



LEGACY INSTITUTE

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23 September 2005
Chiang Mai, Thailand

Dear Fellow-laborers,

As I send out this letter, hurricane Rita has hit East Texas and West Louisiana. Both Katrina and Rita have left death and destruction in their wake. We should do what we can to help the people who have been hit, especially those of the household of God, no matter what fellowship they belong to. I would urge all of you to check in on the welfare of God's people and their relatives who live in the affected areas. And pray for all those who have suffered loss.

Some have said that the people in those areas are being punished for their sins. Well, is this really true? Are the East Texans and people in Louisiana any greater sinners than the people living in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco or Chicago? I don't think so.

These disasters in the US remind of what Jesus said in Luke 13:1-5 (KJV):

"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

"And Jesus answering said unto them, 'Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

"Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

These great hurricanes are warnings that God is removing His protection from America because of her sins, but I do not think God is directing punishment particularly at New Orleans or any other city. However, I do think the message is clear: "Repent or all will likewise perish".

Letter From Queen Sirikit

August 12 is Queen Sirikit's birth anniversary and also doubles as Mother's Day in Thailand. This year she turned 73. Every year Gloria and I send flowers and write a letter to her.

The queen has a heavy workload and travels 9 months every year to remote areas in the North, South and Northeast of Thailand to supervise hundreds of royally initiated projects. Since the king cannot travel for health reasons, she must also visit her husband's projects as well.

Queen Sirikit has always been very kind and gracious to us and from time to time invites us to come and see her at whatever royal palace she may be resident. We have known the queen for over 20 years and she introduces us to others as “her old friends”.

God is very merciful and has given us this important relationship. When necessary, we ask the assistance of the palace in getting appointments with the proper officials in order to cut through endless red tape. In Thailand, things flow from the top down. For a westerner, dealing with the various agencies of the Thai government is like trying to find one’s way through a maze blindfolded! We have learned it is better to get help. God provides us with the help we need because the queen is very kind to us. Members of her staff are always willing to provide assistance when we are hopelessly lost in the gridlock of Thai bureaucracy. Frankly, we could not operate our project here in Thailand without her patronage.

Let me give you an example. We have two new students at Legacy school from Burma. With the help of relatives, they were able to acquire passports. They arrived at Legacy with only tourist-class visas. In order to stay in Thailand over 60 days, they needed a different kind of visa called a “non-immigrant” visa, which they could not obtain in Burma. We needed to change their visas at the immigration department in Chiang Mai so they could stay and study at the school. We were told, “It can’t be done! They will have to return to Burma.”

So, Gloria went to Bangkok and contacted the queen’s private secretary who immediately arranged an appointment for Gloria with the chief police general of the entire immigration department. The chief was very kind to her and personally saw too it that the visas were changed!

This is only one of many examples I could relate. Without the help of Her Majesty the Queen, these boys would have to return to Burma and would no longer be able to study at Legacy School. So we do what we can in return for the kindness of the royal family of Thailand. We periodically write letters of encouragement to the king and queen and try to support their projects helping the poor whenever we can. (*These are the same projects the Church was involved in from 1971 until about 1992.*)

Over 20 years ago, Dr. Herbert Armstrong said that the king and queen of Thailand were two of the “*finest examples of righteous leadership in the world today*”. They have spent their entire lives trying to help the poor and underprivileged of their country at the grassroots level. They have received numerous international awards for their humanitarian achievements. They are selfless. They never give up giving. I think that is why God loves them and watches over them.

This year, soon after the Queen’s birthday, we got a very big surprise! We received a 3-page personal letter of appreciation from the queen *on her personal stationery* – a totally unexpected honor!

The queen will soon depart for her annual trip to the South. However, some have tried to talk her out of going this year! Why?!

For those of you who might be unfamiliar with Thailand and some of the political and social problems – let me explain.

Thailand is, more or less, a patchwork quilt of ethnic diversity. In the Northern mountainous towns and cities live the many colorful hill-tribes intermingled with the Shan (a “Tai” racial group). In the Northeast live people of Laotian ethnic background. In Central Thailand live the Siamese Tai people with a mixture of Mon. In the capital of Bangkok, many of the citizens are of Chinese extraction.

The people of Southern Thailand are mostly Malay and Muslim with their own customs, language and traditions.

The king and queen of Thailand treat all ethnic groups the same (no matter what racial background they come from or what religion they follow) and encourage them to keep their own ethnic dress, customs and traditions. They consider all equally as Thai. But not all Thai people, particularly politicians, follow their royal example. Many of the ethnic minorities are looked down on and treated as second-class citizens.

King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit have spent their over-50-year reign championing the causes of the underprivileged and the many ethnic minority groups. Sometimes this has put them at loggerheads with local “godfathers” and corrupt government officials who prey on the poor and weak. It has been, and continues to be, a long, arduous uphill battle.

In each of the geographic divisions of Thailand, the king and queen have started royal self-help projects that target the needs of the poor local Thais and ethnic minorities. I have visited many of these projects personally and it is truly amazing what has been accomplished! Today there are literally hundreds of royal initiated projects all over the remote areas of Thailand.

But it has not always been this way. As a matter of fact, back in 1971, when Dr. Herbert Armstrong met King Bhumibol for the first time, the royal projects of the North of Thailand were in their infancy. The hill-tribes of many ethnic groups (Hmong, Lahu, Akha, Chin Haw and others) grew opium as a cash crop. This was, not only illegal, but also their slash and burn method of agriculture was destroying vast areas of mountain watershed.

The Thai government wanted to stop opium production by bombing and burning hill-tribe villages. The king wanted to employ a different method to stop opium production in his kingdom. He wanted to teach them to grow fruits and vegetables instead. Many officials in the government rejected his replacement crop proposal. They considered it too time-consuming and these people were “only hill-tribes anyway, not really Thai.”

This is where *vision* plays an important role in decision-making. The Thai government and even the U.S. government wanted a quick-fix solution to opium production, i.e. enforcement (*which at the time consisted of bombing villages and burning crops*). But the king knew this “solution” would make the hill-tribes enemies of Thailand and play right into the hands of Communist insurgents, who at that time, were operating in Thailand’s border regions. The king wanted to implement, instead, a program of crop replacement education where the hill-tribes would be taught to grow other crops to replace opium growing. In this way they would be settled in one place, which would stop the nomadic, slash and burn (“swidden”) practice of cultivation and learn how to earn a living growing vegetables instead of opium.

At this juncture, I want to stop and explain something. Many people think that because Bhumibol Adulyadej is king, he: A) has always been rich, and B) everyone has to obey him.

Nothing could be further from the truth. King Bhumibol is today and has always been, a constitutional monarch, similar to the status of Queen Elizabeth of England. He has very little political power. At the same time, in the early 1970’s, he was not a wealthy man. Of course he had crown jewels and palaces; but these all belonged to the state.

In 1971, the king and queen had little money to start these projects and very little political power. All they had was a dream, some influence because of their royal status, and steadfast determination.

The king asked the Thai government to help him get his projects started. They hemmed and hawed and made excuses. The king asked the US government for help. They turned him down.

It was left up to King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit, supported by a few who believed in their vision, including Dr. Armstrong, to pull together resources enough to get these projects off the ground.

Today if you visit Thailand, you can travel to the first joint project started by the king with the help of Dr. Armstrong and the Church of God. It is in a remote mountain valley called “Ang Khang” located right on the border with Burma. The king chose this location because it was situated right in the middle of opium-growing country. How better to teach opium growers how to plant cabbages and strawberries?

Ang Khang has become a real-life “fairytale” success story. The hill-tribes began growing fruit trees, vegetables, and even ornamental plants and cut flowers. They now have greenhouses and pickup trucks to take their produce to market. Their children receive an education. They are happy and content. There is even a modern resort built on a hillside where you can stay and eat meals prepared from the many organically grown vegetables and fruits. They no longer grow opium in this area. It is truly a paradise.

What would have happened to this beautiful “Shangri-La” if the Thai government had been allowed to suppress opium production through their shortsighted draconian means?! The king’s intervention in many small mountain top valleys like Ang Khang truly has rescued a people from destruction and given them a new and much better way of life. This pattern of the king’s and queen’s care and compassion has been repeated in many other parts of the country, including the South.

In the South, particularly the southernmost provinces bordering Malaysia, there has always been a level of suspicion and mistrust between the majority Muslim population and the government officials sent to administer from Bangkok. At one time, there was even a major Muslim insurgency that threatened to tear several provinces away from the central Thai government.

Unrest has continued to smolder under the surface in the South. And as always, there are elements that want to capitalize on any mistrust and resentment there may be in order to further their own political agendas.

For over the past 30 years, the king and queen have worked very hard to change this by letting the Muslims of the South know that they consider them as Thai citizens, equal with any other ethnic or religious group. The king is protector of ALL religions in Thailand, including Christianity and Islam. He has even given money to build mosques in Southern Thailand. The queen has worked tirelessly encouraging the Southerners to retain their traditions and customs and has promoted Southern arts and crafts throughout the country. Through the efforts of the king and queen, many royal projects were created in the areas of agriculture, medical and health improvement, and to help poor Muslims receive an education and learn skills to enhance their quality of life.

Of particular note are Queen Sirikit’s Royal Support Foundation educational centers where Southern women can receive an education and learn new skills in various handicrafts in order to help earn income for their families.

The king and queen have expended a great deal of time and energy in the South over the years to lower the atmosphere of suspicion and resentment and create a condition of peace and tranquility.

But that has now changed.

With a change in government came a change in how the Southerners were administered. Soon the mood of the South changed.

As we all are aware, there is a movement worldwide to create “Islamic states” that observe “Sharia” or a kind of religious law. Afghanistan under the Taliban was an example of this kind of state. This

movement is powerful and well financed. It has influence in Muslim communities all over the world. Some who are adherents to this movement are militants or even terrorists who advocate violence to achieve their goals.

These fanatics feed on young Muslims in such communities who lack opportunity and feel repressed by the authorities of the countries in which they live. They resent that they are treated as second-class citizens. These young people are recruited and indoctrinated in fundamentalist dogma and soon become the foot soldiers and pawns of their militant teachers.

Unless the authorities are careful to provide opportunities of education and employment for the young in such communities and treat the people as equal citizens under the law; suspicion, resentment and ultimately unrest and insurgency are the result.

This is what has happened in the South of Thailand.

Several years ago, this unrest resulted in young Southern Muslims attacking a military installation and stealing weapons. The Thai government reacted with lethal force and, as usual, the innocent suffered along with the guilty. The unrest escalated.

On one occasion, a protest was squashed and hundreds of young men were rounded up. They were stacked in trucks like cordwood with their hands tied behind their backs. Some were gagged. During a six-hour ride to the interrogation center, 80 died of suffocation and heat stroke in the back of those trucks. No one took responsibility for this senseless cruelty. None of those responsible for giving such orders was ever punished.

Bombs were set off in public places and local government officials were assassinated. Again the government reaction was like pouring fuel on the fire. Extra-judicial killings of suspected militants have taken place. One famous Muslim lawyer disappeared. The Thai police have “found no leads”.

Soon public school teachers and even Buddhist monks were targeted for assassination. Numerous government schoolteachers and monks have fled the area. As you can imagine, government officials do not want to be transferred to the Southern provinces!

The killing goes on – by both sides. The unscrupulous have used the unrest to settle old scores and blame it on the “terrorists” or the “security forces.” The Thai government has now declared a state of emergency and the Prime Minister has personally assumed sweeping powers. Literally, any action carried out by his personal order is immune from any legal repercussions of any kind.

This is the condition of things today as Queen Sirikit flies to the South.

So, why does she go? Because she is *COMPELLED* to go! Because of her care for ALL the people of Thailand – she can do nothing else!

The queen explained to us in her letter that many had discouraged her from going this year, but that she could not abandon the people of the South. She said that the morale of the people was so low that, if she did not go, the people would feel that she had abandoned them. She told us that she was going to do whatever she could to uphold the freedom of religion, alleviate the suffering of the people, uphold justice for all and ensure protection of life and property under the law of the land.

One serious problem is that besides the homeless, widows and orphans in the South left by the tsunami of December last year, there are also widows and orphans (Buddhists as well as Muslims) who have lost husbands and fathers to the brutal and merciless killing. They have lost, not only those they love, but also the breadwinners in the family.

The queen's heart goes out to the innocents whose suffering seems endless.

She explained in her letter that, from the donations she received to honor her on her 72nd birthday, she purchased several large sections of land and built small houses situated on plots of farmland. Many widows and their families, as well as unemployed youths, are now able to earn a living by raising vegetables, farm animals and fish on these plots. She plans to visit this project to inspect progress and to boost their morale.

The queen also has initiated the training of local villagers as defense volunteers. These armed and trained villagers will be able to protect themselves and their families from terrorists who seek to create fear among the populace.

Because terrorists have targeted Buddhist monks, temples have been abandoned in sensitive areas. The people have no place to worship. To alleviate this problem the queen is taking along certain respected monks who have volunteered to accompany her and stay in these temples to serve the people. Their bravery will greatly raise the morale of local Buddhist villagers.

Queen Sirikit ended her letter by saying:

“So you can see why I have to go to the South. I am confident that if everyone works together under His Majesty's guidance and principles the situation will improve and all the tragedies and sufferings will eventually be stopped. Thank you once again for all your good wishes.”

As you can see, Queen Sirikit has her work cut out for her. She is advancing in years, but her energies seem to increase in the face of adversity. The driving force of her life is her compassion and empathy for her people. Many times the people need a champion. When this is needed, she bravely fulfills the role. Gloria and I admire her and are pleased that our letter encouraged her.

The projects that the king and queen initiate to help the victims of tragedies in the South go a long way to alleviate the suffering and give hope for the future. We would like to help the queen more with her project to help the widows and orphans in the South. The Bible teaches us what pure religion is:

“What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world.” (Jam 1:27) GNB

Legacy Institute can help in only a small way. At the moment, we can only give the queen much appreciated moral support. Of course, we wish that we could do more. Please pray for Queen Sirikit that God will protect her and bless her with success in her programs to help the many widows and orphans of the South.

Brethren in Taungoo, Myanmar

I have just received news that there is a Burmese Army offensive against the Karen National Liberation Army presently taking place in Taungoo District of Myanmar. We have a Church of God congregation of about 25 brethren that meets regularly in this area. I have no news yet of their condition. The tactic that the Burmese Army uses is to target Karen villages; burn their crops and drive them into hiding in the jungle where they face starvation and are at the mercy of the elements. Please pray fervently that God protects His children who live in this area and that any of their villages will be left alone.

Apology

I have to apologize! For those who receive this letter by email, somehow a large list of email addresses appeared in the last email header. This was an unintentional mistake! We have a strict policy to protect the privacy of our readers, and this was a serious breach of that policy. Please forgive me.

Trips to Myanmar and India

I had planned to go to Burma (Myanmar) between now and the Feast of Tabernacles to meet with Evangelist Lazum Brang and Pastor David Ye Gyan in Yangon. I had to cancel because a blood vessel burst in my kidney. I've also had to cancel my trip to India for Trumpets, as the healing is taking a bit longer than expected.

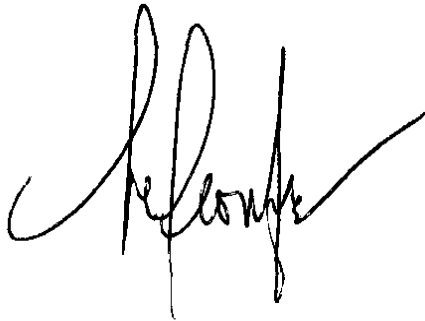
I sent Jason Boise (one of our volunteer teachers) to Myanmar to deliver much-needed funds to them for the Work of God in Myanmar as well as funds for the Feast of Tabernacles. Lazum Brang has traveled a very long distance from his home in the far North to Yangon to meet him and then must immediately return to make arrangements for the High Holy Days of Trumpets and Atonement. Please pray for these men and all the brethren in Myanmar that will be gathering to keep the Fall Holy Days. And please pray for me that God speeds the healing process so I can get back on my feet.

Karen Language Hymnal

Davidson Lay Bey, son of long-time Pastor of Myanmar (Saw Lay Bey) has just completed the translation of a Church of God hymnal in the Karen language begun by his father many years ago. Davidson, a deacon in God's Church is doing this as a memorial to his father, who died about 5 years ago. Legacy Institute will publish this memorial hymnal for use by Karen brethren in both Thailand and Myanmar. We are pleased we can help Davidson in this labor of love. By the way, this will be the first COG hymnal ever published in the Karen tribal language.

That's it for this letter. May all of you have a wonderful and spiritually energizing Fall Holy Day season. May God grant you all safety and may His Grace fall upon all God's people – worldwide.

Our Lord's servant,



WHAT IS LEGACY INSTITUTE?

LEGACY INSTITUTE is a private, non-profit, charitable foundation and is not affiliated with any human church organization. Legacy Institute seeks to serve and help mankind in the spirit and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. His instructions were to freely give. This means without discrimination and without prejudice. Your donations to Legacy Institute are tax deductible in the USA.

Leon Sexton

ANNOUNCEMENT

Gloria and I are planning a speaking tour in the USA from mid-November until mid-December. We will be talking about the ministry God has given us to do in Asia and the Legacy Institute Leadership Training Center in Chaingmai, Thailand.

Following is our schedule:

Portland, Vancouver, Washington area.

Sunday, November 13, 2005 1 PM (Location yet to be determined.)

For information on location and time, please contact: Brenda Rule Tel. No. 360-944-5930. Email brenneslechateau@yahoo.com or contact Anita Showers at 330-852-2709. Email mshowers@wiltshire.net

Ohio, Kentucky area

Sabbath, November 26, 2005 2:30 PM Church of God, Cincinnati

Northern Hills Fellowship Unitarian Church located at 460 Fleming Road in Cincinnati. Fleming Road passes through a residential area connecting two major roads Winton Road and Springfield Pike (Hwy 4).

Contact information: Jim Obrien Tel. No. (513) 755-0040 home / office; (513) 235-0507 cell; jobrien@fuse.net email; www.cogcincinnati.com church info

Dallas, Texas area

Sabbath, December 3, 2005 1 PM Sabbath Services 3 PM Legacy Presentation
Church of God Big Sandy, Big Sandy, Texas.

The Church building is 1/10 mile West of Big Sandy city limits on North side of Highway 80. Big Sandy is located on Rt. 80 between Hawkins and Gladewater.

Contact information: Dave Havir 903-636-5227; 903-636-4600; DPHavir@aol.com

We would like to see as many of you as we can!

In God's service,
Leon and Gloria Sexton