopes which the Catholic community many have for the future.

At the time of the author’s discussions with Bishop Michael of Ubon in 1988, there was one government minister who was a Catholic, together with three or four senior Army officers.70 Many prominent bureaucrats, government officials and members of the armed forces have been educated in the prestigious Catholic schools, so that although they remain Buddhists, it may be expected that they will continue to have a warm feeling for, and perhaps, if need be, a protective arm around their alma maters.71

The costs of socio-economic development, running Minor and Major seminaries and various missionary tasks, are, as in many parts of Indonesia, met by Misereor.72

The question therefor must be asked: what is the raison d’être for such an “expensive” Catholic presence in Thailand—for the considerable amount of finance as well as the highly qualified expertise made available to mostly non-Christians? Converts are few, and the Catholic and Christian churches do not have the astringent of persecution to give them impassioned zeal for evangelisation. Is all this simply for the sake of conversions? If this was the answer, after three hundred years of a Catholic presence in Thailand with few Catholics apparent, the programme has obviously failed. Is the continuing Catholic presence in Thailand simply to show another way of living, of allowing people to address the important crossroads in their lives?

Perhaps this is part of the answer, although once again, the actual numbers suggest clearly that few Thais have accepted such a lex credendi, lex vivendi. “Making merit” is of much greater importance than the Christian cardinal virtue of “loving God and your neighbour.”73 And here perhaps is the real reason for the presence of Catholic (and Protestant) in Thailand, and for the spending of large sums of money in socio-economic development and education: in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, to help the Thai rural sector to live a less austere life, to assist in increasing economic prosperity. And, perhaps as a bonus, to help in creating a suitable climate in which the claims of Christianity and the things of the spirit may be broached and discussed.
ENDNOTES


2. Syamananda, Rong. A History of Thailand (Chulalongkorn University 1986) p. 43. The leader of the Portuguese exploratory fleet was Alfonso d’Albuquerque, who defeated the Sultan of Malacca and occupied the port in 1551. Yet because the Siamese king claimed some suzerainty rights over Malacca, d’Albuquerque sent an embassy under Duarte Fernandez to the Siamese king, where he was well receive “because he showed no superiority towards the Siamese.”


4. The Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris was founded in 1660 because some French clergy and laity were eager to share in foreign mission-work formerly reserved for the Religious Orders, especially the Jesuits who had been expelled from Japan early in the seventeenth century. See Boxer, C.R. The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650 (University of Berkeley Press 1951).

Louis XIV approved the M.E.P. in 1663. In 1663 there was a total world membership of 880 with the M.E.P. serving in eleven dioceses around the world, with twenty-one indigenous Bishop members. See also Goyan G. Les Prêtres des Missions Etrangères Paris 1932.

5. Hutchinson, op. cit. p. 44 ff. The Provençal priest M. Cotolledi was consecrated Vicar-Apostolic by a direct Papal mandate for work in Tonkin.

6. Bishop Lambert de la Motte was given one of the obsolete titles of an ancient see in Asia Minor—Beritus—long swept away by the Muslim advance. This was in order to prevent friction between France and Portugal. The French clergy eventually built a brick seminary and a church in the capital, Ayutthaya, to which the king sent some children. See also Chaiwan, op. cit. p. 70.

7. The Chakri dynasty was founded by King Ramathibodi—Rama I—in 1782 (formerly the brilliant general Chao Phraya Chakri), after the mad former king, Taksin, had been put to death. See Syamananda op. cit. pp. 99-100. The present occupant of the throne is Rama IX.

8. Narai the Great was born in 1632 of the Prasatthong dynasty and attained the throne in 1656 after having rid himself of his elder brother and uncle. His capital, Ayutthaya, was well known as a centre for foreign trade and relations with the new European entrepreneurs.

9. A Dutch ship first made a landfall at Pattani in south Siam, building a small trading post there in 1601. In 1604 the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie—the Dutch East Indies Company—came to Ayutthaya. See also Syamananda, op. cit. p. 63. For the involvement of the British East India Company see amongst others Collis, M. Siamese White (Faber & Faber, London 1936; this edn. by D.D. books, Bangkok, 1986).

10. See Hutchinson, op. cit. p. 56 ff. Phaulkon’s rise to be a high Siamese noble and the chief adviser of the king was spectacular. but with the death of King Narai the Great, Phaulkon’s enemies took the opportunity of killing him, thus ridding the Court of what they saw as a dangerous European entrepreneurial presence and influence.

11. Ibid. p. 51 ff.


14. Ibid. See also Syamananda, op. cit. pp. 73-78; Hutchinson, op. cit. pp. 76-77 ff.

15. Chaiwan, op. cit. p. 64.


18. Ibid.


25. The full title of this Teaching Order is Institutum Fratrum Instructionis Christianae a Sancto Gabrielle or The Brothers of Christian Instruction of St Gabriel. The Order was founded in the Vendée Arrondissement in France in 1821 and was known until 1853 as the Brothers of the Holy Ghost.

26. The Protestant churches began work in Thailand in 1828, about two hundred and fifty years after the first Catholic mission had been established. The first Protestant missionaries, Gutzlaff and Tomlin, belonged to the London Missionary Society. Both the Catholic and Protestant missions were constrained by the Edict of Religious Tolerance brought into being in 1730 by King Tai Sara. This edict stated that no Christian literature was allowed to be translated into the Thai or Pali languages; the Christian faith was not allowed to be taught to the Thai, Mon or Lao peoples; no one was allowed to convert these peoples to Catholicism; and the Thai religion...
was not to be criticised. Cf. also Chaiwan, op. cit.

27. Discussions with Bishop Michael Bun-luen Mansap as above.

28. Cf Webb, R.A.F. Paul, Palms and the Cross: Socio-economic Development in Nusa Tenggara Timur (James Cook University of North Queensland, Australia, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies Monograph No 15, 1986) Ch. 12. p. 174. Thirty years ago on the island of Flores, N.T.T., Indonesia, which is overwhelmingly Catholic, the measure of evangeliisation was counted in the numbers of baptisms, confessions and acts of Communion per month. If this made the clergy into "sacrament coolies," now with the emphasis on socio-economic development, as many priests (and ministers) call themselves ruefully "development coolies."


33. Discussions with Fr. Valentine as above.

34. Behind this help was undoubtedly the philosophy of "making merit" within a Catholic ambience, in much the same way as rich Thai Catholics still continue in 1988 to provide assistance for a priest, over and above that which is strictly necessary for their sustenance.

35. Whilst this appears to be the obvious approach, many socio-economic programmes have collapsed through deliberate community non-co-operation because they felt that they were being pushed into actions they did not fully understand or were afraid of. See Webb, Palms and the Cross, op. cit.

36. Discussions with Bishop Michael and Fr. Valentine as above. Disac stands for Diocesan Social Action: the priest in charge of socio-economic development in a diocese is known by this acronym, in the same way as in the Indonesian Catholic Church, the priest (or layman) responsible for development is called Desos—Delegation Sociales, the Social Delegate. Cf. Webb, Palms and the Cross op. cit. p. 168.


39. Villagers who need a buffalo for ploughing take one from a "buffalo pool"; a percentage of the rice crop is returned with the animal. Rice, usually for seed, is also distributed in this way, with a percentage of the harvest being returned to the donor: Disac or the ban or village.

40. The Flores-Timor Plan in the Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur was established in 1957 under the guidance of the Bishop of Larantuka, E. Flores, Msgr. Thijssen, with the assistance of Misereor (the Overseas Aid Department of the German Bishops Conference), various German political parties and the Federal German government. See Webb op. cit. p. 143 ff. Also Lemenczik, K., "Der Kirchliche Beitrag zur Ökonomischen in N.T.T." Verbum (Rome) 16, (1975) p. 330.


44. Cf Webb op. cit. See also Setz, P. "Aid as an Instability Factor" Impact—Asia Magazine for Human Development (Hong Kong) Vols. 8 & 9 (1973).

45. Discussions with Bishop Michael and Fr. Peter Paisan as above.

46. Misereor (see note 40) receives much of its finance from the unique Church tax prevalent in Germany.

47. The Flores-Timor Plan in N.T.T., Indonesia, works in a slightly different mode. Rather than giving money (except through credit union loans), development schemes are paid for by Misereor, whilst the practical work/details are done by the village people and the Desos.

48. Discussions with Fr. Valentine.

49. This is not a unique situation: similar occurrences take place in Indonesia with money from overseas aid agencies, and even in Australia, where Federal government grants appear to be dissipated when moving through the system in any particular State.


51. Discussions with Fr. Valentine as above. See also Seri Phongphit op. cit. p. 33 where the author does in fact discuss the involvement of Buddhist monks in community and rural development during the late sixties, although it is admitted that this is unusual.

52. Seri Phongphit, ibid. See p. 102 ff. for an account of a village monk actively engaging in socio-economic development with his people.


54. In the islands of Flores and Timor, Indonesia, village women continue to weave their own kain ikat (traditional cloth/patterns) for their own use, but they are now increasing production, still using the traditional loom, using modern dyes and sending the finished ikat to Jakarta to be sold in the large tourist hotels. Visit to a rural "factory," Ende, Flores 1982.

55. The contrast between the Thai farmers in the Ubon region and the petani, farmers of, say, Upper North Timor, in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia, is strong. In the latter case it is very difficult for either officials of the Provincial Agriculture Extension Service or for the Catholic Church's Desos to persuade the Timorese to use modern methods and modern tools. Subsistence
farming is still the norm, and whilst in most of Java, say, a cash economy is certainly in situ, in the islands of N.T.T. the idea of a cash economy is slow to take root in the villages. Personal visits to villages in Flores, Sumba and Timor between 1979 & 1988.

56. Discussions with Fr. Valentine and an official of F.I.A.M. as above.

57. One of the difficulties experienced by development officials in N.T.T. is that adat and ratu adat (those practitioners and keepers of traditional customs and law) often block modern agricultural development through fear for their own positions in the village hierarchy. When the tua' tanah, "Lord of the Land," disapproves of pesticides, irrigation works, the planting of new crops, it is a brave farmer who persists in the face of this disapproval. See Webb, R.A.F. Paul, "Adat and Christianity," op. cit.

58. There are strong similarities to this "poverty - money lending" syndrome in all parts of Asia. Even in the Western nations, "hire-purchase" agreements tie people into a similar cycle.


60. These figures are from the official budget of Disac sent to Misercor, kindly given by Fr. Valentine.

61. Such regressions appear to be unknown in the villages of N.T.T., mainly because the adat hierarchy is still so strong. It is in this area of traditional customs and law that the differences between Buddhism—even a nominal adherence—and animism with a Catholic/Protestant veneer can be most clearly seen.


64. The Bishops Institute for Social Action had its first meeting in 1975, as a project of the Office for Human Development, in turn an agency of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference, and is based in Manila. Its theological underpinnings can be traced to Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. At the same time BISA also owes its genesis to those broad currents in the Church found in e.g. Progressio Populorum and Octogesima Arxhieniens as well as the deliberations of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1971. (Correspondence with Fr. M. Kelly S.J., Asian Bureau, Melbourne, Australia.)


66. Personal visits to these schools in Ubon Ratchathani July 1968.

67. It is through education, of course, that the Indonesian churches are able to influence society—Muslim, Hindu, and animist. The most prestigious and (comparatively) expensive schools in Indonesia are Catholic and Protestant. The reason is that the churches train their own teachers, who by and large are better trained than those who come out of State Teachers Training institutions. See Webb, Palms and the Cross op. cit. pp. 186-89 passim; Cooley, F. (ed.) Benih Yang Tumbuh Xi: Gereja Masehi Timor Dewan Gereja Indonesia, Jakarta 1976 passim.

68. Discussions with Bishop Michael as above.

69. Discussions with Fr. Peter Paisan as above, who has often taken advantage of such periods of meditation in a temple not far from his Minor Seminary in Ubon.

70. Discussions with Bishop Michael as above.

71. For similar hopes of the Catholics in Indonesia see Webb, R.A.F. Paul, Indonesian Christians and their Political Parties (James Cook University SEAsian Monograph 2, 1978); also R.A.F. Paul Webb, "Christian Interviews in Indonesia," Kabar Seberang, James Cook University, No. 5/6, 1979, pp. 200-232.


73. A visit to a hospitable and charming rich Thai Catholic household in Bangkok where a room is always kept for a priest from Ubon diocese, where relatives of the priest are given employment in the house as family servants. The house is awash with statues, crucifixes, pious medals; the expensive cars had at least four St. Christopher medals on the dashboard in 1988. And in the corner of the courtyard stands a large "spirit house" with marigolds and burning incense sticks as a votive offering to the spirits of the place. It would seem that like their Indonesian cousins, Thai Catholics are also inclined to hedge their bets.