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**KEEPING THE FAITH**

**Turning the Other Cheek**

Two Born Again Christian missionaries got badly beaten up last week whilst trying to preach their message and discuss with the locals about their faith. Where is this you might ask? Afghanistan? Iran? Hollywood? No, of all places it was right here in Pattaya!

A group of six American missionaries arrived in Pattaya, some for the first time, and began spreading their message along Beach Road. Whilst outside of a famous shopping mall further along Beach Road, one of them, 33 year old Mr. Tony Webb, was confronted by a tourist in the crowd who told him that Thailand was mainly Buddhist and that they should respect the law of the land and not preach out loudly about other religions in public. The man even declared that he himself was a Buddhist. A claim, he declared by showing the group a string necklace with a glass bauble around his throat that he claimed was a Buddhist relic, a fact verified by his white girlfriend.

This, however, did not deter Mr. Webb, who noted seeing the pair earlier in another



area where they were preaching, and indeed had listened to the missionaries talk about their faith for at least an hour. Therefore, Mr. Webb carried on with his preaching, but now unfortunately was being constantly heckled by this stranger. This did not deter Mr. Webb who tried starting a conversation with the man, who suddenly decided he didn't want to hear any more and walked away in a miffed state with his girlfriend in tow.

At this point, Mr. Webb carried on preaching to the swelling curious crowd in the area. However, it wasn't

long before he heard someone scream "I will kill you in the name of my God", and with that he received a blow to the back

of the head. As he turned round he was confronted by the tourist who started punching him at least 10 times, with one serious blow to his left eye. As Mr. Webb fell to the ground, he did not retaliate and fight back and so the disgruntled man began setting on another member of the group. Cheered on by his girlfriend, shouting "I love you baby" he then began punching 23 year old Henry Thompson, who received among other wounds, a nasty blow to his jaw (which required stitches). Like

his friend, Mr. Thompson did not respond and in fact 'turned the other cheek' to the thug. This act seemed to confuse the man who suddenly calmed down and in apparent shame walked away from the scene. Police arrived but the missionaries did not wish to press charges against the man.

We invited Mr. Webb and Mr. Thompson to discuss the incident at the Pattaya People Office and they agreed and came along in the afternoon of Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> March to give us more information.

They stated that they are Born Again Christians. That is, people in the Christian faith (mainly Evangelical, Fundamentalist, and Pentecostal Christians in the USA) that have undergone a conversion experience. Mr. Webb, aged 33, is half Vietnamese and half American and has lived in Bangkok for the past 18 years. In fact, before finding his Christian faith, Mr. Webb was a Buddhist and also a former Thai Boxer, who went under the name of Tony Sasiprapaygm. Mr. Thompson, aged 24 comes from Minnesota, USA. Based in Bangkok and as a team they all go preaching

around Thailand and other parts of Asia. They claim to be independent evangelists, preaching in Orphanages, Prisons with the help of the Thai Prison Foundation and even Drug Rehabilitation Centres. Once a month they go along the Thai-Burmese border to preach to villagers. They never hand out literature and only rely on the spoken word to get their message across. They have never had any problems with the Thai police in all the areas they have been. Mr. Webb stated "Even in Thai society there is great religious tolerance and people can express religion freely. I first came to Pattaya in 1998 and it was a lot different. People here have a very liberal

outlook on life. To me, Buddhism is a philosophy, Christianity is a faith."

As for the villain of the story, they stated that he was about 24 years old and had a European accent, possibly German or Russian. He had a shaved head, was shirtless, wearing only a pair of white shorts (and his "relic") and had a number of tattoos all over his body, including a very distinct Ying and Yang symbol. Being Born Again Christians, they said they forgive the man for his actions. Mr. Webb stated "I'd even take him out to dinner. After all, there is still hope for all of us, including him."

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