

Report to the Laos Day of Prayer in Bangkok Thailand, Nov 20

regarding development of Theological Education by Extension

for use inside Laos.

Background: While working with Specialized Ministries from 1980 to 1982 in the U.S. I was asked as part of my work to do an adaptation of the Alliance Center for Theological Studies (ACTS) in Lao. During that time I finished a rough draft of the first volume, and had started testing. Subsequently, the Hmong Field took over development of this project in Hmong for use in North America.

Seeing the usefulness of TEE in general, I was impressed that the area of greatest need for TEE was in places that regular Bible Institutes or Seminaries had been closed. I eagerly hoped that it could be tried for use within Laos. From February to April of this year, I came out to Nakhorn Phanom to develop that first volume further, and specifically to conform it to current spelling and usage within the Laos Peoples Democratic Republic. When I returned to the U.S., I left 20 copies of the book spiral-bound, but none of the copies could get in right at that time. Subsequently, a few were taken in and one has been returned with comment.

My wife and I arrived 2 months ago on a long-range basis to implement development of this, hopefully to a complete syllabus, designed to provide leadership training for the churches.

The ACTS course is made up of three levels. The first level is derived from the S.E.A.N. materials (S.E.A.N. stands for Seminary by Extension for All Nations -- originally Seminario por Extension Anglicano of Chile South America.) We expect to take these materials as models, but making adjustments within that framework. Eventually, and at more advanced levels, determination of the needs from within Laos will dictate the content of courses.

We are using people within the Nha Pho camp as resource people. Up to this point most of it has been done with a pen and pad, but we expect very shortly to have a computer that we can take into the camp. In this preliminary process, we are also ferreting out the most likely helpers, but helpers in a refugee camp are often short-range because they may be repatriated to a third country. After we get a computer in hand, we expect to proceed something like this;

1. Initial translation/adaptation
2. Modification by someone educated under the new system, screening for contemporary usage and textbook/question techniques. Also simplification to lower target users.
3. Having a relative unsophisticate go over it.

4. Actual use by several home-studiers in the camp.
5. Sending to Laos for initial critique.
6. Laos based modifications incorporated.
7. Sending to Laos for actual use, and critique.
8. More modifications accordingly.
9. Texts considered finished for use in Laos (but they can still be modified further if necessary.)

Volume I has gotten to point 5, but we bypassed point 4 because I was here only 2 months. The initial 1-person critique pointed out some key issues:

It was still too hard.

The inch-thick book is intimidating, and needs to be broken up.

Some outright mistakes remained.

Some illustrations objectionable to Lao Socialism remained.

At present the second volume of Matthew chapter 1 has been developed to point one, and a volume not part of the 6-volume Matthew topical series called "How to Preach " has 3 chapters done at point one.

So far we have been relying on volunteer helpers in the camp. When the helpers are paid they will doubtless be more regular.

The cultural gap is immense, but the utter impossibility of direct translation forces us to be more sensitive to getting the TEE into cultural as well as language idiom. With a lesser gap (eg. Thai to Lao) we might have approached it more simplistically, and thus be less compelled to aim carefully at a difficult target.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Durling