

INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

"A PROLEGOMENA FOR THE THAI CONTEXT: A Starting Point for Thai Theology"

by

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Abstract of a Thesis  
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## ABSTRACT

Most theology taught in Thailand originated from Western thought frameworks. The Thai, however, have a different framework of thinking.

This study looks at how theology may be developed within the Thai context. Fundamental issues related to prolegomena and developments in the West are studied. Current thinking regarding contextualization is presented especially Dyrness's Interaction Model. A summary of recent attempts to develop Asian theologies is given, noting that most attempts have majored on the context to the expense of Revelation.

The heart of the research is an extensive study of the Thai context in particular the Thai thought structure, philosophy, epistemology and system of belief. Data was drawn from materials already available and six interviews with prominent Thai thinkers. The results show that the Thai are not conceptual and do not define, but are concrete, empirical, experiential, pragmatic, use feelings, emotion and intuition, and can hold opposites together without needing to synthesize. They believe what they can experience. They move from particular to particular without tracing back to sources, general principles or definitions. Their belief system incorporates a mixture of Animism, Brahmanism and Buddhism. Regarding new ideas, they have the ability to add to what has already gone before them without feeling the need to negate or start afresh. Their particular strength is their ability to "narrate" (amplify, say in different ways) and this may be their unique contribution to theology.

A method of approaching theology in the Thai context is proposed. This consists of taking existing theological statements, ideas or topics (perhaps from

an existing creed); examining the issues and feelings the Thai have intuitively regarding the statement; identifying Biblical and natural sources which relate to the statement and respective issues (in particular actual events - Creation, Israel, Jesus Christ, The Cross and Resurrection, The Church in Acts); by the Spirit's leading along with the propensity of the Thai to narrate and describe, the above data is amplified upon; conclusions are compared to doctrinal passages.

325 words

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### What is Prolegomena ?

##### Introduction

“Show me your prolegomena, and I will predict the rest of your theology”<sup>1</sup>.

Prolegomena, in particular with reference to theology, is an opening section which discusses and lays down the framework and presuppositions whereby the rest of the work will be done. It thus determines the course the work will take.

The prolegomena on “theology” present a discussion of fundamental issues of method, its presuppositions and basic intentions, and provide a clear identification of the *principia* of theology, the cognitive and essential grounds of the discipline, namely, Scripture and God.<sup>2</sup>

Basic concerns in Prolegomena to Theology include “foundational problems in theology, such as the source of knowledge, the nature and authority of Scriptures, the hermeneutical principle and the interpretation of the Scripture, faith and revelation and basic perspective in doing theology, etc.”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Volume 1: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 20.

Note that he has already defined *principia* as being the doctrines of Scripture and God.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Tong, *Systematic Theology and Preaching Ministry* (Los Angeles: Syllabus and Class Notes - International Theological Seminary, 1997), p. 19.



## Orthodoxy and Effectiveness

“All theology rests upon presuppositions and principles”<sup>4</sup> and these form the basis on which the arguments are amplified. Both the *orthodoxy* and the *effectiveness* of the final work may be predicted from careful analysis of the prolegomena. *Orthodoxy*, since regard to the importance of revelation, the authority of scripture, the attention to the historical faith as handed down to us must be considered. *Effectiveness*, since the mode and style of communication within any particular context must also be considered.

The harmony of these two considerations is of utmost importance and is a most delicate enterprise. Hubbard compares it to the fiddler in *The Fiddler on the Roof* :

Fall to the right and you end in obscurantism, so attached to your conventional ways of practicing and teaching the faith that you veil its truth and power from those who are trying to see it through very different eyes. Slip to the left and you tumble into syncretism, so vulnerable to the impact of paganism in its multiplicity of forms that you compromise the uniqueness of Christ and concoct “another gospel which is not a gospel.”<sup>5</sup>

## Context

Concerning context, it must be readily admitted that most theology, both written and taught, has been formulated within a Western context. The prolegomena for such theology was influenced by the Western cultural, historical and philosophical context. “Theology in the West has developed under unique historical circumstances... the discipline of theology, has grown up in the West under the influence of Greek philosophy and our interaction with that

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<sup>4</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Volume 1*, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> David Allan Hubbard, *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), p. vii.

philosophy.”<sup>6</sup> Theology has traditionally adjusted itself to speak to the prevailing philosophy of the time.

Through the missionary endeavor, especially of the past two centuries, the Christian faith has been planted into most of the major cultures of the world. The theology that has been introduced to these cultures has inevitably, however, been almost exclusively Western in origin. Whilst being, on the whole, orthodox it has not been altogether relevant or effective. “D. T. Niles once expressed this concern in a brilliant image. Christianity in Asia, he said, is like a “potted plant” which has been transported without being transplanted”<sup>7</sup>.

More specifically, the thought processes and epistemology of the Thai have generally not developed along Western lines<sup>8</sup>. They hold different presuppositions and world view to that of the West. Furthermore “local theologies which are directly applicable to the Thai mind and culture have not yet emerged”<sup>9</sup>. The gospel of Jesus Christ can not yet be said to have become rooted in the Thai mind.

This dissertation is concerned, therefore, to find relevant starting points for doing Biblical theology in the Thai context. It researches the generally accepted philosophical and religious presuppositions held by the Thai and proposes meaningful approaches to theology in their context.

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<sup>6</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Invitation To Cross-Cultural Theology: Case Studies In Vernacular Theologies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas J. Elwood, "Asian Christian Theology in the Making: An Introduction," in *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> John Davis, *Poles Apart?* (Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan, 1993), p. 31-37.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

## Who Are the Thai People?

### History

Archaeological evidence suggests that there has been almost continuous human occupation of Thailand for the last 20,000 years<sup>10</sup>. Tai-speaking people, however, migrated southward and westward from China around the 10th century AD.<sup>11</sup> The Tai Sukhothai kingdom was founded about 1220 replacing the Khmer who were living in that area. Chiang Mai was established in 1296 after the Tai people defeated the Mon state of Haripunjaya. The Chakri dynasty came to power in 1782 under the leadership of Chao Phraya Chakri (Rama I). In the early years of the new dynasty the capital city was established in Bangkok. Today there are approximately 65 million people living in Thailand, eighty percent of which are of Tai descent (the majority being Thai). The Chinese, the Khmer, and Malays also constitute a significant portion of the population as do a variety of hill tribe people.

### Religion

*Buddhism* (Therevada) is professed by the majority of Thailand's population and is considered the national religion. Although Thai Buddhism has been regarded by some to be of a particularly pure form, the religious practice of most Thais is actually a syncretistic mixture of both *animism* and Buddhism. Many of the practices of the monks, themselves, are actually animistic in origin.

Although they total only a few thousand families, a considerable influence is also held by Hindu *Brahmans*. Most royal and official ceremonies are directed

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<sup>10</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica: CD 98 Multimedia Edition* (NeoLogic Systems, Inc., 1997), s.v. "Thailand".

<sup>11</sup> There were two main routes taken by the Thai Yai and the Thai Ahom respectively. Supatra Suparp, *Sangkom Leh Watanatam Thai (Thai Society and Culture)* (Bangkok: Thai Watanapanit Publishing Company, 1985), p. 1.

or performed by the Brahmans, whose rites are mixed in harmony with those of the Buddhists.

Brahmans are renowned for their astrological expertise, assume responsibility for preparing the national calendar, and officiate at such state ceremonies as the annual plowing ceremony, which is believed to bring a good rice harvest.<sup>12</sup>

Michael Wright goes as far as to say that it is only in fact animism that "is truly their own".<sup>13</sup> Buddhism and Brahmanism are both "imports".

One may ask us Thais whether we are real Buddhists or not? The answer is that we are Buddhists the Thai way. That is, we are Buddhists with many other world views mixed in. Even though these different world views are inconsistent with each other, we have been able to adjust them so that they fit together as one. As Sian Goset said, the Thai believe in various religions one on top of another just like the image of a Jedi. That is at the base, there is animism, on top of that there is the magical beliefs stemming from Brahmanism and Hinduism, and on top of that, Buddhism.<sup>14</sup>

### Philosophy

One might suppose that the Thai Philosophy is basically Buddhist. Certainly, there is Buddhist philosophy in Thailand, but as Professor Kirti Bunchua points out, that Buddhist philosophy is Indian, not Thai philosophy<sup>15</sup>. He says that the Westerner likes to "define" (*niyahm*), the Thai likes to "narrate" (*banya*). The lack of emphasis on defining in the Thai context is evidenced by the lack of the verb "to be" in the Thai language<sup>16</sup>. So whereas the Western

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<sup>12</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica: CD 98 Multimedia Edition* (NeoLogic Systems, Inc., 1997), s.v. "Thailand, Religion".

<sup>13</sup> Michael Wright, "Some Observations on Thai Animism," *Practical Anthropology* (Jan-Feb 1968): 1-7.

<sup>14</sup> Nuangnoi Boonyanati, "Fortune (Duang)" In *Key Terms in Thai Thoughts* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1992), p. 56. (Translation from the Thai is my own).

<sup>15</sup> Kirti Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratyā Kawng Nak Kit Thai (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language)* (Bangkok: Unpublished Manuscript, Under the Sponsorship of the Thai National Research Institute, 2002), p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1-2.

(Greek influenced) philosophy and mind-set is bent towards condensing a matter to its basic root, the Thai's creative mind-set is inclined to amplifying and building on what is already there<sup>17</sup>.

An extended study of Thai thought, including religious philosophical and epistemological considerations, is undertaken in chapter 3.

### Rationale for a Contextualized Thai Theology

#### Crisis

Dr. Bong Rin Ro of the Asia Theological Association in an article on contextualization states:

John Baillie once said, "Theological ideas are created on the Continent (Europe), corrected in Great Britain, and corrupted in America." An appropriate phrase can be added: "and crammed Into Asia." However, shoving the "Westerner's Christianity" upon other nationals is no longer acceptable.<sup>18</sup>

The Gospel has been preached by Protestants in Thailand since 1816.<sup>19</sup> The first church to emerge was among the Chinese in 1837.<sup>20</sup> Eric Cohen writes, "Christianity was on the whole spectacularly unsuccessful in penetrating Thailand."<sup>21</sup> There are still estimated to be only approximately 200,000 Protestant Christians in Thailand today (0.3 percent of the population). It is clear that the gospel has not "taken root" amongst the Thai.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>18</sup> Bong Rin Ro, "Contextualization: Asian Theology" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 2(1) (1978): 15-23, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Alex Smith, *Siamese Gold* (Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan, 1982), p. xxiii.

<sup>20</sup> The Maitri Chit Church (being the first Protestant Church in Asia); Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Eric Cohen, "Christianity and Buddhism in Thailand" *Social Compass* 38, 2 (1991): 115-140, p. 118.

Hiebert points out that:

Most mission movements have led to theological crises. Three or four generations after a church is planted in a new culture, local theologians arise and struggle with the question of how the gospel relates to their cultural traditions... How should we respond ... if we encourage them, are we not opening the door for theological pluralism and eventually, relativism? If we oppose them, are we not guilty of the worst form of ethnocentrism and of stunting their growth?<sup>22</sup>

### Objections

Objections to contextualized theology come predominately from those wishing to retain the “purity” of the Gospel message. Sometimes these are the national leaders themselves. Indeed Chow suggests that in Asia various factors have discouraged the launching of theological contextualization, including uncritical adherence to tradition and fear of syncretism.<sup>23</sup>

Hiebert answers his own question concerning how we should respond by explaining that “all theologies are shaped by their particular historical and cultural context - by the languages they use and the questions they ask”<sup>24</sup> and “moreover, all theologies are flawed by human sinfulness”.<sup>25</sup>

A further objection may be posed by citing the “peculiar-ness” of the children of Israel. They were set apart (and so too is the church<sup>26</sup>) as a Holy people. They were not intended to be like the nations around them, they were to be distinct. Why then the emphasis on contextualization?

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights For Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 197.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson W. Chow, "Biblical Foundations: an East Asian Study" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 7 No 1 (1983): 102-112, p. 102.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.

## Biblical Response

Chapter two deals with various approaches to contextualization, and critiques them according to orthodoxy and effectiveness. I certainly do not advocate a contextualization whereby the context dictates the message and the distinctiveness is lost through absorption by the culture. Neither, however, do I propose that the solution lies in enforcing a Judaeo, Greek or Western mold of Christian thought upon a community whose thinking is very different.

“The most striking evidence of contextualization in the Old Testament is the manner in which God deliberately and repeatedly shaped the disclosure of himself to his people by using the widely known, ancient phenomenon of covenant.”<sup>27</sup> Glasser goes on to describe the typical non biblical covenant of the late second millennium B.C. and how God used the same concepts with Israel. He continues by citing the Old Testament prophets:

The prophets were masters of the contextualization process. Their messages were communicated orally or by symbolic actions devoid of all ambiguity. They spoke directly to the people in unmistakable terms. “I sat where they sat,” said Ezekiel (3:15), and his ministry was a vivid demonstration of sensitivity to the context in which his hearers found themselves.<sup>28</sup>

Part of the glory of the New Testament Christian message is that, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, it is capable of being understood and appreciated by peoples of every cultural background. The book of Acts, clearly demonstrates how the apostle Paul effectively planted the Christian message outside the Jewish “camp” among the Greeks and Romans. In Acts 15, The Jerusalem Council once and for all agreed that “Gentiles” do not need to become

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<sup>27</sup> Arthur F. Glasser, “Old Testament Contextualization: Revelation and Its Environment,” in *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

“Jews” in order to be Christian, thus freeing the gospel to take root uniquely in each different culture. Paul consistently sought to adjust his message so as to speak intelligibly and meaningfully to his audience<sup>29</sup>.

Language is just one part of learning to communicate in another culture. Marvin Mayers suggests there are twelve key elements in a culture's system of values.<sup>30</sup> Fluency in a language does not necessarily mean that one may communicate effectively.

The incarnation is the prime example of how God communicates with a people. Rather than declaring His truth from above, *the* Truth was born in human form, as a Jew. He spoke their language and enjoyed their festivals. Even so, he was distinct and his call to radical discipleship cut through the religiosity of the day. Yet He spoke into the culture and those with “ears to hear” were transformed.

Quoting from the Policy Statement of the TEF Committee, (“Theology in Context,” SEAJT, XIV, 1 (1972), 64-67:

False contextualization yields to uncritical accommodation, a form of culture faith. Authentic contextualization is always prophetic, arising always out of a genuine encounter between God's Word and his world, and moves toward the purpose of challenging and changing the situation through rootedness in and commitment to a given historical moment.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> His message on Mars Hill in Athens being a prime example. Acts 17.16-34.

<sup>30</sup> Lingenfelter & Mayers, *Ministering Cross Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Gerald H. Anderson, “*Asian Voices In Christian Theology* - Introduction,” in *Asian Voices In Christian Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 4.



## Language

Elwood points out that:

Christianity began in a Hebrew cultural environment, with a Hebrew or Aramaic vocabulary, and the Gospel's first great encounter was with Judaism. When the first Christians began to proclaim the Gospel to peoples of Greek cultural background, they had to use a different vocabulary. Gradually the language of Christian theology changed, incorporating many Greek terms and ideas such as *logos* and "substance," alongside the Jewish ones already in use. It is quite natural to expect, therefore, that a similar pattern will follow as the Gospel confront more directly the thought-forms and life-ways of particular Asian cultures.<sup>32</sup>

## History

Hiebert points out that the history of the church cannot be understood apart from its cultural and historical setting. "The early church sought both to make the gospel understood and to preserve its authentic message in the context of a Greek culture that was in many ways foreign to the Bible"<sup>33</sup>. In the process it had to fight the heresies that emanated from the dualistic Greek world view, which made Christ either man or God, but not both. "Protestant orthodoxy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries countered the degenerate nature of the church in its day and formulated a theology meaningful to the people of the Enlightenment."<sup>34</sup>

## Perspective

Whilst not agreeing with Song's approach to theology one must agree with his sentiment. He states that:

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<sup>32</sup> Douglas J. Elwood, "Christian Theology In An Asian Setting: The Gospel And Chinese Intellectual Culture" *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 16(2) (1975): 1-16, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights For Missionaries*, p. 207.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

The tradition which the English-speaking Churches of the West have inherited is inevitably Graeco-Roman, and more especially Latin, and it is difficult for an Anglo-Saxon or Celtic Christian to look at his or her faith and practice except through Latin spectacles.<sup>35</sup>

He continues by saying "They must train themselves to see Christ through Chinese eyes, Japanese eyes, Asian eyes, African eyes, Latin American eyes. This is what I mean by doing theology with a third eye."<sup>36</sup>

### Thai Context

The time is ripe for Thai Christians along with foreign missionaries to help each other in developing an indigenized Thai theology.

As long ago as 1990 Davis urged for local theologies to "be defined within the cosmological world-view of Buddhist people in Thailand, especially those with predominant folk religion convictions, which probably amounts to ninety five percent of the population."<sup>37</sup> My own research has revealed that there are still many "gaps" in the understanding of the Thai Christian towards the Christian faith which the current Christian education is ineffective is correcting<sup>38</sup>.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to research the generally accepted philosophical and religious postulates within the Thai context and propose Biblical and foundational Christian postulates along with meaningful ways of communicating Christian truth to the Thai.

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<sup>35</sup> Choan-Seng Song, *Third-Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> John R. Davis, *Towards a Contextualised Theology for the Church in Thailand* (Birmingham: PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1990), p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen C.R. Taylor, "Gaps in Beliefs of Thai Christians" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 37(1) (2001): 72-81, p. 72.

It is hoped that this research and resulting prolegomena will stimulate others in the same direction and provide a basis and starting point for further development of theology for the Thai context.

### Methodology

Extensive research of methods and principles of contextualization, articles relating to contextualization in Asia, attempts at Asian theology and writing relating to Thai religion, epistemology and philosophy were carried out.

In addition to the above, and perhaps most valuable, were a series of interviews carried out in Bangkok with some leading Thai thinkers. The fully transcribed text of those interviews are presented in the appendixes at the back of this dissertation.

Results were analyzed and conclusions were made.

### Limitations, Assumptions and Definition of Terms

As James P. Spradley suggests, the *Ethnographic Interview* tool is a highly effective method of obtaining pertinent information for use in analysis<sup>39</sup>. There is, however, a limit to the number of interviews that can be performed (in this case 6) and therefore cross section of representation of views.

Inevitably as a Westerner, I hold an *etic* or “outsiders” understanding of the Thai. While the interviews form an important source of knowledge, it is hoped that Christian Thai thinkers will continue to pursue this research from an *emic* or “insiders’ understanding. Ideally, the two perspectives working together will produce the best results.

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<sup>39</sup> James Spradley, *The ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1979).

I have limited or focused the main concern of my research to the vast majority of the Thai, that is the Thai “commoner”, who forms approximately 95% of the population. There are, indeed, a small number of academics who have been very much influenced by Western thought and epistemology. This is not, however typical of the majority of the Thai, even within the main cities. In my interviews, I endeavored to focus the discussion around the thought patterns of the average Thai.

### Organization of the Rest of the Study

Chapter Two, summarizes the importance of prolegomena to theology and how it has developed within the Western context with Biblical postulates. Next is an introduction to some of the major theories relating to contextualization along with a critique of different attempts within the Asian context. A summary of published articles relating to contextualization in Asia is given.

Chapter Three investigates the Thai context in particular. Important issues raised in the interviews are discussed. Relevant material, both published and unpublished, which specifically relates to the Thai is presented and analyzed.

Chapter Four seeks to bring the findings of chapter two and chapter three together and specific suggestions are made.

Chapter Five provides a summary and conclusion.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL AND CURRENT REFLECTIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter endeavors to briefly outline what has gone before in terms of theology in both the Western and Asian contexts with some Biblical perspective. It also presents some of the current thinking regarding cross-cultural theology.

#### Development of Theology and Prolegomena in the Western Context

“All theology rests upon presuppositions and principles... theological prolegomena address issues that are always present and must always have their effect on doctrinal statement.”<sup>40</sup> No one is capable of approaching theology in *tabula rasa* fashion. The fact that one’s prolegomena will determine one’s theology is inherent in the fact that *a priori* presuppositions, philosophical ideas and assumptions are inevitably present in anyone setting out on theological discovery. These will of necessity influence the resultant theology.

13th Century French theologian William of Auxerre (1231), following Aristotle, suggested that all sciences rest upon their own *principia* or first principles. Theology, therefore, must have its own self-evident principles (*principia per se nota*) which provide the foundations for demonstrative knowledge and the basis of argument for the sake of clarifying or proving the faith.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Volume 1*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

Otto Weber asks the crucial question, however, concerning prolegomena in his *Grundlagen der Dogmatik* namely:

...whether and under what circumstances the prolegomena are vordogmatisch, or predogmatic. When dogmatics rests on prior, nontheological, ontological, or anthropological presuppositions, and these presuppositions are set forth in the prolegomena, then indeed the prolegomena are *vordogmatisch*—*but* is this then a Christian dogmatics?<sup>42</sup>

Weber concludes that Christian dogmatics can have no true prolegomena, but only an introduction which shares in the presuppositions of the system of dogmatics as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

Muller states that:

The production of any theological formula brings with it fundamental questions of the relationship of language to divine truth, of the capability of any human statement to bear the weight of revelation, and of the relationship of statements concerning God to grammatically identical statements concerning the world of sense and experience. In other words, the inherent paradox of the use of finite forms to discuss an infinite truth, of the presentation of concepts relating to an incomprehensible Being and the unfathomable mystery of his relation to the world and its creatures, hovers in the background of all theological statement. Prolegomena merely make these issues explicit.<sup>44</sup>

This problem of stating infinite ideas in finite language led Aquinas, for example, to develop his *analogia entis* (analogy) as part of his prolegomena. The Protestant scholastic statement of fundamental principles (*principia theologiae*), was critical of the pure Thomistic approach of the Middle Ages and recognized “the inability of theology to rest its arguments on a principle of

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 53-54.

analogy between Creator and creature and, instead, tends to argue the use of ideas and terms on the basis of scriptural revelation”<sup>45</sup>.

The early reformers, however, were concerned more with polemics and lacked basic methodology and structure to their theology. Calvin’s *Institutes*, for example, were formulated with no concern for methodology, and even his final edition was simply arranged under a credal form “and not the development of a consistent approach, either synthetic or analytic, to the organization of doctrine.”<sup>46</sup>

The early orthodox church of the 16th Century sought to “create a theological system suited to the successful establishment of Protestantism as a church in its own right”<sup>47</sup>. Quoting Dormer, (*History of Protestant Theology*, 1871) Muller continues that this system was to be “catholic in its teaching, capable of being sustained intellectually against its adversaries, and sufficiently technical and methodologically consistent to stand among the other disciplines in the university.”<sup>48</sup>

This concern for method and structure marks a point of genuine distinction between the theological approach of the Reformers and that of the early orthodox...The early orthodox era...strove toward cohesive method and arrangement of doctrine as well as toward precise definition. Typical of the era is a concern to distinguish between a theoretical, somewhat deductive and teleological approach to system, usually called “synthetic,” and a more practical, somewhat inductive approach usually called “analytic.” The synthetic model, which became the dominant pattern for system, begins with prolegomena and the doctrine of Scripture and moves from the doctrine of God, via the historical path of sin and redemption, to the last things. Analytic patterns can, for example, begin

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<sup>45</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), analogia entis.

<sup>46</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Volume 1*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 31.

with the problem of sin and move, via the work of redemption, to faith and the articles of the faith.<sup>49</sup>

With an increase in methodology came an increase in the arid character of Protestant scholasticism. Pietism endeavored to rescue the Reformation from the ever increasing emphasis on theological system. Yet as Muller points out:

Even pietism, in its assumption that confessions of the church were not absolutely necessary, exercised “the liberty inherent in Protestantism” to the detriment of the biblical standard. Some churchly confession is needed, after all, to identify the meaning of Scripture.<sup>50</sup>

### Theology and Philosophy

The extent to which philosophy forms a part of theology has been debated since the early church. Tertullian, for instance, was strongly opposed to the intrusion of philosophy, in particular Greek thought, into theology. Yet as Pannenberg points out:

The same Tertullian who asked what Athens had to do with Jerusalem, or the Academy with the church, and who wanted to affirm nothing that went beyond faith, admitted Stoic thought into theology in a very risky way, for example, by conceiving God and the soul as special kinds of bodies.<sup>51</sup>

Holmes points out that Tertullian himself “was indebted to Philosophy in adopting the Stoic’s traducian view of truth”<sup>52</sup>. Tertullian is quoted as saying, “The soul of man, like the shoot of a tree, is drawn out (deducta) into a physical progeny from Adam, the parent stock” (Shedd, *History of Doctrine*, II, 14).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 30-31.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>51</sup> Wolfhart (Translated by George H. Kehm) Pannenberg, *Basic Questions In Theology Volume II* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 47-48.

<sup>52</sup> Arthur Holmes, *Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1975)

<sup>53</sup> *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Vol 8 ( Albany: Ages Software, 1998), “Psychology”.



Origen, on the other hand, was typical of what was to be called the “Alexandrian school” with its strong leanings towards mixing philosophy and theology. Schaff goes as far as to say that “in the hands of Origen, philosophy was identical with theology.”<sup>54</sup> Gregory, however, moved to make philosophy the handmaid of theology (*ancilla theologiae*) using it to serve rather than rule or dictate to theology. “Gregory, in this respect, has done the most important service of any of the writers of the Church in the fourth century. He treats each single philosophical view only as a help to grasp the formula of faith.”<sup>55</sup>

Over the course of the next two centuries, Spykman points out that:

As reason is subservient to faith, it was argued, so Greek philosophy can serve as a preparatory stage in developing a Christian body of truth. Like the proverbial Trojan horse, Christian theology opened its gates to admit and make room for Greek philosophy to play a servant role in the formulation of Christian doctrine. Philosophers were enlisted as “handmaidens” to theologians. So complete was the presumed conquest of theology over philosophy, so fully did some Christians believe that they had assimilated into their own theological systems the “natural light” of pagan thinking, that in A.D. 529 the last remaining schools of Greek philosophy were closed.<sup>56</sup>

The impact of philosophy on theology gained strength at the beginning of the early scholastic period of the eleventh century with the emergence of reason (philosophy) as a method to be used in theology. Anselm used it to demonstrate the rationality of Christian doctrine. “Reason had entered theology not (yet) as a means of defining Christian doctrine (which was based on revelation) but as a technique for defending and further understanding this faith.”<sup>57</sup> Thomas Aquinas, upon whose theology the Catholic Church is still predominantly based, likewise

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<sup>54</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series, Volume 5* (Wisconsin: The Ages Digital Library, 1995), p. 29.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>56</sup> Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, p. 17.

<sup>57</sup> Tony Lane, *The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Lion, 1986), p. 70.

mixed philosophy and theology. He combined Aristotelian thought with Christian doctrine to formulate his “proofs” for the existence of God.

The Reformers were generally against philosophy, Luther terming reason a “monster,” “the source of all evil,” and “the blind whore of the Devil.”<sup>58</sup> Yet Luther later appealed to “clear evidence of reason [*ratio evidens*] as the judges of his case”<sup>59</sup> in his defence at Worms.

The rise and fall of Protestant scholasticism is aptly described in relation to philosophy by Muller as follows:

The decline of Protestant orthodoxy, then, coincides with the decline of the interrelated intellectual phenomena of scholastic method and Christian Aristotelianism. Rationalist philosophy was ultimately incapable of becoming a suitable *ancilla* and, instead, demanded that it and not theology be considered queen of the sciences. Without a philosophical structure to complement its doctrines and to cohere with its scholastic method, Protestant orthodoxy came to an end.”<sup>60</sup>

More recently, Gordon Spykman states that “Theology and philosophy form a partnership in the sense that the best prolegomena to Christian theology, more specifically to Reformed dogmatics, is a Christian philosophy.”<sup>61</sup> He continues “Thus philosophy, in the form of a natural theology, serves as prolegomena to theology proper, which in turn is viewed as the theoretical contemplation of supernatural truths.”<sup>62</sup>

Barth, however, totally rejected the idea of a natural theology and stressed the *revelatory* nature and foundation of the Christian faith and proposed a *theology from above* which is discussed in subsequent sections.

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<sup>58</sup> Pannenberg, *Basic Questions In Theology Volume II*, pp. 48

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Volume 1*, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

Our present discussion continues under our next heading (Faith, Reason and Revelation), but Placher well sums up the dilemma:

The issues raised by Tertullian and Origen remain alive today. Some Christians attack the intellectual life, and much of the world around them, in the name of Christ, as if one had to stop thinking in order to be a good Christian. Others seem eager to modify their faith to suit the current cultural fashion. Tertullian warns of the dangers of compromising faith to make it socially acceptable. The school of Alexandria shows how Christians can use all the intellectual resources of the world around them to proclaim their faith. In the generations immediately after Origen and Tertullian, Christians demonstrated that they had learned both lessons. In struggling to define what they believed about Christ, they fought off compromise and also created a theory of great intellectual sophistication.<sup>63</sup>

Modern theologians in the post-modern period face greater challenges than their predecessors. Nevertheless, they will do well to take careful note of the position stated above.

### Faith, Reason and Revelation

The Christian faith is based upon “the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”<sup>64</sup> That is, the special revelation of God as given and written under inspiration to the apostles and prophets of the Old and New Testaments. These truths, Paul states, are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.<sup>65</sup> Primarily, the special revelation of God is Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection, as recorded in the Scriptures<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> William C. Placher, *A History Of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), pp. 65-66.

<sup>64</sup> Ephesians 2:20.

<sup>65</sup> What God has prepared for those who love him is not heard by the ear nor conceived by the mind but rather, God has revealed it by his Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:8-10.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

Migliore explains that “the meaning of revelation... refers to the self-disclosure of God in the creation, in the history of the people of Israel, and above all in the person of Jesus.”<sup>67</sup> And he continues: “Revelation is not the transmission of a body of knowledge but the personal disclosure of one subject to other subjects.”<sup>68</sup> The question which is often debated by theologians is whether we are to think of revelation as an *objective occurrence* (as recorded in the Bible) or a *subjective experience* (as in one’s own encounter with Christ). Migliore helpfully explains:

But surely both sides of the process of revelation are important and must be held together. Revelation is God’s free and gracious self-disclosure through particular events that are attested and interpreted by people of faith. In Paul Tillich’s words, “Revelation always is a subjective and an objective event in strict interdependence.” What is called revelation includes both God’s self-disclosing activity through particular persons and events and the working of God’s Spirit, who enables people to appropriate and bear witness to this activity.<sup>69</sup>

Given that the Christian faith is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, personal experience should subjugate itself to the Scriptural standard. But we are still left with a connected problem which and that is finding a valid starting point for theology. Should we start with the Scriptures or with the idea of God. The dilemma is well stated by Erickson:

The theologian attempting to develop a systematic treatment of Christian theology early encounters a dilemma regarding the question of starting point. Should theology begin with the idea of God, or with the nature and means of our knowledge of him? In terms of our task here, should the doctrine of God be treated first, or the doctrine of Scripture? If, on the one hand, one begins with God, the question arises, How can anything meaningful be said about him without our having examined the nature of

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<sup>67</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, p. 22.

the revelation about him? On the other hand, beginning with the Bible or some other source of revelation seems to assume the existence of God, undermining its right to be considered a revelation at all.<sup>70</sup>

The best solution seems to be to start with both, since both parts support each other. Erickson continues:

Instead of beginning with either God or the Bible, either the object of knowledge or the means of knowledge, we may begin with both. Rather than attempting to prove one or the other, we may presuppose both as part of a basic thesis, then proceed to develop the knowledge that flows from this thesis, and assess the evidence for its truth. On this basis, both God and his self-revelation are presupposed together, or perhaps we might think of the self-revealing God as a single presupposition. This approach has been followed by a number of conservatives who desire to hold to a propositional or informational revelation of God without first constructing a natural-theology proof for his existence.<sup>71</sup>

Thus the basic postulate or starting point would be the proposition that: "There exists one Triune God, loving, all-powerful, holy, all-knowing, who has revealed himself in nature, history, and human personality and in those acts and words which are now preserved in the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments."<sup>72</sup> From this basic postulate an entire theological system may be formulated through unfolding the contents of the revelation/Scriptures. While no specific part is proved antecedently to the rest, the system as a whole can be verified or validated.

This basic postulate, however, has historically been challenged both from outside and within the church. In the Western context, those outside the church have challenged the *reasonableness* of the postulate and those within, from time to time have thought to *prove* by natural means the idea of God<sup>73</sup>. The result has

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<sup>70</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 30.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> For example Aquinas and his five "proofs for the existence of God"

been that much of Western theology has been dominated by discussion over the place that should be given to faith, reason and revelation.<sup>74</sup>

Referring back to our discussion on Philosophy and Theology, Mavrodes makes an interesting observation:

What is the relation between faith and reason? That is an old question, and it has sometimes been put in the form of an ancient metaphor, "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?" But perhaps we should read that metaphorical question literally for a moment. If we do that, then we realize that Jerusalem and Athens have a host of different relations to each other. Geographical relations, for example, and economic, religious, cultural and military relations to boot. If we read the question metaphorically now, there may again be a variety of relations which belong to its answer.<sup>75</sup>

It is inevitable that philosophy and reason will to some degree be absorbed into the foundation of our theological systems. Even those most strongly opposed to such a merger are at some point inconsistent, such as Peter Damian, "who damned philosophy as an invention of the devil, at the same time used a dialectical-philosophical path to refute attacks on the omnipotence of God, and formulated the principle that philosophy should serve theology as a maid"<sup>76</sup> And again, Luther, who "never tired of stressing that the gospel is *against all reason*"<sup>77</sup> yet "the same Luther not only esteemed reason as the highest court of appeal in the natural, worldly realm, but also affirmed the cooperation in the realm of' theology of a reason illuminated by faith and the Holy Spirit."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> This observation was made in The Seoul Declaration: Toward an Evangelical Theology for the Third World. "Western theology is by and large rationalistic, moulded by Western philosophies, preoccupied with intellectual concerns, especially those having to do with the relationship between faith and reason" See: Bong Rin Ro, *The Bible & Theology In Asian Contexts: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology* (Taichung: Asia Theological Association, 1984), p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> George I. Mavrodes, "Jerusalem and Athens Revisited," in *Faith & Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 192.

<sup>76</sup> Pannenberg, *Basic Questions In Theology Volume II*, p. 48.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

We may summarize by stating that the proper use of reason and philosophy in theological discourse rests upon recognition of their place and the limits of their competence. Philosophy and reason, rightly understood, are simply instruments aiding in the clear perception of the object.<sup>79</sup>

Once it has been recognized that philosophy, like natural theology, has a legitimate though not doctrinally formative or fundamental use in the context of Christian faith, the actual function of reason and philosophy within the system of revealed theology can be outlined. The Reformed orthodox go to some length to emphasize the biblical foundations of their claims concerning the instrumental use of human reason. In the first place, reason can be used to make clear points in divine revelation, as was the case when Christ demanded of his disciples, “Have you understood all that has been said to you? They responded, ‘Yea’” (Matt. 13:15). Second, reason must be used in discussion and argument with others, as when the Bereans compared the words of Paul with Scripture (Acts 17:11). Next, reason is necessary in the work of explication, even as Ezra and Nehemiah taught the people reasonably (Neh. 8:9). Fourth, in order to discern falsehood it is necessary “to explore the things that differ” (Phil. 1:10). Finally, reason is useful to vindicate the truth from objections, as Paul himself does in the ninth chapter of Romans.<sup>80</sup>

### Epistemology

Why do we believe what we believe? This is a fundamental question and forms part of the prolegomena. It is also connected to our previous section because it concerns the extent to which reason plays a part in what we know.

Tertullian has been credited for the expression: *Credo quia absurdum* which translates “I believe because it is absurd”. For Tertullian, faith and reason are incompatible, and therefore faith entails belief in the unbelievable or the absurd.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Volume 1*, pp. 236-237.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>81</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki & Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999), *credo ut intelligam, credo quia absurdum*.

St. Augustine, however, observed that the Christian “believes also the evidence of the senses which the mind uses by aid of the body; for if one who trusts his senses is sometimes deceived, he is more wretchedly deceived who fancies he should never trust them.”<sup>82</sup>

Yet Augustine affirmed the primacy of faith in God's revelation with our senses supporting that faith. “Following Augustine, the Schoolmen started with the principle that faith precedes knowledge—*fides praecedit intellectum*.”<sup>83</sup> Or, as Anselm also put it, “I believe that I may understand; I do not understand that I may believe” *credo ut intelligam, non intelligo ut credam*.”<sup>84</sup> Abelard, however, reversed the order, seeking to understand Christian doctrine in order to know what to believe.<sup>85</sup> As Schaff points out, however, that “all arrived at the same result. Revelation and reason, faith and science, theology and philosophy agree, for they proceed from the one God who cannot contradict himself.”<sup>86</sup>

The scholastics placed increasing emphasis on reason and later, through the advance of science and empiricism, God was relegated to being what Bonhoeffer derogatorily described as “The God of the Gap”, explaining only what couldn't be understood through reason. With the advance of science, this gap became less and less. Immanuel Kant, building on Gotthold Lessing's “Ugly Ditch” (describing the gulf between God and Man) classified God into a “noumenal” realm which is impossible to be understood by reason, as opposed to the “phenomenal” realm of the world around us which may be. Belief in God

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<sup>82</sup> Ronald H. Nash, *Faith & Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 37.

<sup>83</sup> Philip Schaff, *History Of The Christian Church Vol. 5* (Wisconsin: The Ages Digital Library, 1995), p. 465.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Lane, *The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought*, p. 81.

<sup>86</sup> Schaff, *History Of The Christian Church Vol. 5*, p. 465.



was described more as a “leap of faith” but not with a rational basis. In the 20th century, skepticism has even crept into the phenomenal realm. Einstein’s theory of relativity and studies in quantum physics, have left many questioning whether reason and empiricism are a fully reliable basis for knowing.

Loucks explains:

As the rationalism of Descartes, Locke, Voltaire and other leaders of the Enlightenment found itself unable to answer all of life’s crucial questions, especially the theological and metaphysical questions, it gave way to the more feeling centered philosophies of Rousseau, Kant and ultimately to Soren Kierkegaard. Religion was relegated primarily to the realm of feeling and most of Christendom described faith in terms of Friederich Schleiermacher’s “ feeling of absolute dependence.”<sup>87</sup>

Existentialism and relativism were to follow on the heels of this “feeling” centered faith.

The position of Augustine and Anselm is probably the most satisfactory. A.W. Tozer graphically illustrates the relationship of belief to understanding by comparing them to a long legged father striding ahead while his small son is running on behind trying to keep up!<sup>88</sup> What we understand eventually does catch up with what we are believing, but usually does not precede.

Nash puts it like this:

How do we account for the human possession of these *a priori* (that is, independent of sense experience) categories of thought or innate ideas or dispositions that play such an indispensable role in human knowledge? According to a long and honored philosophical tradition that includes Augustine, Descartes, and Leibniz, human beings have these innate ideas, dispositions, and categories by virtue of their creation by God.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Mel Loucks, *Modern Christian Thought 1648-2000* (. Los Angeles: Lecture Notes for ITS Bangkok Extension Program, 2001), p. 54.

<sup>88</sup> Unpublished, tape on prayer.

<sup>89</sup> Nash, *Faith & Reason*, p. 38.

### Deductive Method

Two basic methods belonging to the field of epistemology are the deductive and the inductive methods.

The deductive method is also called... the *a priori* deductive method because it does not originate from human experience, but from special revelation... The deductive theologian acknowledges that in theology and philosophy one must always begin with some accepted truth.<sup>90</sup>

The deductive method is presuppositional, since one or more basic truths or postulates form a starting point from which the rest is developed. Plato, for example, started with his understanding of essence and existence as a “world of forms” which formed the basis to understand everything else.

### Inductive Method

The inductive method moves from human experience to all things, including God... The inductive method has dominated much of Christian theology since it was promoted by the late Medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas adopted the epistemology of induction of the Greek philosopher Aristotle. He is still the “official” theologian of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>91</sup>

The inductive method moves in the opposite direction to the deductive, moving from what can be observed and measured towards general principles. Hence, Aquinas, through natural observation moves towards a belief in God as creator. Hence we have the cosmological, anthropological etc. “proofs” for the existence of God.

As Loucks says, “It is our contention that theological knowledge is not limited to one methodology. Some things we know are suited more to one

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<sup>90</sup> Mel Loucks, *Apologetics: A Defence of the Faith* (Los Angeles: Class Notes and Syllabus, International Theological Seminary, 2002), p. 30.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

method than to the other. The error to avoid is reductionism, in which only one method of knowledge is accepted as valid."<sup>92</sup>

Epistemology in most periods or cultures has tended to fall primarily (but not necessarily exclusively) into either a deductive or inductive methodology. In chapter three, it is interesting to note that the Thai, however, are probably neither deductive nor inductive!

### Theology from Above

*Theology from above* is a term that may be used to describe theology that has its starting point in special revelation from God. From this perspective, the world does not “set the agenda”, rather God does.

### Transcendent

Theology from above is also *transcendent* in that its emphasis is one God as totally “other” from man. The eternal word comes to us from the Almighty and Omnipotent One.

Barth's Romans, published in 1921, deeply impressed men of the early twentieth century with such an interpretation of God's transcendence. The overwhelming power this book exerted can be attributed in large measure to the discharge from the bow of his stern logic of the notion of “the infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity” and the recurrent theme that “God is in heaven, and thou, man, art on earth.”<sup>93</sup>

### Theology from Below

While *theology from above* emphasizes God setting the agenda so to speak, *theology from below* emphasizes the world setting the agenda. It starts with the needs of man, the oppression and the suffering.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Hideo Ohki, “On The Meaning of Transcendence,” in *What Asian Christians Are Thinking: A Theological Source Book* (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1978), pp. 149.

## Immanent

It is an *immanent* theology since it makes man and his needs the starting point and seeks to portray how God *incarnates* Himself within that context.

While Barth, with his *Theology from Above* has been accused of making God too remote, most attempts at a *Theology from Below* have been “liberal”. Barth accused Schleiermacher of “speaking about humankind in a very loud voice. In other words, Barth accused his forebear of making theology radically anthropocentric and setting the course at the end of which certain theologians of the mid-twentieth century proclaimed God to be dead.”<sup>94</sup> Grenz makes the pertinent remark about Barth, however as follows:

We may be tempted to say that whereas Schleiermacher made the mistake of trying to talk about God by talking about humankind in a very loud voice, Barth made the mistake of trying to talk about humanity by talking about God in a very loud voice. Perhaps Barth’s error is the slightest, but to make neither one would be far better.<sup>95</sup>

Emil Brunner, perhaps, comes closer to the desired position, although his non-propositional approach, in which he avoided giving the Scriptures final authority, proves problematic. He did, however, seek to bridge the gap between transcendence and immanence. His contribution begins with his “identification of revelation with the “I-Thou Encounter” between the individual and God.”<sup>96</sup> For Brunner, the biblical concept of truth lies in the divine human encounter. He distinguishes two types of truth, firstly “it-truth” which is appropriate to knowledge of the world of objects and “Thou-truth” being appropriate to the world of persons. “A fundamental difference exists between persons and objects; failure to recognize this difference and carry through its consequences in all areas of life

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<sup>94</sup> Stanley J. & Roger E. Olsen Grenz, *20th Century Theology* (Illinois: IVP, 1992), p. 49.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78.

lies at the foundation of the errors of philosophy.”<sup>97</sup> Consequently, any theology that treats God as if He were an object is fundamentally wrong-headed.

The very essence Christianity lies in the eventfulness of encounter between God and humanity. Knowledge of God is personal in the sense that it transcends the plane of objects and subject-object dualism inherent in knowledge of objects, calling instead for personal decision, response and commitment.<sup>98</sup>

According to Brunner, Christian truth must be truth as encounter, truth that happens in the crisis of the meeting between God and the human person in which God speaks and the person responds. Only such truth does justice to the freedom and responsibility of persons; only such truth preserves the truth of the gospel, namely, the personal relationship with God: “This truth comes to us as a personal summons; it is not a truth which is the fruit of reflection; hence truth which, from the very outset, makes me directly responsible.”<sup>99</sup>

Building from the concept of revelation as an I-Thou encounter, Brunner’s entire approach to theology has been designated “biblical personalism.” He did indeed elevate this insight, and his attempt to center everything around it stands as his greatest contribution to modern theology.<sup>100</sup>

Brunner’s “transcendence in divine-human encounter” overcomes Miethe’s contention that:

... there are incredible numbers of conservative Christians who also suffer from this overly personalized faith. They... remain “true” doctrinally, but fall into a kind of Christian mysticism. God must be constantly “popping” minor or major miracles every day of their life for them to be happy. God becomes little more than a “celestial bellhop,” taking care of selfish needs.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 79.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Terry L. Miethe, *A Christian's Guide to Faith & Reason: Closing the Gap Between Mind and Heart* (Minnesota: Bethany House, 1987), p. 12.

But at the same time his theology takes seriously Migliore's challenge:

These inescapable questions of faith and theology need to be asked also "from below," from the vantage point of what Bonhoeffer called "the incomparable experience" of solidarity with the afflicted. This should not be construed as a summons to anti-intellectualism or romanticism. It concerns finally the kind of theology one intends to pursue: a theology that accompanies those who cry "out of the depths" (Ps. 130:1) and that finds its center in the message of "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23), or a triumphalist theology that serves only the interests of the powerful.<sup>102</sup>

### Approaches to Contextual Theology

While not agreeing with all elements of his theology, M.M. Thomas, an Indian Theologian rightly says:

Where a people's pre-understanding is left alone without bringing it under the service of the Christian Gospel (believers) will remain pre-Christian in their mind and this will affect the whole person in due course. Their response to the Christian faith, being unrelated to their inner thought patterns, will remain limited and immature.<sup>103</sup>

Gilliland explains that "true theology is the attempt on the part of the church to explain and interpret the meaning of the gospel for its own life and to answer questions raised by the Christian faith, using the thought, values, and categories of truth which are authentic to that place and time."<sup>104</sup> How we do that is one of the greatest challenges to missions and national Christian thinkers.

Stephen Bevans, a Catholic theologian, explains:

As our cultural and historical context plays a part in the construction of the reality in which we live, so our context influences our understanding of

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<sup>102</sup> Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, p. 17.

<sup>103</sup> M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM, 1969), p. 303.

<sup>104</sup> Dean S. Gilliland, "Contextual Theology as Incarnational Mission," in *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), p. 10.

God and the expression of our faith. The time is past when we can speak of one right, unchanging theology, a *theologia perennis*. We can only speak about a theology that makes sense at a certain place and in a certain time.<sup>105</sup>

Bevans explains that there are both external and internal factors that make cross cultural theology a necessity. The *external* includes the dissatisfaction of both first world and third world countries of traditional theology as it fails to “resonate with contemporary experience”, that rather than speaking a word of hope to the marginalized masses it has often been used ideologically to justify continued domination by the rich and powerful. As for *internal* reasons they include the nature of incarnation and the more recent understanding of revelation as being God’s ongoing and personalized revelation of Himself in individual’s lives as opposed to purely propositional truths handed down.<sup>106</sup>

Several approaches to “doing” contextual / cross cultural theology have been categorized<sup>107</sup>. Dyrness suggests four categories as follows<sup>108</sup>: 1. Anthropological Model, through a thorough understanding and appreciation of the culture (e.g. Asian theologian Choan-Seng Song). The assumption is that God is present in all cultures working out his purposes. This model lends itself to syncretism 2. Praxis Model (e.g. Latin American theologian Gustavo Gutierrez), which likewise takes the culture seriously and more especially to side with those who are oppressed. God’s involvement in history is for liberation from all kinds of

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<sup>105</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 5ff.

<sup>107</sup> Apart from Dyrness, Schreiter, Hesselgrave & Rommen mentioned here, Daniel Adams offers a further set of categories, namely: systematic theology, philosophical theology, political theology, and contextual theology. Daniel J. Adams, *Cross Cultural Theology: Western Reflections in Asia* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), pp. 73ff.

<sup>108</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Learning About Theology From The Third World* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1980), pp. 25ff.

oppression. While introducing the important category of “practice” as an essential component of theological insight, this method tends to undermine the more spiritual and supracultural elements of the gospel

3. Translation Model (e.g. American ethnotheologian Charles Kraft), which is an attempt to place the Gospel within culture without changing its content. Although God is transcultural, he communicates through culture. The goal, therefore, is to “decode” the message of the Bible so that it can be “re-encoded” so as to be heard in a dynamically equivalent manner as those in the original situation. While in basic agreement with this model, it is still weak in application to specific demands placed upon Christians originating from within their culture itself

4. Interactional Model (Dyrness’s own suggestion) consisting of proclamation of the Scripture message (in culturally appropriate fashion), taking seriously the life of the evangelist (which will speak to the situation of the hearer), the needs and aspirations of the culture are to be understood and shown to be important to God (who is already working within the culture). The believer then responds to those themes of Scripture that parallel the questions of the culture.

Schreier proposes three basic models<sup>109</sup>: 1. Translation Model. This is a two step procedure, firstly freeing the Christian message as much as possible from its previous cultural accretions and then translated into its new cultural setting (similar to number three above). Schreier points out two weaknesses with this approach - firstly, the often lack of dynamic equivalence from one culture to another and secondly, the misconception that biblical revelation is purely supracultural which may be then translated into any culture. Rather than a

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<sup>109</sup> Robert J. Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), pp. 6ff.



“kernel-husk” image of an incarnate Christianity, he proposes the image of an onion where the kernel and husk are intimately bound together. “The strength of the translation model is its concern to remain faithful to the received tradition of Christian faith. But without a more fundamental encounter with the new culture, that faith can never become incarnate. It remains an alien voice within the culture.”<sup>110</sup> 2. Adaptation Model. There are variations of this method. Some would start by formulating a philosophical model, or world-view of the culture, from which a natural theology is then formulated (rather similar to Thomas Aquinas’s approach in the Western context). Others (such as Pope Paul VI) have proposed “planting the seed of faith and then allowing it to interact with the native soil, leading to a new flowering of Christianity, faithful both to the local culture and to the apostolic faith”<sup>111</sup>. Schreiter suggests that there is rarely an ideal or untainted soil which does not already have preconceived ideas of Christianity. In my own opinion, this model would tend quite rapidly towards syncretism. 3. Contextual Model. Under this category he introduces two approaches, firstly the “ethnographic” approach which concentrates on cultural identity and the “liberation” approach concentrating on oppression and social ills.

Hesselgrave and Rommen have yet another set of classifications<sup>112</sup>: 1. The Liberal Dialogical Method - pursuing truth 2. The Neoliberal Dialectical Method - Discovering Truth 3. The Neo-orthodox Dialectical Method - Discovering Truth 4. The Orthodox Didactic Method - Teaching Truth. These he classifies under the types of Contextualization : Apostolic, Prophetic and Syncretistic. These are presented diagrammatically as follows:

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000), pp. 151ff.

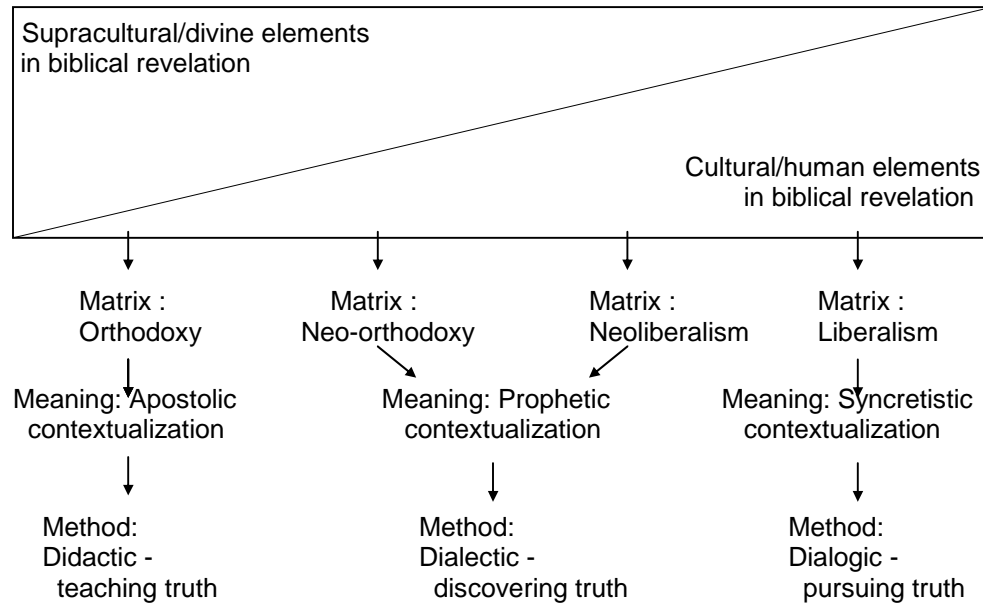


Fig. 1. The Contextualization Continuum. <sup>113</sup>

The diagram itself is a good summary of the spread of types of contextualization, spanning from Orthodox (extreme left) to Liberal (extreme right). Referring back to our previous sections, the extreme left may also be described as “Theology from Above” and the extreme right as “Theology from Below”. The middle position is that the biblical revelation is a kind of compass, but we must chart our specific course on the basis of contemporary history under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. He quotes Koyama, whose “starting point” for theology comes from “some universally valid and relevant factor”, namely some point of human need, rather than from an exegesis of the biblical text. “The *method* is to discern truth in the dialectical tension between living history and the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

Scriptures as one is illumined by the Holy Spirit. The hoped-for *result* is that the Word of God will “come through” the biblical text.”<sup>114</sup>

Of all the approaches suggested above, Dyrness’s Interaction model appears to be the most appropriate, with maximum interaction of the Scripture and the cultural context.

It is presented diagrammatically as follows:

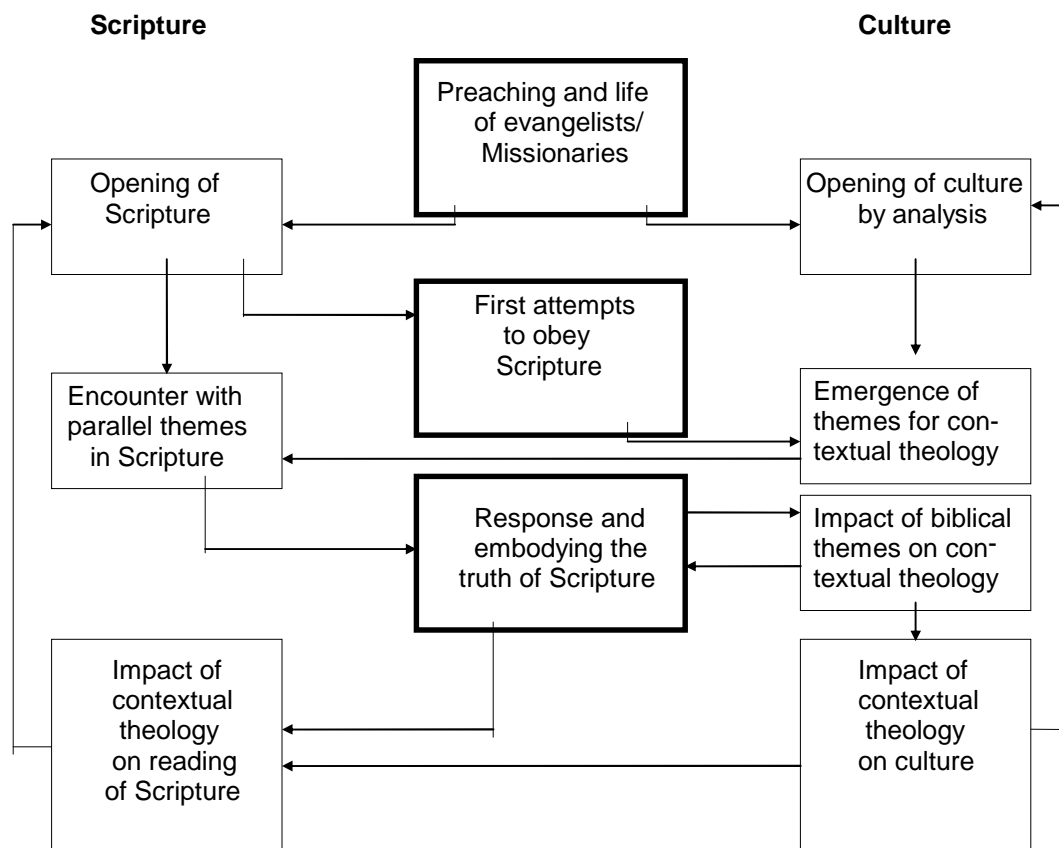


Fig. 2. Interaction Model of Contextualization. <sup>115</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., pp. 154-5.

<sup>115</sup> From Dyrness, *Learning About Theology From The Third World*, p. 30..

### Vernacular Theology

A final word related to contextual theology concerns the question “Who does theology?” There is a growing recognition that in the final analysis, it is the layman, or local congregation, working out their faith on the ground, so to speak, who ultimately are involved in the process of “doing theology”.

“Let us think of this as *vernacular theology*: that theological framework constructed, often intuitively, by Christians seeking to respond faithfully to the challenges their lives present to them.”<sup>116</sup> Dyrness points out further that while some theology, formulated as such, is in print, the vast majority of local congregations, preachers and teachers in the third world have no access to the printing press. For them. Their theology was being done in an oral mode communicating directly to the people and their context. “There is an entire dimension of theological reflection that theologians regularly ignore, or even despise; theological frameworks that ordinary Christians develop in the course of their experiences with God and Scripture”.<sup>117</sup>

Bevans comes to a similar conclusion:

In the same way that classical theology understood the form of theology to be discursive and academic, it understood the theologian to be a scholar, an academic, a highly trained specialist with a wide knowledge of Christian tradition, the history of doctrine, and a number of linguistic and hermeneutical skills. Such a picture of theology and the theologian made sense as long as theology was conceived as being a reflection on documents that needed considerable background skill to understand. But when theology is conceived in terms of expressing one's present experience in terms of one's faith, the question arises whether ordinary people, people who are in touch with everyday life, who suffer under the burden of anxiety and oppression and understand the joys of work and

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<sup>116</sup> Dyrness, *Invitation To Cross-Cultural Theology*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

married love, are not the real theologians —with the trained professionals serving in an auxiliary role.<sup>118</sup>

Schreiter also agrees and makes the following observation: “The experience of those in the small Christian communities who have seen the insight and the power arising from the reflections of the people upon their experience and the Scriptures has prompted making the community itself the prime author of theology in local contexts.”<sup>119</sup>

If we are to take context and culture seriously (as proposed in the Interaction Model for contextualized theology), then it will be inevitable that the layman and local congregation will play a vital role in the formulating of theology. This, however, will not make the “scholars” and “specialists” redundant since if we are to take the Scriptures seriously (as also proposed in the Interaction Model) then correct exegesis will continue to be of utmost importance. Swanson makes the observation of how one particular Thai congregation in Northern Thailand went about the about the task of *behaving theologically* when confronted by a particular cultural dilemma:

First, the congregation’s theology was church based, the “work” of the whole church rather than particular individuals... Second, Thai local theology, in this case, emerged in the immediate, even dominating presence of the church’s Buddhist neighbors... Third, the Thai local theology looks to respected, trustworthy authorities to validate theological views. During the debates of 1996, the congregation turned repeatedly to the three theologically trained members of the church... Fourth, Thai communal theology pays attention to the Bible... Fifth, Thai theology concerns itself with boundaries, particularly in ritual and worship... the Church was actually engaged in a redefinition of religious boundaries, a key issue for Thai local theology.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>119</sup> Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 16.

<sup>120</sup> Herbert R. Swanson, "Dancing to the Temple, Dancing to the Church: Reflections on Thai Theology" *The Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia* 1 (2002): 59-78, pp. 69-72.

### Attempts at Contextual Theology in Asia

“Christianity has been in Asia for centuries. Yet it is only in the last few decades that Asian theological thinking has become a subject of academic interest in theological circles.”<sup>121</sup> Since 1960, various approaches to theology have been attempted in the Asian context but space doesn’t permit more than a cursory summary. The Asia Theological Association has attempted to published much of what has been written under a variety of compilations. Orbis Books has also taken an interest in Asian writers.

In 1969, Karl Barth questioned whether his theology could be understandable and interesting to the Asian (SEAJT, vol. II, Autumn 1969, p. 3.) and wrote: “Now it is your task to be Christian theologians in your new, different and special situation.” (Ibid., pp. 4-5).<sup>122</sup>

In 1976, Veitch posed the question whether an Asian theology is possible and makes the following suggestion:

Asian Theology... points to the possible existence, or potential creation, of a theology shaped, moulded and related to a specific historical context, by a particular socio-cultural and religious factors (religious here includes philosophical) so that the emerging form of this theology differs in emphasis and possibly in structure, though not necessarily in content, from other kinds of theology - e.g. western theology in either its continental or American cultural form.<sup>123</sup>

As we consider Asians who have been contributing to theology it is wise to take note of Elwood’s comments in 1976:

We need to remember, of course, that the Asian Church is still in the “Apostolic Age” of its history, a period in which the central doctrines of the

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<sup>121</sup> Peter K.H. Lee, "Some Critical Issues in Asian Theological Thinking" *Ching Feng* 31(2-3) (1988): 124-152, p. 124.

<sup>122</sup> J. A. Veitch, "Is An Asian Theology Possible?" *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 17(2) (1976): 1-14, p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

Faith were being forged and shaped under the heat of controversy with a variety of heresies. Historically, the Apologists were the first theologians; only later did the great Church Fathers emerge. How can we expect it to be otherwise in the Asian Church?<sup>124</sup>

Choan-seng Song, D. Preman Niles, Kosuke Koyama, Lynn de Silva, and Jung Young Lee are among the most prominent Asian writers.

### Choan-seng Song

As early as 1976, Song wrote:

It is of paramount importance to know how other people can see and experience redemption and hope in the sufferings which descend on them with cruel consistency. They want to know how the chains of suffering can be broken, and to experience salvation in the present and the future. It is to these people that Asian Christians must address themselves, sharing their longing for liberation.<sup>125</sup>

Song observes that "a particular era of Christian salvation history has ended; and we have to discover in a new way the significance of the redemption performed by God in Jesus Christ in 30 A.D. for Asia today."<sup>126</sup> In this way, Israel's redemption may be seen alongside the redemption of other people. A theological detour through salvation history theology developed in the West may therefore be avoided. What it suggests is a "theological leap from "Israel to Asia", which he suggests is both possible and necessary. Commenting on Song, Hsiao says

An Asian nation, Japan, China, or Indonesia, and so on, for example, would have its own experiences of exodus, captivity, rebellion against Heaven, or the golden calf. It would have its own trek in the desert of

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<sup>124</sup> Elwood, "Christian Theology In An Asian Setting", p. 16.

<sup>125</sup> Choan-seng Song, "From Israel to Asia - A Theological Leap" *Theology* March (1976): 90-96, p. 94.

<sup>126</sup> D. Preman Niles, "Toward A Framework For "Doing" Theology In Asia," in *The Human And The Holy: Asian Perspectives in Christian Theology* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 280.

poverty, slavery, or dehumanization... An Asian nation will thus be enabled to find its place side by side with Israel in God's salvation.<sup>127</sup>

Song refers to Israel in the 2nd part of Isaiah and parallels it to the sufferings of Asians. Salvation in this framework does not come through Israel - but Israel's salvation stands alongside theirs. The church's role is to relate Christ to them for this salvation.

Song is known for his "Third Eye Theology" which he defines as "the perception needed to grasp the meaning behind the surface of things and phenomena. He justifies his need for a "third eye" on the basis of his contention that traditional theology tends to be an instrument of an elitist minority."<sup>128</sup> He is also known for *Minjung* theology (i.e. theology of the people/ the mass).

One will immediately identify the anthropocentric nature of Song's theology.

#### D. Preman Niles

D. Preman Niles<sup>129</sup> has a similar approach to Song, but suggests a framework for doing theology in Asia using creation, as opposed to redemption, as motif to support the idea that "in Asia God is realizing in a new way the promise of salvation given in Jesus Christ for all mankind."<sup>130</sup> The Creation affirms the absolute freedom of the Creator-God to do "the new thing" in history.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ching-fen Hsiao, "Asian Theology - In Retrospect And Prospect" *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 19(1) (1978): 1-6, p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> Tissa Weerasingha, "A Critique of Theologies from Buddhist Cultures," in *The Bible & Theology In Asian Contexts: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology* (Taichung: Asia Theological Association, 1984), pp. 291-292.

<sup>129</sup> Not to be confused with D. T. Niles who has written prolifically on Buddhism and Christianity.

<sup>130</sup> Rodrigo D. Tano, "Toward an Evangelical Asian Theology" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 7(1) (1983): 155-171, p. 155.

<sup>131</sup> Niles, "Toward A Framework For "Doing" Theology In Asia", p. 280.



In the light of the Servant passages in Isaiah, Niles concludes that “in the situation of Asian suffering and hope, we are called upon to see our participation as no less an undertaking than to share in God’s suffering love for his creation.”<sup>132</sup> He believes that the motif of Creation enables Asian Christians to see the activity of the Creator-God in their midst. The task of an Asian Christian theology, then, is “to perceive and articulate the nature and shape of the radically new thing which God in Jesus Christ is doing in our midst.”<sup>133</sup>

Niles states:

If theology in Asia is to have its own identity, it must cease to be merely an extension of Western theologies, and instead speak meaningfully to and within the context of Asian suffering and hope. The true identity of Asian theology will emerge only when we begin to perceive and articulate the relevant word in our situation.<sup>134</sup>

It is evident that Niles appears to be reducing the salvation act to salvation from suffering and oppression.

#### Kosuke Koyama

Like Song, Koyama affirms the importance of Israel for Christians “because apart from Israel they cannot understand the root of their own faith. They cannot construct their theology, ethics, or critique of civilization without listening to the spiritual heritage Israel has given to the church.”<sup>135</sup>

As a Japanese missionary to Thailand, he wrote “Waterbuffalo Theology” in which he raises many of the issues regarding the complexity of theological situations in Asia. These situations include not only traditional religions but also

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<sup>132</sup> Elwood, “Emerging Themes in Asian Theological Thinking”, p. 254.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Niles, “Toward A Framework For “Doing” Theology In Asia”, p. 265.

<sup>135</sup> Kosuke Koyama, “The Tradition and Indigenisation (in Asian context)” *Asia Journal of Theology* 7 Ap (1993): 2-11, p. 5.

factors such as modernization, pluralism, spirituality, and urbanization. Theology, which is a “reflection on history in the light of the Word of God,” will germinate only through involvement”.<sup>136</sup> He says, “I decided to subordinate great theological thought, like those of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth, to the intellectual and spiritual needs of the farmers. I decided that the greatness of theological works is to be judged by the extent and quality of the service they can render to the farmers to whom I am sent.”<sup>137</sup>

Much of his work is helpful, especially where he highlights the dissimilarities between Christianity and Buddhism.

There is a disorientation, he says, between Thai history which is circular and biblical history which is linear. There is a diversity between the “no-pathos” call of Buddhism and the non-apathetic, passionate God of the Bible. This disparity causes Christians in Buddhist cultures to play down the wrath of God. Furthermore, the covenant God of the Bible purposes not the elimination of a person’s “I” (or ego or self) but the restoration and the resurrection of the “I” or self. This restoration is not to be confused with self aggrandizement. God is not *nirvana* or void oriented but history oriented.<sup>138</sup>

For Koyama, what matters for the Christian gospel is our neighbor as a person. Our concern is not Buddhism, nor is it the Buddhist as distinct from ourselves. Rather, our concern is our neighbor as a person.<sup>139</sup> All true theology will rise from our involvement with them. Koyama evidently wrote his theology, however, without much thought to the terminology he used and as Davis points

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<sup>136</sup> Weerasingha, "A Critique of Theologies from Buddhist Cultures", pp. 292-293.

<sup>137</sup> Kosuke Koyama, *Waterbuffalow Theology: A Thailand Theological Notebook* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1974), pp. viii.

<sup>138</sup> Weerasingha, "A Critique of Theologies from Buddhist Cultures", pp. 292-293.

<sup>139</sup> Koyama, *Waterbuffalow Theology*, chapter 8 .

out, there would be very few farmers who would understand his western concepts and theological jargon<sup>140</sup>

### Lynn de Silva

Lynn de Silva's theology centers around the searches for a satisfactory explanation of the meaning of "self". His proposal is that man has no eternal soul apart from Christ which is similar to the *annata* concept of Buddhism.<sup>141</sup> In response to the question what makes man unique and distinct from the rest of creation, de Silva's explains :

Is there anything that makes man unique and distinctive? The biblical answer is that man is not only a creature created out of the dust of the earth, but that he is created in the "image of God." This does not mean that he is created in the likeness or form of God, but in relationship to God. Man is what he is only in this relationship to the Eternal (*Amata*) and apart from this relationship he is nothing—he is *anatta*, no-self.<sup>142</sup>

Although his argument is basically conceptual, and therefore perhaps not best suited to the Thai, we will consider this point further in subsequent sections.

### Jung Young Lee

Jung Young Lee has been instrumental in developing a "Yin-yang" system of theology. From the Asian mind-set, Lee points out that:

The both/and category of thinking, which is based on the yin-yang symbolism, is characteristic not only of the Chinese but also of the Indian way of thinking. As Betty Heinmann pointed out, "The West thinks in aut-aut, the disjunctive either-or." India, on the other hand, visualizes a continuous stream of interrelated moments of sive-sive, the "this as well

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<sup>140</sup> John Davis, *Poles Apart: Contextualizing The Gospel In Asia (Revised Edition)* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1998), p. 40.

<sup>141</sup> Lynn A. de Silva, "The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity," in *What Asian Christians Are Thinking: A Theological Source Book* (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1978), p. 105-118.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

as that, in an endless series of changes and transformation.” The relativistic world view of India certainly provides this category of both/and thinking which seems to be the general characteristic of Eastern people, and must be adopted by theology.<sup>143</sup>

Since the yin-yang way of thinking transcends human reasoning, argues, Lee, its application to theology may not only clarify some paradoxical issues but provides fresh interpretations. “It can, for example, illuminate such concepts as the nature of divine transcendence and immanence, God as personal, Jesus as the Christ, or the relation of body and spirit.”<sup>144</sup> This is an interesting method, certainly relating to Thai epistemology and thinking, and will be discussed further in subsequent sections.

Several others could be mentioned here such as Japanese Kazoh Kitainori’s “Pain of God” theology which is an attempt to reconcile the devastation of Japan after World War 2 with a God of suffering and pain who is able to identify with the suffering Japanese. Space permits, however, only a further brief review of other literature written in the Asian context.

### Review of Literature in the Asian Context

Saphir Athyal urges that Asian Christian theology be systematized “around contextual issues in Asia.”<sup>145</sup> He delineates the lines along which theologizing in Asia may be done but does not elaborate. Bong Rin Ro, an evangelical, suggests a method of doing theology and characterizes Asian theology according to its content, whether syncretistic, accommodational,

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<sup>143</sup> Jung Young Lee, “The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking: A Possible Method for Ecumenical Theology,” in *What Asian Christians Are Thinking: A Theological Source Book* (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1978), pp. 64-65.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>145</sup> Tano, “Toward an Evangelical Asian Theology”, p. 155.

situational or biblically oriented. "He opts for a biblically based theology dealing with Asian realities but does not demonstrate how this may be done."<sup>146</sup>

Ro and Eshenaur write of Weerasingha as one who "rejects the assumption of ecumenical theologies that hidden affinities exist between Christianity and Buddhism. He believes that Buddhism prepares people for the gospel only by what it does not say in that it asks questions for which the gospel provides the answers."<sup>147</sup> Weerasingha proposes:

An initial step towards developing an indigenous theology among Buddhist cultures would involve a categorization of biblical truth with reference to the conceptual framework of Buddhism"... proposes "A theology of Suffering", "A Theology of Self" "A theology of Origins" as areas of interest for Asian Theology<sup>148</sup>

Lorenzo, having mentioned the reality of powers and principalities in the Asian context, states:

An Asian theology must therefore be governed by the dialectic interplay between culture and the Bible. The cultural context poses the questions to the Bible. And the biblical answer, to complete the hermeneutical circle, must be given full integrity not only to respond to the contemporary issues but especially to reformulate, if necessary, the questions themselves.<sup>149</sup>

Yung laments the fact that since there is no Asian Systematic Theology Text, then most "Asian theologians" have been already "primed" by Western Theology and the attempts at Asian theology have therefore been Western in origin. He compares the present Asian theology to the *banana* - which is of indefinite origin as opposed to the *mango* - which is purely Asian.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Weerasingha, "A Critique of Theologies from Buddhist Cultures", p. 304.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Lorenzo Bautista et al., "The Asian Way of Thinking in Theology" *Evangelical Review of theology* 6(1) (1982): 37-49, p. 49.

<sup>150</sup> Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (New Delhi: Regnum Books, 1997), p. 228.

Sumithra and Gnanakan also point out that:

When we talk about the need for theologization in Asia we are at once faced with the lack of an adequate theological methodology. It is only during the last quarter of this century that the significance of theological methodology has become central in theological debates. Here the concern is not so much what we produce in our theologies but how we produce them. It is not so much about practising a proper theology or grasping its theological truths, but rather the very basic question which the liberation theologians have posed to evangelicals. Though as evangelicals we cannot completely concur with liberation theology and its results, the questions it raises are of such magnitude that we must take them up most seriously in order to offer biblical answers. Otherwise the very survival of our theology is at stake. For example, it does no one good just to reject the notion that praxis is the starting point in theology, or to argue that the context is primary. The real question is: have we an alternative we can supply in its place? I am sure we have—but it still needs to be articulated in a responsible and acceptable way. It is precisely for the lack of such an alternative evangelical theological method that in most of Asian theological writings we still refer only to European and American theologians and theologies, but hardly to any Asian works.<sup>151</sup>

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have traced some of the developments in theology and prolegomena in the Western context and saw how much centers around the use or non-use of *philosophy* and *reason*. Epistemology is predominantly *inductive* or *deductive*. Theology tends to fall into either *theology from above* or *theology from below*.

We then evaluated several models of doing contextualized theology and concluded that the *Interaction model* as proposed Dyrness is of most interest. As we looked at the approaches to contextual theology already made in Asia, the interactive method of Koyama comes close to fitting this model. The

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<sup>151</sup> Sunand Sumithra & Ken Gnanakan, "Theology, Theologizing and the Theologian" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 12(3) (1988): 276-283, p. 279.

contributions of de Silva regarding the *soul* and the *yin-yang* method of Lee were also noted and will be considered further.

By and large, however, it would be fair to say that the majority of attempts at Asian theology so far have been anthropocentric and may be classified as *theology from below*.

## CHAPTER 3

### THAI PHILOSOPHY BELIEF AND THINKING

#### Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to explore the thought structure, philosophy, epistemology and system of belief of the Thai.

A seemingly endless stream of books is readily available on Thai culture and religious belief. Source materials on the philosophy and the epistemology of the Thai, however, are extremely rare and almost conspicuous by their absence. Their very absence, however, is in some way an indicator of the thought structure of the Thai, as will be discovered through the contributions of Professor Kirti Bunchua.

This chapter is the result of extensive research in the libraries and archives of two of the leading Bangkok universities<sup>152</sup> plus a series of interviews carried out in June 2002 with some leading Thai thinkers (both Christian and non-Christian)<sup>153</sup>.

The interviews are fully transcribed in the appendixes of this dissertation and it is hoped that they may be helpful in further research and study of this nature.

The results of this chapter, along with the observations already made in chapter two, will be analyzed in chapter four in order to provide some suggestions for theology in the Thai context.

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<sup>152</sup> Chulalongkorn University and Assumption University (ABAC).

<sup>153</sup> They are: Dr Kirti Bunchua, Dr Soraj Hongladarom, Dr Warayuth Sriewarakul, Dr Chaiyun Ukosakul, Dr Seree Lorgunpai, Dr Apichart Punsakworasan



## Review of Literature in the Thai Context

### Thai Belief

The Thai possess a multi-level system of belief, deriving from a variety of influences. Koyama explains:

The Thai people are relative late-comers in the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. Long before Thailand, as we know it today, was formed, the region came under the cultural influence of India. Indian influence was already in decline when, in the thirteenth century, the Mongol invasions in Asia made it possible for the Thai, who were entering the Peninsula in ever increasing numbers, to become powerful there and to develop a national identity. Coming from China, into an area which was already rich in Indianized cultures, the Thai borrowed freely from their neighbours as they developed their own distinctive culture. The Thai were, before coming into a position of power, under the domination of the Khmers, and living among the Mons. These two peoples were a fertile source of influence for the assimilating Thai. Through them the Thai inherited the cultural values of far-off India. The Mons and their Burmese neighbours passed on to the Thai Sinhalese Buddhism which was to become the spiritual pillar of the Thai nation.<sup>154</sup>

### People, Nature and the Kwan

“Ancient Thai belief stemmed from the Thai’s experience with their neighbors, with nature, and with things supernatural. When these things have helped in a time of trouble they are passed down to the next generation.”<sup>155</sup> The Thai observe the people around them very closely and have traditional beliefs concerning physical characteristics which they believe reveal the person’s character and whether one may be trusted or not.<sup>156</sup> The Thai are also extremely observant and are adept at predicting events or danger from natural signs in the

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<sup>154</sup> Kosuke Koyama, "The Lord's Controversy With Thailand" *International Review of Mission* 61(243) (1972): 229 - 235, p. 232.

<sup>155</sup> Maryat Kitsuwat, *Kwam Chua Tang Durm Kawng Thai (Traditional Thai Belief) (Thai Language)* (Bangkok: Course Notes Thai Culture, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1980), p. i.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

environment.<sup>157</sup> Water plays a significant role in almost every aspect of Thai culture, including its symbols, rites etc.<sup>158</sup> Co-existence with basic elements of nature is strong in Thai thought and belief.

The belief in auspicious days may be traced back to the very early days of Thai society. For instance,

the Northern Thai peasant's delight in acquiring and committing to memory all sorts of formulas for determining whether a time is auspicious or inauspicious, be it a birth date or a time to begin an important undertaking, represents the continuation of an ideology rooted deep in Tai culture. Apparently, the archaic Tai techniques for determining the fatal quality of time did not include elaborate verbal formulas like those used by Muang soothsayers, but involved the use of objects and charts.<sup>159</sup>

Note that this is *not* astrology, which came later with Brahmin beliefs, but something unique to the Thai.

A further concept unique to the Thai is that of the *kwan*. The ancient Thai had a belief about the *kwan* as follows: "the person consists of material and immaterial parts, the material being the body, the immaterial being the *kwan* but which is associated with parts of the body, i.e. there is the *kwan* of the ear, *kwan* of the eye, of the hand etc."<sup>160</sup>

There is no direct translation for the word *kwan*. The belief is that all who are born, whether young or old, male or female, have something within their body from birth that is called *kwan* and if this is present in the body then the

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 50. Kitsuwat further notes that "when the ancient Thais started to believe in Buddhism, they believed that if they practised the teachings of Buddhism then they would be happy, have no enemies or even sickness."

<sup>158</sup> Sumet Kumsai Na Ayutaya, *Nahm, Baw Gurt Haeng Watanatam Thai (Water, the Source of Thai Culture) (Thai Language)* (Bangkok: Thai Culture Press, 1986), p. \_.

<sup>159</sup> Richard B. Davis, *Muang Metaphysics: A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual* (Bangkok: Pandora, 1984), p. 91.

<sup>160</sup> Suwana Sataanan and Nuangnoi Bunyanet, *Kam: Rawng Roi Kwam Kit Kwam Chua Thai (Words: Clues to Thai Thought and Belief) (Thai Language)* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1994), pp. 76-77.

person will be content and happy, but if the *kwan* gets separated from the body then the person will have suffering and may even die if it does not return to the body. Kitsuwon explains:

When a child is born, the *kwan* is still weak. If anything unusual happens that makes the child shocked, then the *kwan* may leave the body and wander around in barren places only to return to the child when the shock is overcome. If it does not return, then the child, who is the owner of the *kwan* will die. As the child grows and becomes stronger, then the *kwan* also becomes stronger... the belief in the *kwan* is very deep in the hearts of the people even up to today and is expressed in the Thai language such as *tahm kwan* (to do something for the *kwan*) etc... Even objects such as the foundation pillars of a house or the buffalo cart have a *kwan* because they are made from the tree which also has life.<sup>161</sup>

Both the word *jai* (meaning heart) and *kwan* appear extensively in the Thai language.<sup>162</sup>

It should be noted that the continuation of these ancient beliefs up to the present day is a clear indication of the syncretistic tendency of the Thai. As will be seen later, the *Thai way* is to add and expand rather than replace or negate. This of course has enormous implications for Christian theology and will be discussed further in chapter four.

### Animism

From ancient days to the present, the belief in spiritual powers has been very important in the daily life of the Thai. Belief in spirits is general throughout

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<sup>161</sup> Kitsuwon, *Kwam Chua Tang Durm Kawng Thai (Traditional Thai Belief) (Thai Language)*, p. 44.

<sup>162</sup> Bunmi lists several usages: Thirayut Bunmi, *Brawatsat Kwam Kit Kawng Sangkom Thai Chuang Ton (History of Traditional Thai Thought) (Thai Language)* (Bangkok: Seminar Notes 30th September 1986 Quality Research Society, Chulalongkorn University Research Institute, 1986), p. 19. as does Kirti Bunchua: Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratyakawng Nak Kit Thai (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language)*, p. 30.

the whole Thai population and is governed by the practice of black magic (*saiysat*).<sup>163</sup>

Often the Thai need a “dependence point” (*ti pung tang jai*) in the form of magical objects along with magic incantations in order to relieve oneself of suffering and in order to gain success.<sup>164</sup> “Magical objects are things that occur naturally but which become sacred through having been made potent by incantations,”<sup>165</sup> and it is believed that these objects are able to protect one from danger e.g. bullets or blades are unable to penetrate the body.<sup>166</sup>

Kitsuwan explains that when the Thai are unlucky or are ill, they seek something supernatural to help deliver them. These are in the form of supernatural things from the ancient belief of the Thai:

...the spirits and angels, magical objects, magic spells and incantations (witchcraft), belief in *kwan* (spirit/soul - no direct translation), luck - fortune/fortune telling, omens and premonitions, dreams. The Thai believe that we have the spirits of our forefathers protecting us, and these spirits, through their desire to help their descendants, alert them to dangers lying ahead by means of visions, cloud formations, the wind and dreams<sup>167</sup>

The popular belief in spirits in the Thai context is unlike that of India or Western Greek concepts. The angels actually used to be people on earth. On death the person's spirit did not die with the body. Those with great virtue become angels, those who were evil may become a wicked spirit.<sup>168</sup> The spirit

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<sup>163</sup> Teachers of the Faculty of Arts, *Kwam Chua Leh Sasana Nai Sangkom Thai (Beliefs and Religions in Thai Society)* (Course Notes, Faculty of Arts, Sukothai Thammarat University, 1990), p. 286.

<sup>164</sup> Kitsuwan, *Kwam Chua Tang Durm Kawng Thai (Traditional Thai Belief)* (*Thai Language*), p. ii.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ii.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

has mysterious powers beyond the normal person to bless or to punish and the higher levels of spirits are called angels.<sup>169</sup>

One wide-spread practice is to make a vow to the spirits with the promise of some reward (*bon ban san klao*), if the request is fulfilled. If the person fails to honor the promise, the spirits will inflict misfortune and disasters on him.<sup>170</sup> Kitsuwon observes that:

Although the spirits don't have mouths, stomachs or visible bodies, they do have thoughts and feelings just as they had when they were alive as a person; they are conscious, can see, may be pleased or grieved, if they have not attained sainthood they are still limited in knowledge, lustful, craving.... Therefore, when one worships them with things that they used to like... with a sincere heart, then the worship is more fruitful.<sup>171</sup>

As people become more educated and modernized, it would be expected that these beliefs and practices which are usually seen as characteristics of peasant society should be phasing out. Through the research of Suntaree Komin, it is interesting to note that:

40.0% of the samples had practiced *bon ban san klao* from 1 to over 20 times in the previous year. Of those who practiced it, women were of a higher proportion than men. What is more interesting is to find that the urban Thai practiced it more than the rural Thai; the more educated slightly more often than the less educated. The data seem to suggest that education has nothing to do with occupation in relation to such practices.<sup>172</sup>

One may say that these ancient beliefs are a foundation for newer religions which came later - i.e. Brahmanism and then Buddhism. Again, "the

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>170</sup> Suntaree Komin, "The World View Through Thai Value Systems," in *Traditional and Changing Thai World View* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1985), p. 181.

<sup>171</sup> Kitsuwon, *Kwam Chua Tang Durm Kawng Thai (Traditional Thai Belief) (Thai Language)*, p. 4.

<sup>172</sup> Komin, "The World View Through Thai Value Systems", p. 181.

older beliefs were not erased, but rather they were mixed in, in such a way as to be inseparable. There is therefore the saying “Buddhism and Animism dwell together”.<sup>173</sup>

Kitsuwan emphasizes that “if one is to understand Thai civilization clearly, one must understand these ancient beliefs which are still ever present in the modern Thai.”<sup>174</sup>

### Brahmanism

Brahmanism and “Indian astrology was known in Tai court circles by the late thirteenth century and probably earlier.”<sup>175</sup> It is still the basis of most religious rites both in the Royal Court and in Thai festivals.

Astrology was entirely lacking in primitive Thai culture but “found fertile ground in the nascent Tai kingdoms and principalities, where the ideology of a fatal time was already strong.”<sup>176</sup>

From these beginnings, the Thai have developed a deep rooted belief in luck, whether it be in the form of fortune telling, omens, premonitions or dreams. There is still an active belief that occasionally one may know a future event through a dream or other such premonition.<sup>177</sup>

Kirti notes a further development during the Ayutthaya period (1350-1757). Apart from being influenced from India, the Thai were also influenced by

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<sup>173</sup> Kitsuwan, *Kwam Chua Tang Durm Kawng Thai (Traditional Thai Belief) (Thai Language)*, p. ii.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. ii.

<sup>175</sup> Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, p. 93.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-92.

<sup>177</sup> Kitsuwan, *Kwam Chua Tang Durm Kawng Thai (Traditional Thai Belief) (Thai Language)*, p. 34.

Khmer belief in *Thewatirat* which is the belief in the King as an angel, making their belief different from that of the Sukhothai period of the 13th Century.<sup>178</sup>

### Buddhism

After the Thai emigrated from the south of China to central Thailand in the 13th century, conquering the Khmers and Mons, the Buddhism which was flourishing in Ceylon at the time came and flourished in Thailand.<sup>179</sup>

Various reasons have been given to explain the adoption of Buddhism by the Thais. Some give political reasons<sup>180</sup> and some sociological. It is true that some of the basic characteristics of Animism (already adhered to by the Thai) are also basic to Buddhism, such as the concepts of impermanence, insecurity and instability, and this, no doubt, contributed to Buddhism being embraced by the Thai.<sup>181</sup>

Bunmi makes the observation how the attraction of Buddhism in early days of the city society was the “heroic” element, following the line of the Thai’s belief in the protector spirit of the city stone (*pi arak lak muang*<sup>182</sup>). The Thais look for one who is brave, just like the benevolent fathers of the city who were brave and did good. The hero needed to fulfill one or more of the following: 1.

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<sup>178</sup> Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratyakawng Nak Kit Thai* (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language), p. 38.

<sup>179</sup> Samuel Sing-Hay Lee, *Understanding God as Creator in the Context of Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: Master of Christian Studies Dissertation, Discipleship Training Centre, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>180</sup> For instance Bunmi suggests the how an attraction of Buddhism in early days of the city society was the politically unifying side. Since there were spirits in all the cities with different traditions requirements etc, Buddhism would make all into “one family” so to speak and avoid war between the cities. Bunmi, *Brawatsat Kwam Kit Kawng Sangkom Thai Chuang Ton (History of Traditional Thai Thought)* (Thai Language), pp. 28ff.

<sup>181</sup> Davis, *Towards a Contextualised Theology for the Church in Thailand*, p. 63. Please also refer to the interview with Dr Kirti Bunchua.

<sup>182</sup> Where the spirits of the city’s founding fathers are believed to dwell.

Was a “father substitute” - giving love, inspiring worship and fear 2. Enabled the ordinary person become part of a “movement” or group 3. inspired strong adherence to his belief, philosophy or cause. At that time, Thai society was an oral society. Buddhism was spread in the early days by telling the *chadok lon nibad* (a Jataka, that is, one of 500 odd stories of former incarnations of the Buddha) more so than the *lak apitam* (principles from the book of the *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets) which is the Pali canon and the earliest systematic and most complete collection of early Buddhist sacred literature). The point here is that the Thai were not attracted to the principles of Buddhism per se, but rather to the “heroic” life of the Buddha himself, viz. the Buddha’s self sacrifice, wisdom, majesty (or prestige<sup>183</sup>), patience, steadfastness, tranquility.<sup>184</sup>

Again, it must be noted that the adoption of Buddhism by the Thai in no way led to the negation of Animism and Brahmanism. As Klausner points out, the Thai have “300 percent grace... they are 100 percent Buddhists, 100 percent animists and 100 percent Brahman ritual observers.”<sup>185</sup>

Although the Buddhism in Thailand is of the original and purer Theravada tradition, it is extremely rare to find anybody adhering to pure Buddhist belief. As Davis points out, “many renowned monks are famous, not because of their accumulated wisdom and knowledge of Buddhism, but because of their ability to prescribe the correct solution to the given problem regarding the spirit world.”<sup>186</sup> Wan adds that “even though Buddhism gives little weight to supramundane

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<sup>183</sup> *Barimi* in Thai.

<sup>184</sup> Bunmi, *Brawatsat Kwam Kit Kawng Sangkom Thai Chuang Ton (History of Traditional Thai Thought) (Thai Language)*, pp. 21-23.

<sup>185</sup> William Klausner, *Reflections on Thai Culture* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1987), p. 336.

<sup>186</sup> Davis, *Towards a Contextualised Theology for the Church in Thailand*, p. 59.



powers, many, many people in Thailand today are really part animist, whether they are educated or not.”<sup>187</sup> Sociologist, Suntaree Komin states that:

Because the impersonal world view of Buddhism is still relatively unattainable, the Thai readily accommodate Hinduism and animism, the beliefs in spirits and ghosts which is directly opposite to the impersonal view, into their cognitive-belief systems. The Thai in actuality really believe in the supernatural world of gods and spirits. Observably, one can find a spirit house in every household.<sup>188</sup>

Among the various teachings of Buddhism, the law of *kamma*<sup>189</sup> remains intact and is “a crucial concept that Thai Buddhists are not willing to give up. They can by-pass the beginnings of the world, but they cannot let-go the Law of Kamma.”<sup>190</sup> Interestingly, Doctor Kirti observes that the Thai does not maintain the normal Buddhist usage of the kamma concept. In the Thai setting, it is used almost exclusively for *bad* kamma.<sup>191</sup>

An extension of the kamma concept is what Thai Buddhists call *ahosi kamma* (the result of an action disappears). For instance, if a truck driver knocks somebody down and they die he’ll go to the funeral and ask for *ahosi kamma* from the deceased soul and from the relatives too. “This idea of *ahosi kamma* suggests that Buddhists entertain the idea of forgiveness in their system of belief. An offender has to depend on the mercy of the offended. Buddhists do not take God into consideration because they do not see that God is offended.”<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Petchsongkram Wan, *Talk in the Shade of the Bo Tree: Some Observations on Communicating the Christian Faith in Thailand* (Bangkok: Thai Gospel Press, 1975), p. 194.

<sup>188</sup> Komin, "The World View Through Thai Value Systems", pp. 180-181.

<sup>189</sup> Karma - merit or demerit and the consequences of it both in this lifetime and the next.

<sup>190</sup> Seree Lorgunpai, *World Lover, World Leaver: The Book of Ecclesiastes and Thai Buddhism* (Edinburgh: PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1995), p. 190.

<sup>191</sup> Please see interview with Dr Kirti Bunchua. Although Supatra Suparp does mention both good and bad karma: Suparp, *Sangkom Leh Watanatam Thai (Thai Society and Culture)*, p. 24.

<sup>192</sup> Lorgunpai, *World Lover, World Leaver*, p. 193.

The practice of meditation is common among the Thai Buddhists. We may define meditation in Buddhist terms as “a devout reflection on life by cultivating wisdom (*panna*) which sees things “as they really are”.<sup>193</sup>

The common Thai Buddhist has a strong belief in reincarnation and the concept is mixed into their Brahmin and Animist beliefs concerning the angels and spirits.

All of these non-human powers, like human beings, are subject to the wheel of rebirth, the natural law that all living beings become reincarnated in a form determined by the merits and demerits of their past actions. This law applies to the god Indra and his celestial cohorts as equally as to people, animals, and sufferers in hell. This is the only unifying principle which governs all creatures in the universe.<sup>194</sup>

Buddhahasa,<sup>195</sup> however, denies that rebirth is central to Buddhist doctrine. “His reason for reinterpreting the notion of rebirth metaphorically is that this belief, presented in Theravada interpretive tradition, contradicts the doctrine of *annata*, which teaches that there is no self.”<sup>196</sup> Other scholars do not agree with him and the whole question of the exact nature of the “soul” in Buddhism is a difficult one<sup>197</sup>.

Eventually, the goal of the Buddhist is to reach enlightenment and *nibbana*<sup>198</sup> - a state of total rest, tranquillity and a cessation of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Dr Seree suggests:

Buddhists in modern Thai society still try to reach *nibbana* ... many of them do not consider it as an immediate goal. They maintain that it is still

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>194</sup> Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, p. 77.

<sup>195</sup> A prominent Thai Buddhist teacher.

<sup>196</sup> Lorgunpai, *World Lover, World Leaver*, p. 190.

<sup>197</sup> The dilemma is this: if there is no soul (*annata*) then what exactly is reborn? Some would say the “self” or the “soul” is simply an aggregate of many different elements that have come together and which is itself impermanent and subject to change.

<sup>198</sup> Or *nirvana*.

an attainable goal... In spite of the rapid influence of modernization in Thailand, many Buddhists still hold to the traditional value of non-attachment which derives from the concept of *nibbana*.<sup>199</sup>

It would be fair to say that for most Thai Buddhists their more immediate goal is release from immediate suffering and salvation, for them, is seen in this immediate dimension.

### Thai World View

Formally, the Thai have quite a complicated cosmology. I shall present it here in a simplified form to the extent it is influential on the average Thai. Naturally, this world view is a result of the influencing factors already mentioned in this chapter.

One very influential work was written by Phya Lithai then the heir apparent to the throne in the central Thai kingdom of Sukhothai. It is called the *Trai Phum* or *Traiphum*.<sup>200</sup> "The Trai Phum is a royal text, an expression of the orthodox Theravada tradition, and a sermon that seeks to make the Dhamma<sup>201</sup> more accessible to the laity."<sup>202</sup>

Phya Lithai's sermon had a crucial impact in his own time and in the subsequent history and life of the Thai people. He describes the various cosmic realms and the beings, (devata) gods that exist in those realms within the world of desire. There are 3 realms of desire (and then the fourth realm, *nibbana*, which is free from desire) 1. Desire, or the *material world* (earth, lower levels of heaven). This is the lowest level of desire. 2. *semi-material* (consisting of sixteen

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<sup>199</sup> Lorgunpai, *World Lover, World Leaver*, p. 249.

<sup>200</sup> Literally means three worlds or regions.

<sup>201</sup> Truth/teaching.

<sup>202</sup> Phya Lithai (Translation and Introduction and Notes by Frank E. Reynolds & Mani B. Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology* (California: Asian Humanities Press, 1982), p. 5.

levels of heaven where material elements barely exist) 3. *immaterial* (where material elements do not exist).<sup>203</sup>

The “traiphum” world view locates man at the center of the whole scheme of existence. The “traiphum” highlights no transcendent center to the cosmological system other than the person.<sup>204</sup> In this scheme of things, the Thai world view has no room for God. “Instead, man is positioned at the core of the whole scheme of existence while spirits and gods exist in great numbers in the unseen world. This world view requires human self-dependence and recognition and homage to spiritual powers.”<sup>205</sup>

Apart from the vertical *traiphum* perspective, the Thais also view their location in the world from the horizontal perspective. The horizontal *toloka*<sup>206</sup> view locates them between “khuna” (morality) and “saksit” (powers).<sup>207</sup> In the domain of morality (or goodness), the main benefactors of goodness are the Buddha and three female symbols - - the Mother, Mother Earth, and Mother Rice. As for the domain of power, the basic word is actually “decha” which is divided into “saksit” and “chaos/wickedness”. The “saksit” area is an amoral and tenuous order. It is potentially protective and/or dangerous. Beyond the “saksit” power area there is the area of chaos, wickedness, and immorality.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Phya Lithai (Translation and Introduction and Notes by Frank E. Reynolds & Mani B. Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, p. 7. Also [Online]. Available: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/music/braxton/papers/story-mythology.html>.

<sup>204</sup> Soo Gil Yoon, *Discipleship Ministry as Power Encounter in Thailand* (Deerfield, Illinois: Doctor of Missiology Dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1994), p. 73.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. iii.

<sup>206</sup> Literally, Two worlds.

<sup>207</sup> Yoon, *Discipleship Ministry as Power Encounter in Thailand*, p. 67.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

“These two styles of the Thai world view have shaped and determined their everyday lives and religious practices.”<sup>209</sup> “The Thais do not start with what is true (*arai jing*) - they start with power (*amnat*).”<sup>210</sup>

### Thai Values

In her ground breaking treatise, *The Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioral Patterns*<sup>211</sup> Dr Suntaree Komin suggests nine components that make up the value structure of the Thai. Dr Nantachai Mejudhon suggests these form the key to an effective style of evangelism among the Thai people. He suggests that the appropriate approach to evangelism in the Thai context is that of “meekness” rather than confrontation. The nine “value clusters”, suggested by Komin in order of relative significance are as follows: 1. Ego Orientation, 2. Grateful relationship orientation 3. Smooth interpersonal relationship orientation 4. Flexibility and adjustment orientation, 5. Religio-psychical orientation, 7. Interdependence orientation, 8. Fun-pleasure orientation, 9. Achievement-task orientation.<sup>212</sup>

Chai Podhisita agrees with the individualistic tendency of the Thai and suggests that “the Buddhist emphasis on individualism seems to play an important part in shaping up the individualistic tendency in Thai attitude and behavior.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>210</sup> From a discussion with Acharn Prasit Ruhkpisut.

<sup>211</sup> Suntaree Komin, *The Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioral Patterns* (Bangkok: Research Center, National Institute of Development Administration, 1990).

<sup>212</sup> Nantachai Mejudhon, *Meekness: A New Approach to Christian Witness to the Thai People* (Asbury: Doctor of Missiology Dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1997), p. 53.

<sup>213</sup> Chai Podhisita, “Buddhism and Thai World View,” in *Traditional and Changing Thai World View* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1985), p. 45.

Apart from the values mentioned above there is a strong adherence to benevolent authority figures. This is particularly reflected in their love for the King who binds the peoples' hearts together.<sup>214</sup>

Supatra Suparp also mentions the Thais love for fun (number 8 in Komin's value clusters) and says: "work is play, play is work"<sup>215</sup> She further observes that the Thai would "prefer to trust in people more than principles"<sup>216</sup> and that their tendency is to "speak more than they do - always holding committee meetings but with little action."<sup>217</sup>

### Thai Thought and Philosophy

#### The Thai Reflecting on Themselves and the World around Them

"The study of Thai thought is still a new subject in academic circles."<sup>218</sup> Some debate has even gone on as to whether a Thai philosophy is possible. Dr Soraj Hongladarom suggests that so long as the Thai community reflects upon itself then Thai philosophy is not only possible but it is actually taking place.<sup>219</sup> He also said that concerning "the question of whether there is or isn't a "Thai Philosophy" and if there is of what form is it, then Thai Philosophy in as much as it is the observation of the Thai towards the world in which he lives, from ancient times then there certainly is one."<sup>220</sup> He continues, "at least in observing that the world is full of various "powers" called "spirits" which the ancient Thai believed

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<sup>214</sup> Suparp, *Sangkom Leh Watanatam Thai (Thai Society and Culture)*, p. 7.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>218</sup> Bunmi, *Brawatsat Kwam Kit Kawng Sangkom Thai Chuang Ton (History of Traditional Thai Thought) (Thai Language)*, p. 1.

<sup>219</sup> Soraj Hongladarom, *How is Thai Philosophy Possible?* (Bangkok: [Online]. Available: <http://pioneer.netserv.chula.ac.th/~hsoraj/web/Thai.html>, 2002)

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., pp. 236-237.

resided in every part of nature”. But he warns against restricting Thai philosophy to how the Thai have viewed their world in the past, since “that would make Thai philosophy no different from anthropology... If Thai philosophy is to have its own identity it must also include modern philosophical reflection.”<sup>221</sup>

### Progression of Thai Thinking

While elements of Thai thought have remained constant (as will be seen later regarding the tendency not to define but to narrate), Dr Kirti does suggest that the progression historically of Thai thinking is as follows. In the first period belief centered around mystical powers and animism. The second period is marked by strict observance of religious laws. The third period by the philosophical view of “uncertainty/impermanence/meaninglessness” (*anijang*) - that is all in the world is uncertain, and therefore we should give up present worldly joys for the more permanent in another.<sup>222</sup> The 4th period was marked by the attempt to portray Buddhism as scientific and in accord with Western rationalism.<sup>223</sup>

### Buddhist philosophy is not Thai Philosophy

Some have suggested that since over 90% of Thais are Buddhist, then their philosophy must be Buddhist philosophy. Dr Kirti Bunchua, however, strongly disagrees with this statement and says, “Buddhist philosophy is not Thai philosophy”<sup>224</sup> since it originated in India, not Thailand. The Thai were also not interested in defining further the principles of Buddhism as Dr Kirti explains:

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Mostly this came from fervent adherents to Buddhism.

<sup>223</sup> Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratya Kawng Nak Kit Thai* (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language), pp. 21-22.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

The educated Thai long ago received Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent... the Buddha's style of teaching and presentation was of the type that would appeal to the Aryan mind, that is to define, and research in order to define... Our Thai ancestors received the Buddhist religion not because of interest in the Buddha's philosophy and method of defining. Rather they were interested in the goal of life which the Buddha clearly presented. Once their interest in the Four Noble Truths, which clearly explain human living, was established it followed that they would study all the rest of the Buddha's teaching. Educated Thai were able to study and divide and memorize the teachings in great detail, but this was not their real interest. They could study and memorize, but they didn't think and expand on it or seek to further define. Educated Thai who were able to be creative did so in another channel, that is along the characteristics of the Thai language and according to the innate character of the Thai... what is clear is that these were true thinkers and that they thought in a Thai way even though they may not meet the specifications of the Aryan.<sup>225</sup>

### The Thai Way is to Narrate, not Define

As has already been mentioned in chapter one that whereas Western philosophy has centered around the desire to "define"<sup>226</sup>, the Thais are reluctant to define. The lack of emphasis on defining in the Thai context is evidenced by the lack of the verb "to be" in the Thai language.<sup>227</sup> The Thai, traditionally, are

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>226</sup> Dr. Kirti explains: Greek thinkers started with the problem of the what was the original matter of the world (arche) which can be translated in two ways: First Principle and First Element. This showed the tendency of the Aryan mind which needed to define the origin of what can be seen... They tried to define "arche" or the basic principle in order to understand all things, but it was originally haphazard since no methodology was known for doing so. Socrates tried to define many things through the method of conversing with other thinkers of his age, but never found clear direction. Plato suggested the "world of forms" as the standard of defining, but this was difficult to grasp and without a guarantee that it was correct. Aristotle was the first to give a clear method which would provide certainty and that was through logic. Since then, Western thinking sought increasingly to define whatever could be defined, and this was regarded as knowledge. What could not yet be defined became the object for further research. Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratyakawng Nak Kit Thai* (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language), p. 172.

<sup>227</sup> Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratyakawng Nak Kit Thai* (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language), p. 1-2.



more adept at narrating<sup>228</sup>. This, Dr Kirti argues, should not make Thai thought (or “philosophy”) inferior to its Western counterpart since “the Western system of “defining” is one method of increasing the intellect, but so too is “narration”. The important measurement should be how new and how valuable the content is.”<sup>229</sup>

For Dr Kirti, the Thai language is a key factor in understanding Thai thought. He explains:

The Aryan languages were formulated in such a way as to fix the way the language should be used in order to help in the process of defining clearly and precisely. But traditionally, the Thai language was formulated so as to enable it to be twisted and expanded. And so it especially stressed the poetic. Principles of language were not for keeping the usage of the language in a set format, but gave example in order that they may be further varied or twisted. So traditionally, Thai creative thinkers have been poetic in style.<sup>230</sup>

### The Use of Emotion

While Western philosophy has sought to control the emotion in order to get clear definition, the Thai makes much use of feeling through the Thai language.<sup>231</sup> Dr Kirti explains that Western philosophy started to despise the poetic and emotion since it could detract from clear definition and since emotion was perceived as being for the lower class. Yet Christianity brought back a respectability for the arts. Yet even the arts was seen as a different form of creativity from academic creativity. Philosophy was more scientific and therefore not related so much to the arts. But traditionally, the educated Thai thinkers were not like that. They saw that the Thai language was a field for creativity in which

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<sup>228</sup> The Thai word Dr Kirti uses is *panyai* and it implies more than mere *narration* - it includes the ideas of *expanding upon*, *explaining*, *clever use of words* etc.

<sup>229</sup> Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratyakawng Nak Kit Thai* (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language), p. 3.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

both feeling and thinking could go together hand in hand. They were of the opinion that to say something directly was too limiting, but if they were to use poetic language there was no limit to the variation that could be given. They therefore put all their efforts into this approach.<sup>232</sup>

Again, the Thai language lends itself to this approach, and indeed has developed as it has as a result of it. Dr Kirti explains, “Thai language has principles of language but not principles of grammar as the Aryan languages do. The principles of grammar in Thai come from experience... One needs to listen and feel along with the context if one is to understand.”<sup>233</sup>

### The Thai Way is Not to Negate but to Expand on What is Already There

A further difference to the Western approach, and which is relevant to our theme of the development of Thai theology is the following:

Traditionally Thai thinkers were not interested in defining. They were not interested in fixing a meaning clearly and then arguing over who is right and who is wrong. Thai thinkers sought, rather, to give a new understanding from what was already there. With this goal in mind, Thai thinkers do not have the intention to erase what has gone before in order to suggest some new thing in its place, as Aryan thinkers like to do. Rather Thai thinkers will study the effectiveness of what has already been given and then will think how he may add some new thing to it. He does not think that he needs to erase the old in order to make what he has acceptable in its place. Rather, he thinks whatever is already there, I still have opportunity to build upon it. He therefore seeks to expand or build understanding without defining or segregating in order to delimit, but rather helps to expand and amplify. Thai thinkers therefore do not oppose one another but seek to listen and add to each other<sup>234</sup>... we have words of praise for the King more and more without throwing away what went

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>234</sup> A good example of this is a television program on Thai TV (TTV) called *Kohn Sawng Yuk* (Two Generations) in which two Thai men (of different ages) discuss a variety of topics, one adding to the other and so on. Very rarely would one make his point by refuting the other, but rather by adding to what has already been said.

before, and we have much use of the word “spirit/ghost” without thinking it is too much.<sup>235</sup>

And so the Thai tend not to eliminate the old - they add to it.

If anyone wishes to be further creative, then let him be creative according to the way of the Thai who have gone before, that is find a method of expressing something differently from the way it has been said before through the enabling of the Thai language. This is the traditional Thai way of creativity.<sup>236</sup>

Dr Kirti warns, however, that there is a problem in that by saying something in a creative new way the risk is that no-one understands what is being said... but if they say it in the old way then there is nothing to be proud of - and people don't think he's wise!!!<sup>237</sup>

### A Call for the Development of a Thai Philosophy Syllabus

At the end of his research, Dr Kirti concludes:

This research has shown that by present standards of philosophy, it is hard to find a creative Thai philosophy among the Thai. This is because 1. The Thai language does not support an interest in the problems arising from within the Aryan language 2. Thais who study Western philosophy are not ready to follow the advancements of Western philosophy to the extent that they can make a positive contribution.<sup>238</sup> Nevertheless, we are certain (basic presupposition) that Thai thinkers are capable of being creative in the same way as anyone else of other cultures, and so we should take the creativity of the Thai and interpret it until we obtain a true Thai philosophy.<sup>239</sup>

And so in the past, Thais who were interested in philosophy had to start with ideas developed from the West, which they were not able to fully appreciate nor were they able to contribute to. Dr Kirti believes they should rather start with

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<sup>235</sup> Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratya Kawng Nak Kit Thai* (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language), p. 175.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>238</sup> This statement could be echoed concerning Thai Theology.

<sup>239</sup> Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratya Kawng Nak Kit Thai* (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language), pp. 178-179.

those areas which the Thai are interested and states the need for the creation of a syllabus relating directly to Thai philosophy.<sup>240</sup>

### Thai Epistemology

#### Experience as Opposed to Reason

Dr Soraj Hongladaram laments the fact that:

Buddhists, or those who believe in Buddhism (which is almost the entire Thai population) believe that the Buddhist teachings are true. So, when the Buddhist religion suggests a philosophical view it is understood to be automatically true, and therefore there is no further discussion. But the foundation of philosophy is that there is no final end to discussion or “argument” (towards the truth).<sup>241</sup>

From the basis of his general understanding of philosophy as examining various “arguments” in order to reason and reach the truth, Dr Soraj speaks of the Thai context. Traditionally there is a refusal to admit the validity of “argument” in order to reach truth. Thai Buddhists tend to believe that “reason” is only a reckoning of one’s own thoughts, but it is not the correct method to arrive at truth. “In that it doesn’t use reason or logic nor does it use logical methods of discovering truth, it is in line with an attitude that has dominated Asian thinking, including the Thai for a long time.”<sup>242</sup> Many are of the opinion that “argument” or reason is not the way to prove the truth of religion since reasoning is for those who have not yet *practiced* the principles of religion. He gives the example of Puttatat<sup>243</sup> who is of the opinion that philosophy is of no use - it is only the operation of fanciful thinking. So in summary, Buddhists would tend to say that

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>241</sup> Soraj Hongladaran, *Kawp Fah Haeng Pratyā: Kwam Ru, Pratyā Leh Sangkom Thai (The Limits of Philosophy: Knowledge, Philosophy and Thai Society) (Thai Language)* (Bangkok: Under the Sponsorship of the Thai National Budget, 1998), p. 239. Final brackets mine.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>243</sup> Prominent Thai monk and teacher.

one cannot reason one's way to the truth, it comes through experience, and then you'll know.<sup>244</sup>

One may ask whether this is “blind faith” or a “leap of faith”? It is probable that the primary motivation to step out and practice stems from the tradition of their ancestors, or certain authority figures in their lives. But it also infers that there is no point in arguing over concepts or principles.<sup>245</sup> The Thai are used to the empiricism of “doing something” or “experiencing something” and therefore knowing, rather than through rationalism based on conceptual ideas. Nantaya Kunpakdee confirms this through the results of his study which shows that “the primary reason for belief is actual experience (*prasop hen*).”<sup>246</sup>

#### Dialectic of Thesis, Antithesis but without Synthesis

The Thai are innately able to hold opposing ideas without feeling the necessity to synthesize them in some way. This is quite different from the Western Greek mind set which cannot hold two contradictory ideas in harmony together.

The difference between the Western need to see things clearly as “either/or” as opposed to the “both/and” of the Thai is illustrated by Swanson as he relates the findings of Tongchai Winichakul's study on the impact of the Western concept of mapping on Thailand:

Before the advent of Western mapping, shifting allegiances among the rulers of Southeast Asia's empires and petty states left political

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<sup>244</sup> Hongladaran, *Kawp Fah Haeng Pratyā: Kwam Ru, Pratyā Leh Sangkom Thai (The Limits of Philosophy: Knowledge, Philosophy and Thai Society) (Thai Language)*, pp. 236 & 240.

<sup>245</sup> Supatra Suparp confirms that the Thai are “not stuck on principles.” Suparp, *Sangkom Leh Watanatam Thai (Thai Society and Culture)*, p. 20.

<sup>246</sup> Nantaya Kunpakdee, *Wikroh Kwam Chua Kawng Chai Thai Nai SawadiRaksa (An Analysis of the Beliefs of Thai Men in Swasdi Raksa) (Thai Language)* (Nakorn Phatom, Thailand: Silapakorn University, 1987), p. 16.

boundaries fluid, diffuse, and ill defined. Smaller states frequently gave allegiance to two power centers, so that travelers only gradually moved across the “boundary” between those centers. The European colonial powers, however, could not tolerate this hazy attitude toward boundaries and insisted upon carefully surveying and marking out the lines between each state and territory (Tongchai Winichakul. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (ChiangMai/Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1994) esp. 20ff). Asia’s rulers, today, generally accept the Western concept of political boundaries, and, by the same token, the Thai church has accepted a Western conception of how Christians draw boundaries between themselves and the world.<sup>247</sup>

The same tendency is also illustrated by the syncretism of the Thai belief system and their ability already observed to “add-on” without “deleting”. The several quotations that follow will amply illustrate this truth:

Thai Buddhism has not eliminated the theistic belief left behind by the pre-Thai Hinduized Khmer culture.<sup>248</sup>

Nerida Cook explains how King Rama IV (King Mongkut) was both astrologer and astronomer. The early missionaries thought that advancing science would undermine Buddhism and primal Thai belief. It was seen, however, that King Mongkut was able to embrace Western scientific astronomy without rejection of his traditional Thai astrology... “In the case of Mongkut’s experiments with Western astronomy, it can be seen that justification can be found for the emergence of Siam into the modern world, and the retention of Siamese tradition without ceding defeat to competitive and hostile intellectual traditions.”<sup>249</sup>

The Siamese elite of Mongkut’s generation accepted the veracity of many of the Western scientific notions of the world around them, but retained from their traditional cosmology the moral explanations of the way things were.”<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Swanson, "Dancing to the Temple, Dancing to the Church: Reflections on Thai Theology", pp. 72-73.

<sup>248</sup> Sing-Hay Lee, *Understanding God as Creator in the Context of Thai Buddhism*, p. 9.

<sup>249</sup> Nerida Cook, "A Tale of Two City Pillars: Mongkut and Thai Astrology on the Eve of Modernization," in *Patterns and Illusions Thai History and Thought* (Singapore: The Richard Davis Fund and Dept. of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra and Issued under the auspices of Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1993), pp. 284-285, 302.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

The coming of western power and modern ideas and ideologies created a situation in which the traditional cosmological orientation became problematic for many thoughtful Buddhists. Not only the cosmological imagery and symbolism, but also the ritual and communal patterns that correlated with them, became the subject of skepticism and were often attacked as archaic and even antithetical to the “true” and “original” teachings of the Buddha. However, in Thailand the new modes of thought that challenged the traditional conceptions of cosmic, ritual, and social order made their impact rather gradually, and were mediated through a local elite that, despite its concern for modernization, was basically conservative in its orientation to Thai culture, and sympathetic to the Buddhist cause. Thus, despite the skepticism, many of the old traditions have remained intact.<sup>251</sup>

Thai thinking does not attempt to synthesize the contradictory, opposed or complementary factors of daily life but leaves them as they are.<sup>252</sup>

### Interviews

#### Introduction

The following are the results of a series of interviews carried out with some leading Thai thinkers, some Christian, some not, in Bangkok, June 2002.

The questions centered around the following topics: whether the Thai think predominantly deductively or inductively, epistemology (why the Thai believe what they believe), what is true or real, the role of experience, feelings, reason or revelation as basis for faith, world view, intuition versus empiricism, miracles, mythology among others.

The full transcripts of each interview are in the appendixes. Discussion here will be restricted to the points that could be of most significance to our study.

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<sup>251</sup> Phya Lithai (Translation and Introduction and Notes by Frank E. Reynolds & Mani B. Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>252</sup> Neils Mulder, *Everyday Life In Thailand: An Interpretation* (Bangkok: Duang Kamol Books, 1985), p. 45.

Dr Seree Lorgunpai <sup>253</sup>

### Shame not Guilt

“A scholar that wrote a book on Buddhism, his title is “precepts and practice”, he tried to explain that what they have been taught and what they do is not the same.”<sup>254</sup> They are motivated, says Dr Seree by *shame*. They know deductively one thing, but inductively they will respond to *shame*.<sup>255</sup> Although *guilt* may control the heart and mind, it is the outside, or the situation, which will determine the behavior.<sup>256</sup> As far as feelings are concerned, they are more concerned by other people’s feelings towards them than they are about their own feelings.<sup>257</sup> Through conforming in this way, they are able to survive in society. If the relationship with God is a “personal salvation” we will encounter problems when they are confronted with their society.<sup>258</sup> The community is still more vivid to them than God is.<sup>259</sup>

### Concrete not Abstract or Conceptual

“They are more concerned about something that you can touch, and not abstract.”<sup>260</sup> If what we say only hits the mind it is not enough, even for those who one might think would be *academic*<sup>261</sup>. A thing is not *rational* to them if it cannot be understood in practical terms of living.<sup>262</sup> Their belief in the spirits is based on encounter, either direct or through a medium, rather than just the

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<sup>253</sup> Please see appendix 1.

<sup>254</sup> Appendix 1, line 1.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., line 5.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., line 9.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., line 13.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., line 17.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., line 21.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., line 23.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., line 33.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., line 25.



concept. For the Thai, they need *phenomena* rather than abstract ideas from the *noumena*<sup>263</sup> realm.

“They can embrace all these things, rather than having only one absolute truth.”<sup>264</sup> This ties in with the non-conceptual tendency of the Thai since if they were conceptual they would be “pure” Buddhists instead of syncretistic. Their enjoyment also comes from things to do with action (such as football), not thinking through conceptual ideas.<sup>265</sup> Their tendency is to want something instantly, which doesn’t come through a long process of “reasoning”, and for this there is the willingness to gamble or take a risk.

#### Practical not Mystical; Revelation or Miracles for Practical Benefit

Dr Seree does not regard the Thai as being particularly *mystical*. They are more practical. Neither are they particularly influenced by mythology. There is, for some, the concept of *revelation* or *inspiration* from saints, dreams or others, yet it is not “self-disclosure” in order that one may know these beings more, but is related to the people’s practical life (for instance receiving inspiration for a winning lottery number etc.).<sup>266</sup> They would see *miracles* in the same light as *luck*, being a way of instant gratification without much thought for the source of the miracle.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> From Kant, being the metaphysical realm where God exists, which can not be understood by reason.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., line 41.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., lines 51-53.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., lines 80-94.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., lines 96-102.

Dr Apichart Punsakworasan <sup>268</sup>

### Inductive and Pragmatic; Experience and Utilitarian motives the ground for Belief

“For the general Thai, they are inductive and pragmatic. Everything that works they can accept.”<sup>269</sup> Belief in a spirit, for example, comes through a personal experience with it or possibly by hearing from someone else. Interest in the spirit is generated, however, on the basis that it may influence the person for good or for bad.<sup>270</sup>

### Biased away from Christianity

When you come to the Christianity they are biased. Even though they say that they have done some benefit, Jesus Christ can perform some miracles, and that he may be greater than some other spirits and so forth, but because of the bias they won't touch it. But some will touch in the sense of benefit. And the bias is that deep down, we are Thai and we are Buddhist. I think that's the main obstacle for Thai people.<sup>271</sup>

### Pragmatism: Reasoned or not, Conceptual or not, but for Personal Benefit

It is possible for them to believe in “noumenal” entities, such as mythology, since they could affect this or the next life. “The Thais are... very slippery,”<sup>272</sup> says Dr Apichart. They can switch between believing or not believing, whether it be based on reason or non-reason, at their convenience. The common denominator, however, appears to be pragmatism and *personal benefit*.<sup>273</sup>

### Existential

The future is uncertain, it is impermanent. What matters to the Thai most is what will bring benefit *now*. The next life is not as important as this one. “Thais

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<sup>268</sup> Please see appendix 2.

<sup>269</sup> Appendix 2, line 17.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., line 19.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., line 21.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., line 27.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., line 29.

are mainly existentialists, humanists and pragmatic.”<sup>274</sup> They will use their money now (rather than keep it for the future). They seek to enjoy the present. They believe in luck, their stars - all in order to benefit *now*. But concerning the future, their actions now are the most important factors they believe will influence their future.

#### Signs, Inspiration and Favors; Empirical Rather than Pure Intuition.

The Thai look for favors, signs or even inspiration from the Spirits, all for personal benefit. Dreams may also be a source of inspiration. But these all take the form of empirical phenomena, as opposed to pure intuition.<sup>275</sup> In this way the average Thai is more in line with Aristotle than Plato.

#### Start with Knowledge from Below not Revelation from Above

Dr Apichart would say that there is no equivalent in the Thai scheme of things to the Christian idea of *revelation*. The Thai way is to obtain knowledge and this knowledge will help you through.<sup>276</sup> But he suggests an empirical, inductive approach of pointing to things around them which may lead their understanding to the larger concept.<sup>277</sup> It is from the ground up rather than *revelation* that draws one up, just like Brahmanism or the Buddha... one gains knowledge and thereby “rise up” and became like a “god”.<sup>278</sup> Actually, “we need a general revelation and a special revelation. I would start with general revelation first. Yes, truth in the nature. I think that if you want to talk to Asians, you must start from below.”<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., line 31.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., lines 58-67.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., lines 82-86.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., lines 87-88.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., lines 98-103.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., line 107.

Dr Apichart suggested the following as a helpful model when approaching the Thai:

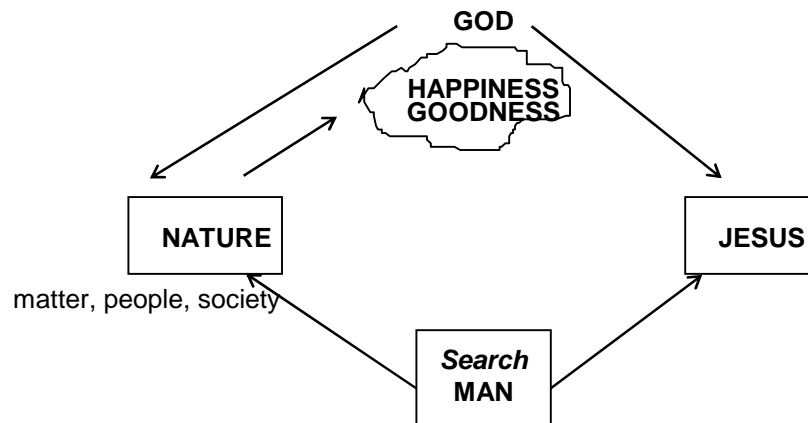


Fig. 3. Dr Apichart's Model for Approaching the Thai.<sup>280</sup>

One should start from their search for happiness and goodness through nature (matter, people and society). General revelation can be explained as God's presence and revelation of Himself through natural things. But this is not enough because 1. it is all relative (relative goodness etc.) and 2. we all have sin and are ignorant. So then the special revelation of God through Jesus (as good news) may be introduced.<sup>281</sup>

#### Hand to Heart to Head

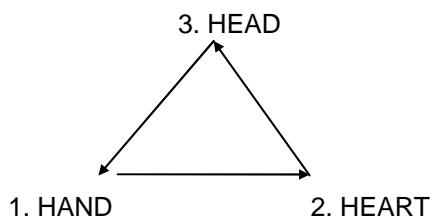


Fig. 4. Dr Apichart's Model for Educating the Thai.<sup>282</sup>

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., line 113.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., lines 113-140.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., line 155.

The Thai start with the practical (hand), which influences the heart, which then reaches the head or the mind. Some however, stop at the heart level and so don't continue to grow. When the "hand" stops, then they discontinue, which Dr Apichart suggests has been typical of Christians in Thailand for the past 160 years.<sup>283</sup>

### Summary

"So humanism, individualism, pragmatic, empirical, inductive, Aristotle, but yet, some Plato ideas. Follow to the higher levels, they go up. There is nothing. It is nothing."<sup>284</sup> The problem of the Thai is self. Since all is impermanent they look for what will benefit me now.<sup>285</sup>

Dr Chaiyun Ukosakul <sup>286</sup>

### Inductive Methodology

Dr Chaiyan would recommend an inductive method of Bible Study with the Thai, moving from particulars to a general principle. For instance, "let's say: this statement helps to understand that there is a God, and then we move on to say look this is also a statement or a fact that there is a God the creator. And because of that, we can make a conclusion... there must be a God the creator."<sup>287</sup> "We start from a particular and we derive to a general truth or

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., lines 160-165.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., line 153.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., line 167.

<sup>286</sup> Please see appendix 3.

<sup>287</sup> Appendix 3, line 9.

thought.”<sup>288</sup> He illustrates this by the Thai expression *chak mae nam tang haa* meaning “drawing from five rivers”<sup>289</sup>.

So you can draw from five rivers, actually they are the five main rivers in India... so this means that one must help the audience see what point we mean by working from several kinds of evidences or arguments, before they can accept any proposition.<sup>290</sup>

### Experience rather than Reason

Concerning how far one can reason the Thai to believing, Dr Chaiyan says, “Empirical is another thing in epistemology, but yes, rational is one thing, but experience is more important... it’s not necessarily that it has to be feeling, but it’s more experience... I think they want to realize something. Realization is important.”<sup>291</sup> “And to a great extent, as you would see the Thai or the Asian as a whole, I might accept the experience of somebody I might trust.”<sup>292</sup> For instance in Buddhism, one is trusting in the fact that of the Buddha’s experience of enlightenment. “In order to understand the truth, you have to realize it.”<sup>293</sup> This goes to emphasize the fact that to be convincing, one’s whole life must be a demonstration of what one believes.<sup>294</sup>

Dr Kirti Bunchua <sup>295</sup>

### Introduction

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., line 17.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., lines 3-5.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., line 33.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., lines 11-13.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., line 21.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., line 23.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., line 27.

<sup>295</sup> Please see appendix 4.

My session with Dr Kirti was perhaps the most influential. His main method of discovering the way the Thai think is through observing the Thai language. In Dr Kirti's words, "the language explains the thought."<sup>296</sup>

The following are mainly in the form of excerpts from my interview with him.

#### Westerners like to Define, the Thai do not

The Westerners like to define, but the Thais have no interest to define. Why? My reason to why the westerners like to define is because the westerners are familiar with the verb "to be". Words such as "I am" are very frequently used in western languages. For the English "I am strong", in Thai language, they use "*chan kheng raeng*" (I strong), which is an adjective. So in Thai language they don't use "to be" that much. And when you say "I am running", in Thai it's "*phom wing*" (I run); there is no word "to be". So for the Westerners, to be and not to be is the problem. The Thai has no problem because they don't have it. If we prohibit the westerners from using the verb "to be", it would be difficult to communicate any significant subject. But in Thai language, you can talk the whole day without using the word "*phen*" (am). And to me that is the fundamental philosophical source of the Thai people.<sup>297</sup>

#### Buddhism has its Roots in Aryan Language and Therefore is not Thai

Buddhism is from India. Indian languages are similar to that of the western people, because it is in the group of Aryan languages. So the Buddhists may influence the Thai people with the teaching of the beliefs, but Buddhism does not give the basics, or as we may say, the contemporary philosophers may use the pre-understanding, that is, the pre-belief, the fundamental belief, the most basic assumptions of the human source. The Thais have their own, and this does not derive from Buddhism.<sup>298</sup>

#### The Thai Way is to Narrate or to Tell

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<sup>296</sup> Appendix 4, line 14.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., line 4.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

The Thai have no interest at all with definition. What is the preoccupation of the Thai? According to me it is the *Thai Siam chawp barryai* (the Siamese Thai like to narrate/tell) description. Instead of giving and copying the definition “what is man”, you explain, you try to go to the being, to the substance, to the ontology. But the Thai are not interested in that description. The Thai are more interested in “what is the appearance of man?” “what does he look like?”, “what does he do?”, “how does he act?”.<sup>299</sup>

### The Thai Start with Feeling and then Come to Understanding

They are interested in the description according to feeling, not to the understanding. And you can observe from the Thai language the use of “*reuw suek*” (feel). Everything is to do with “*chai*” (heart). Instead of asking “what do you know about this?” you ask “what do you feel about this?”. So it is more feeling oriented than reason oriented. And you can observe it from the language. When you use the European languages, even Pali and Sanskrit, you must stick to the grammar. Subject, verb and etc. every sentence must consist of a verb. Who does what? And when you stop, you must begin again. The structure of the language is set. But in Thai, there is no need to stick to that. So when you try to speak the language, you must try to understand first. Understand “who is the subject of doing?”, “what is he doing?”. But in Thai, you have to know that you can observe that the Thai language, when they speak, sometimes they don’t know where the subject is, and what does he express? The feeling, the Thai feelings and they speak out the feelings, and when they want to understand, they have to reformulate the feeling into the understanding. The Thai starts with the feeling and comes to the understanding later. But the Europeans have to start with the understanding, and if they want to feel, they just add it later.<sup>300</sup>

Whereas the Westerner will start by thinking of man as a rational animal, having rationality... “the Thai will think that the human nature is the feeling.”<sup>301</sup>

Later in our interview, Dr Kirti explained:

Aristotle’s logic starts with the term: “man is mortal”. And you argue according to this proposition... But the real thought of the Thai people,

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., line 6.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., line 6.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., line 14.



they don't try to. They have no equivalent of the argumentation or reasoning in this way. The reasoning of the Thai people come from the feeling. You feel something like this, what do you feel next. You see, for example, when you feel that your mother is very good, you have the feeling that your mother is very good, so if your mother is very good, what do you have to do to her. So the feeling of giving back to her, so you have to do anything for her. With the feeling, there is no argumentation, like this is the premise, and this is the conclusion.<sup>302</sup>

### Do Not Try To Define !!!

From my question to Dr Kirti, "what does the intuition proceed from? From oneself?" he replied:

That is the Western way of thinking. You must ask "who has intuition?". The Thais aren't interested in that. That is the derivation of intuition, and that is why when you try to prove the necessity of the necessity being. Necessity of the Creator, most of the Thais have no interest in why you have to know that. It is a different way of thinking. And if you look at me, you have to realize that I came to an understanding with Western philosophy before I came to realize the Thai sort. You need both before you can get to understand and analyze your own. So now I understand. Because you are a Westerner in thinking. When you say that the Thai people start with the pure intuition, you have to say that "but who possesses that?" "who are the owners of the possession?" "what is the subject". That is the Westerner's thinking. Not the Thai, you see. And then you want to find some way of the Thai theology. You have to accept that is the way of the Thai thinking... if you want to get the Thai philosophy of the Thai way of thinking you must try to forget the Western occidental arguments. You should not try to ask the Westerner questions, you should try to have insight into the Thai system of thought.<sup>303</sup>

### From Feeling to Feeling; from Particular to the Particular

Dr Kirti explains that for the Thai they start "from one feeling, they compare it to another feeling."<sup>304</sup> Most helpful was his reply to whether the Thai

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., line 26.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., line 16 & 20.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., line 30.

are basically “deductive” or “inductive” in their method of thinking. He said the following:

The deductive means that you start with the general, you come, you go to the particular. That is the inductive is where you go from the particular to the general. But the Thai argumentation as I call the intuitive is where you don't have any reason or augmentation, the intuitive is the inside. You feel what it is. But the argumentation of the Thai people is to jump from particular to the particular. And this particular is not based on the understanding, but on the feeling. What do you feel? A particular feeling to the particular feeling.<sup>305</sup>

He illustrated this by explaining that if one sees a river, the inductive mind will think where the water came from. The Thai would rather think intuitively according to their feeling. They would “feel” that the water is useful... and then would think if it were to overflow then there would be trouble... and so on. They would not think of origins (i.e. where it came from) but the effect of the water on me and how it may affect me in the future.<sup>306</sup>

And so the Thai do not tend to think about the cause of things. Even if they have bad luck... “Thai people don't want to think what the cause of it is. Only that you have bad luck, and bad luck may come any time.”<sup>307</sup> Or if a spirit (*phii*) did something bad to you... “they would just say that it is the pleasure of the *phii* to do that. No real cause at all, it is just the pleasure of the *phii*.”<sup>308</sup>

### Fear of the Unknown

The Thai people always have the feeling of fear in their life of the unknown. In fact *phii* (spirit) is the unknown. The unknown is capricious, you cannot control it. It capricious, today they may favor you, but tomorrow they may now. It is not controllable, and you cannot guess it.

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., line 40.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., lines 40- 43.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., line 48.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

You would not know what each *phii* may want. You are the victim of the capricious nature of the spirit, or as they call them in appearance. But the deep feeling is the unknown power that may appear to you at times, but it is unknown. And this unknown, you cannot hope too much to gain the favor. You have to fear them more than hope to get their favor. If they favor you or something, it is really something extraordinary. You have to fear them because of even today even with the Buddhist belief, people live in the fear of the unknown and their power.<sup>309</sup>

And he continues:

If you observe, even among the scholars, in the deep, deep feeling, and the first assumption in their hearts and they have fear in their subconscious. Fear of everything. Can I live in this society? Can I live in this world? Can I be at peace? And this trust among the friends and relatives, they always discuss that they aren't 100% sure of anything. And that is maybe the racial complex of the Thai people. It wants friendship, but they are afraid in their heart that one day you may change your mind. There is always something like that. In the family, if the husband and wife, there is not full trust of each other.<sup>310</sup>

Buddhism gives Nirvana as the answer to the impermanence and uncertainty. But the Thai people are basically existential and a nirvana in the future does not penetrate their consciousness. They remain fearful.<sup>311</sup>

Dr Warayuth Sriewarakul <sup>312</sup>

#### Must Experience in order to Know and to Believe

Dr Warayuth also confirmed the need for the Thai to "experience" something of the spirits in order for them to believe.<sup>313</sup> In connection to Buddhism, he says:

they have insights from the authorities and the lord Buddha... But... they would try to discover those laws themselves from their practice... they

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., line 54.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., line 58.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., lines 59-61.

<sup>312</sup> Please see appendix 5.

<sup>313</sup> Appendix 5, lines 17-18.

would say that if you would like to discover the truth, you wouldn't be able to talk about them, because it is not a matter of discussion, but the matter is that you have to discover from the practice. In this sense, it is similar to Taoism, where the speaker never knows, the "knower" never speaks, only the practitioner knows.<sup>314</sup>

### All is Process

We just believe in process, we just believe in events. Everything is events, not substance, even though you are a man, a woman, it is an event. So you see that's why the Eastern world's ideas is very close to process philosophy, very close to quantum physics. Very close to impermanence, everything is developing.<sup>315</sup>

### Can Hold Opposites Together Without Synthesis

In Western logic, we have p or not p, but not both... Westerners, you cannot hold contradictions, you cannot accept contradictions, there is no way. It produces dissonance, and you can't live with dissonance. If you say this marker is red, and somebody says that this marker is not red. According to the Western mind, they would say that just one statement is true, the other must be false. But I would show you that this never happens to the feelings of the Eastern people, not only for the Thai, we have no problem at all... you see the similarity of Taoism it's only processed philosophers in the Western world that have similar ideas as the Eastern people... You see a husband can be only a husband if he has another thing, a wife.<sup>316</sup>

Dr Soraj Hongladarom <sup>317</sup>

### The Thai Believe What they Can Experience

"One may say that the Thai people tend to be... more... inductive... they understand... believe what they can feel and touch or see through their eyes. Rather than just thinking about it. Some phenomena that happens."<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., line 30.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., line 54.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., lines 56-64.

<sup>317</sup> Please see appendix 6.

<sup>318</sup> Appendix 6, lines 8 & 62.

### Do Not Take Life Seriously

“They are not so serious as the Khmers. They want to have fun... sanook (fun)”<sup>319</sup>

### Opposites Can Co-Exist - in their own Environment

In answer to my question to Dr Soraj concerning opposites co-existing, he said, “Yes, as long as you don’t put them together, as long as you don’t put them in a juxtaposed position... if you put them together they clash.”<sup>320</sup> He gives the example of students of veterinary sciences at Chulalongkorn University who have merit making ceremonies once a year because of the animals they kill for their experiments. Both the experimentation and also the Buddhist idea of the sinfulness of killing animals are correct in their own environment.<sup>321</sup> “So in one area of their life, they believe in one way as Buddhists, and in another area they may... be thoroughly modern, like sciences.”<sup>322</sup>

### Do Not Think About the Cause

When they experience something that can’t be explained, or something supernatural, they are very interested of course and you find in the news papers, the popular ones about supernatural occurrences, and people are very interested in interpreting these into numbers so they can buy the lottery. They don’t think about what the cause of the miracle is... they don’t really care. It could be God himself, but it doesn’t matter... They don’t have to find some ultimate cause that unites things and brings it into a system.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., line 18.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., line 26.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., line 28.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., line 34.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., lines 42, 44 & 50.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed various aspects of Thai thinking, from published and unpublished materials and also from several interviews with leading Thai thinkers. The data collected in this chapter and the principles from chapter two are considered in chapter four where proposals are made for theology in the Thai context.

## CHAPTER 4

### SYNTHESIS AND PROPOSALS

#### Introduction

In chapter two we observed that the Interaction model of Dyrness for contextualized theology is the most interesting. In chapter three several observations relating to Thai philosophy, belief and thinking were made including the following: the Thai way is to narrate, not define; the use of emotion; the Thai way is not to negate but to expand on what is already there; experience as opposed to reason; dialectic of thesis, antithesis but without synthesis; shame not guilt; Concrete not abstract or conceptual; practical not mystical; inductive and pragmatic; experience and utilitarian motives the ground for belief (personal benefit); existential; start with knowledge from below not revelation from above; hand to head to heart; experience rather than reason; the Thai start with feeling and then come to understanding; the Thai think from particular to the particular; the Thai do not necessarily think about the cause.

This chapter seeks to offer some suggestions as to how to approach Theology in the Thai context. These are inevitably only initial ideas and it is hoped that others will build on the observations from chapter 2 and especially chapter 3 in order to further develop theology that will be relevant to the Thai.

#### Important Preliminary Issues

##### Revelation

First and foremost, it is important to emphasize that *revelation*, both general and special, is essential to knowing God and the truth he wishes us to

know. This applies to all people, no matter what their cultural background. There is no need to assume that just because there is no equivalent to revelation in the Thai context, that revelation must take a less significant role.

### The Role of the Holy Spirit

Paul makes it clear that the things of God are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit whom He has given to us.<sup>324</sup> Paul prayed for the Ephesians that the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened, that they might know the hope to which God has called them, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.<sup>325</sup> Theology does not start with man, but man cooperates with the Holy Spirit in a quest to understand those things that God has revealed to us. Apart from the Holy Spirit, man is impotent to understand and appreciate these things.

### Theology from Above rather than Below

It follows, therefore, that although the Thai start with experience and concrete issues rather than conceptual ones, a theology from above rather than from below must be developed. It has already been observed in chapter two that most contextualized theology in Asia would come under the *theology from below* category. This wrongly places man, his context and his needs in the center, rather than God.

### History and Tradition

It is also important that while developing a contextualized theology, we do not neglect the history and tradition of the Church as she has developed through the centuries. The church in Thailand does not stand in isolation to the historic

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<sup>324</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:10-14.

<sup>325</sup> Ephesians 1:18-19.



church but is an extension of it. The propensity we have observed for the Thai to “add to” rather than “subtract or negate from” should stand her in good stead as she carries out her task of developing what is unique in her own context.

### Concepts and Interpretation

Although it has been observed that the Thai are primarily empirical and not conceptual, Thai theology must also find a way to embrace concepts and interpretation as revealed in the Scriptures.

A statement such as “Christ died for our sins” is empirical and historical (Christ died). It is also, however, conceptual and interpretive (for our sins). If Thai theology is not able to embrace the conceptual and the interpretation Scripture gives to itself, it will be an ineffective vehicle for communicating the whole counsel of God.

### Systematic Theology

In his excellent book “Mangoes or Bananas: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology”, Hwa Yung points out that “given the fact that linear logic is not the primary mode of thinking of many Asians, should theology be ‘systematic’ in the Asian context?”<sup>326</sup> In reply, he points out that “the preference for linear or non-linear logic is never exclusive in any culture. Rather, it is a matter of relative emphasis.”<sup>327</sup> He explains further that rather than understanding ‘systematic theology’ in terms of some *a priori* philosophical or other concept, such as existentialism or dispensationalism... “what is envisaged is a systematic reflection on the key themes of the Christian faith arising out of a

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<sup>326</sup> Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas*, p. 228.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

dialectic between text and context, and informed by mission and pastoral concerns".<sup>328</sup>

Systematic Theology should not be dropped out of the syllabus of Asian theological colleges and seminaries. Asian Christians, Thais included, "need a framework within which to think about God's revelation of himself and his activity in the world, in the context of their own cultures and the missiological tasks they face."<sup>329</sup>

### Logical First Point

Traditionally, Systematic Theology has struggled to find a logical first point from which to commence. Should one begin with God, presupposing *a priori* intuitive knowledge of the existence God, or should one begin with the sources of data whereby we may know God, along a more evidential apologetic line? For the more inquiring mind, the former approach seems less than satisfactory. As for the latter approach, natural data (general revelation) is insufficient to understand who God is apart from the special revelation of the Scriptures, which in turn depends on God for its authority. The latter approach is therefore circular.

In the Thai context, with its lack of emphasis on *defining* and in searching for the *primary cause*, and its ability to hold complimentary ideas in harmony, this may not be too great a problem. I suggest that Erickson's approach of starting with both<sup>330</sup> or else even starting with points further down the line in traditional systems (e.g. man) but with an approach which emphasizes the holistic nature of truth/theology rather than a linear approach. All the subjects to be covered,

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> See chapter two.

therefore, could be thought of as forming a circle. Any point/subject in the circle could be a starting point, and every subject will affirm the centrality of God.

#### All Methodology in Itself is Limited

Logic and reason have often been used in the Western environment to enhance man's understanding of God's revelation. Logic and reason, however, have been found to be limited in both usefulness and accuracy. While they are of some value, the truth of God is much greater and far surpasses the boundaries of logic and reason.

For the Thai, intuition, feeling and experience play an important role in their understanding of God and His revelation. It must be remembered, however, that while these will be presented as valuable, they are likewise limited in both usefulness and accuracy.

#### Theology Must Continue to be Developed

Since all methodology is in itself limited, theology in the Thai context must never be thought to have *been developed* but must always *be developing*. Thai "theologians" should be encouraged and new approaches should be explored. Apart from the limitations of methodology, the ever changing context necessitates the continuing development of theology.

#### Presuppositions

##### The Bible is God's Revealed Word

It is assumed that God has reliably and innerantly revealed Himself through the Bible which He inspired. While the records are recorded within certain contexts, they are universally profitable for teaching, reproof, and for revealing God to all mankind, whatever the context or time period.

### Nature and Experience

It is assumed that the Natural world, being God's Creation, and also human experience are also sources for knowing God and the things He desires us to know.

### Insights Waiting to Be Revealed

It is further assumed that within the Bible, nature and human experience, fresh insights and new understandings of God and His will are waiting to be revealed. These will come uniquely to each in their own context through the interaction of the Holy Spirit, the Bible, nature and human experience. I believe there are many insights to both traditional theological ideas as well as new ones, which wait to be unfolded by the Thai.

### The Thai have a Unique Contribution to Make

The Thai will bring their own unique contribution to theology when, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, they interact with the Bible, nature and human experience in a way that is unique to the Thai. Regarding the field of philosophy, it has already been observed in chapter three, that the Thai are unable to make definite contributions in this field so long as they are required to think philosophically in a Western way. Their unique contribution will come when they are allowed to reflect philosophically in the Thai way. Likewise with theology, the Thai need to be encouraged to reflect and enjoy theology in a way which they can excel and so make their own unique contribution.

### Possible Starting Points for Theology in the Thai Context

#### The Context

The first possible starting point for Thai theology is to begin with the Thai context. This has been the approach of other Asian theologies as was seen in chapter two.

A whole host of situations and social problems cry out for God's Word to be spoken into them. These include issues relating to injustice, corruption, poverty, abuse of power as well as a variety of situations such as integration of tribal groups, globalization etc.

The problem with starting from the context is that it creates a "theology from below" with man and his needs at the center. Although God is concerned for the needs of man, I believe that God himself should "dictate the agenda" of theology and theological systems rather than man. What God says inevitably goes beyond the visible needs of man and his situation.<sup>331</sup>

With respect to the context, it will be good to encourage the "prophetic" ministry through which specific words from God that speak into these situations may be communicated. Theology, however, should be kept free to reflect on the wider realm of God's revelation of Himself to man.

### God's Revelatory Word

A second possible starting point for Thai theology is to begin with specific revelatory words from God for the Thai. The "I-Thou Encounter" of Brunner, already discussed in chapter two, is pertinent to this approach.

In this way, we begin by considering what God wants to say to the Thai. Reflection will not be dominated by regard for the Thai context but with the desire to know what God is saying to the Thai.

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<sup>331</sup> Such a "theology from below" may play to the whims of popular ideas such as those quoted by Wan: "If your God truly exists, can he support me without my having to work?"; "Can he tell me the winning lottery numbers?" Wan, *Talk in the Shade of the Bo Tree*, p. 199. It should be remembered that in John 6 when Jesus fed the five thousand and the people wanted to make Him their King (who would go on feeding them like Moses), Jesus did not respond to their *agenda*. Jesus had an *agenda* of His own. He went on to talk about "bread from heaven" which ended up driving his hearers away. We must be careful we don't contextualize to the point of creating "junk food" in order for it to be palatable.

The problem with this approach is that it limits theological discussion to a narrow line of thought and as with our previous approach, this may be better dealt with in the area of “prophetic” words rather than as theology per se. Theology needs to embrace the variety of God’s revelation without being too bound to the specific.

### Theological Statements

Our next possibility is to commence with *theological statements* already introduced through Western theology.

As was observed in chapter three, the Thai do not feel they need to eliminate or negate the old when doing something new. Rather, their creativity centers around building and expanding on the old and thereby forming something “new”.

This starting point has the advantage of linking future Thai theology firmly to the framework of Church tradition and history. Statements such as “The Sovereignty of God”, “The Depravity of Man”, “The Church Triumphant”,<sup>332</sup> may be expounded and expanded on, starting with those most relevant to the Thai’s need or interest. Although these are primarily conceptual, the following section on “methodology” will suggest an appropriate approach.

### Theological Topics or Ideas

A further possible starting point for Thai theology is *theological topics or ideas*. “God”, “Man”, “Sin”, “Christ”, “Salvation”, “The Church” etc. form the basic outline of Western systematic theology. As we have observed, the Thai find no need to negate what has gone before. And so this progression of ideas or topics,

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<sup>332</sup> Or else statements taken directly from an early Christian creed (such as the Apostles’ Creed) - see later section.

which has been so useful in systematizing theology in the Western context, may also be used as a starting point for Thai theology. The uniqueness of Thai theology will be the way in which these ideas are developed. Again, we are starting conceptually, but the next section on methodology will explain an appropriate approach for the Thai.

### Early Christian Creeds

The last possible starting point for Thai theology that I want to suggest is to use early Christian creeds, and to study them against their historical and contextual backgrounds. This approach is suggested by Hwa Yung:

These creeds, especially the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, and the Chalcedonian Formula, were the first 'systematic' formulations of the Christian faith which the Early Church was forced to undertake both to ward off heresy and to instruct its members. Such a study will enable us to see *how the apostolic faith that was being handed down through the Scriptures and traditions was contextually shaped in the process of its formulation by the Early Church*. Having examined that in detail, we can then proceed to ask how the same process might be carried out afresh in the various Asian contexts today.<sup>333</sup>

Although the methodology I will suggest in the following section does not follow this particular line exactly, it is nevertheless a valid and helpful starting point and may indeed prove to be the most helpful.

### Methodology

While it is hoped that more study will be directed to developing an appropriate theological method for the Thai, I endeavor here to give some pointers to the way forward.

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<sup>333</sup> Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas*, p. 228.

In Chapter two it was noted that Dyrness's *Interactive Approach* is a valuable method for contextual theology. Also, as we have discussed in our previous section, an appropriate starting point is to take either Theological Statements already formulated (these may be taken from a Creed), or else the Topics/Ideas already proposed for systematic theology in the West.

Although these are primarily conceptual and the Thai do not naturally think conceptually, we have already stated the necessity for a Thai theology to also embrace the conceptual and the interpretive. I propose the following as one possible method of approach.

First, a Theological Statement, Idea or Topic is selected. This may be selected "interactively" according to the order of interest they are to the Thai. Since our theology is unlikely to concentrate on definitions<sup>334</sup> our theology could probably start at any topic with the assumption that "truth" will always witness and lead us to the centrality of God. It is therefore not necessary to start with God and since the Thai are more naturally conscious of *man* and *nature* these may well be selected first.<sup>335</sup>

Second, identify the *issues* and *feelings* the Thai have in connection with the selected statement, topic or idea. For instance, if the topic is "Man", the intuitive feelings of the Thai may include *fear*, *authority*, *society*, *honor*, *shame*, *usefulness*, *impermanence*, etc. In this way, the intuitive feelings of the Thai are taken seriously and are embedded into the theological method.

Third, identify sources of data - both Biblical and natural which relate to these intuitive feelings. Notice the interactive method of Biblical revelation and Thai context here. The Scripture passages selected will be primarily empirical

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<sup>334</sup> As we have seen, the Thai do not tend to "define".

<sup>335</sup> See our earlier discussion in this chapter "Logical First Point".



rather than doctrinal. Generally these may be to do with the following *events* 1. Creation 2. Israel 3. Jesus Christ 4. The Cross and Resurrection 5. The Church in Acts. For instance, passages may be selected where a man's *honor* is at stake, or where *fear* of man is involved etc.

Fourth, by the leading of the Holy Spirit and with the propensity of the Thai to narrate and describe, the data found in three is amplified upon. Stories may be told and illustrations will abound whether they be from nature, Thai history, current affairs or personal life. Again, the feelings and intuition of the Thai are utilized. While discussion is unlikely to revolve around conceptual definitions of man (continuing to use the example of *man* as our topic), it is expected that the Holy Spirit will lead and guide the "narrator" further into the truth about man.<sup>336</sup>

Fifth, conclusions are compared to doctrinal passages concerning the topic at hand. This will bring balance and checks to the conclusions made in four. For instance, having amplified on the fact that man is impermanent and fleeting, the teaching of Peter ("all men are like grass"<sup>337</sup>) may be used to confirm, or else Paul ("For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality"<sup>338</sup>) to prompt one to a further cycle of discussion.

### Conclusion

While the method suggested here commences with conceptual ideas, the process is quite concrete. It is far removed from the more abstract approach of centering discussion around a systematic exposition of Romans, for example.

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<sup>336</sup> "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." John 16:13.

<sup>337</sup> 1 Peter 1:24.

<sup>338</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:53.

The overall process may be described as *inductive*, in which truth is gradually concluded by means of amplification of concrete examples.

It is *interactive* in that it relates to the Thai context by maximizing on Thai feelings and needs and by utilizing the Thai way of philosophizing. At the same time it commences with statements or ideas from “above”, utilizes scripture as its primary source of data, and tests the results against scripture. Thus the theology is constantly “pulled up” to make it a *theology from above*.

### Further Remarks

#### The Life of Jesus

Hovemyr, responding to a question posed by Barth and others whether the truth which is so often expressed in abstract terms in the West... could be more clearly, accurately and adequately expressed in terms of Jesus' life and acts? says that the answer to this question from an Asian horizon is a resounding “yes”.<sup>339</sup>

I have suggested that the *events* of Creation, Israel, Jesus Christ, the Death and Resurrection and the Church in Acts should be utilized as sources of data. This corresponds to the “concretizing” of theology suggested by Barth, Hovemyr and others.

#### Practical Religion and the Book of James

In his Waterbuffalow Theology, Koyama suggests that the book of James is an appropriate book for the Thai.<sup>340</sup> James is “cool, yet not hot” in Koyama's

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<sup>339</sup> Anders Hovemyr, “Towards a theology of the Incarnation in the Thai context” *East Asia Journal of Theology* 1 No 2 (1983): 78-83, p. 79.

<sup>340</sup> Koyama, *Waterbuffalow Theology*, Chapter 14.

words. He has an emphasis on “impermanence” which, as we have seen, is fundamental to the Thai. His approach is also practical and empirical whereby one’s faith is evidenced by works, true religion means being concerned for the social needs around us.

As we have already observed, the Thai respond to concrete examples. They are “hand, heart, head” oriented.<sup>341</sup> We have also observed that the Interaction Model for contextualized theology suggests the importance of both the preaching *and life* of the evangelists and missionaries.<sup>342</sup> Theology must not be done in a vacuum. Theology will be credible when it is being worked out by those whose lives are consistent with the truths they are preaching. It is only a few who chose servanthood as their role who won the hearts of the masses. As Gnanakan points out, “It is only a few who chose servanthood as their role who won the hearts of the masses... can one really separate the writer from his writing?”<sup>343</sup>

### Being Led By the Spirit

A subject that consistently generates great interest among the Thai is that of “Being Led by the Holy Spirit”. Conservatives may consider an emphasis in this direction to be dangerous, but it is a deeply Biblical concept and under the right constraints it makes both God the center and also our faith practical.

The methodology suggested above gives space for the Holy Spirit to lead in the process of developing theology. Revelation hinges around this and in Paul Tillich’s words, “Revelation always is a subjective and an objective event in strict

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<sup>341</sup> See Figure 4, Chapter Three.

<sup>342</sup> See Figure 2, Chapter Two.

<sup>343</sup> Gnanakan, “Biblical Foundations: A South Asian Study”, p. 117.

interdependence.”<sup>344</sup> Migliore explains that “what is called revelation includes both God’s self-disclosing activity through particular persons and events and the working of God’s Spirit, who enables people to appropriate and bear witness to this activity.”<sup>345</sup>

### No Synthesis, Yin-Yang Dipolar

It is unlikely that the result of Thai theology will be a neat tightly fit system of harmonized beliefs. It is more likely to be a “yin-yang” di-polar of complimentary but opposite ideas. As has already been discussed, the Thai are well able to live with thesis, antithesis but without feeling the need to synthesize. This may result in a form of “process theology”<sup>346</sup> where our *understanding* of the complimentary nature of the truths is constantly developing but never totally harmonizing... yet without the truths themselves taking part in the process.<sup>347</sup>

### Vernacular Theology

As has already been pointed out in chapter two, the absence of written theological texts in a particular context does not necessarily mean that no theology has been done. Listening to the sermons and teaching of the national leaders will reveal that a contextual theology is already emerging. The danger that this may become polarized in one direction highlights the need to form a structure for Thai theology.

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<sup>344</sup> Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, p. 22.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Appendix 5, lines 64-76.

<sup>347</sup> I emphasize this latter point in order to distinguish from a Process Theology in which God Himself enters into the process of change.

Depending on the denomination, two topics appear regularly in Thai sermons 1. Power encounter (which is consistent with the Thai tendency to start with power <sup>348</sup>) 2. Relief from, or understanding of, suffering (since many Thai Christians find their understanding of God challenged by the fact that He allows them to suffer <sup>349</sup>). While I don't believe the theological system should center on these points, the fact that Thai "vernacular" theology already emphasizes them is an indicator that they will certainly major quite heavily in the discussion and "narration" of theological statements and ideas etc.

### Conclusion

This chapter has sought to synthesize the findings of chapter two (theology in general) and chapter three (the Thai context) in order to propose a viable way forward for theology in the Thai context, and specifically *systematic theology*. Having made a variety of fundamental statements about theology (such as the importance of Revelation, the essential role of the Holy Spirit etc), several starting points for theology were suggested. The use of *Theological Statements/Creeds or Theological Topics/Ideas* merit greatest consideration and a method which could be suited to the Thai was proposed. This involved a good

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<sup>348</sup> See chapter three on Thai World View especially Acharn Prasit Ruhkpisut's statement, "The Thais do not with what is true (*arai jing*) - they start with power (*amnat*).\" One popular Thai Pentecostal preacher says that in evangelism one must start with "power" e.g. the power of God to help you in your problems, because that is what 95% of the Thai are interested in. From there one can move on to other areas of Christian doctrine and discipleship. This same point was confirmed by another respected Thai leader. (From personal conversations).

<sup>349</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this, please refer to Stephen C.R. Taylor, "Gaps in Beliefs of Thai Christians" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 37(1) (2001): 72-81 and Stephen C.R. Taylor, *A Study of the Relationship Between Christian Education and The Belief System of Thai Christians* (Los Angeles: A Thesis Submitted as Partial Requirement for the Degree of Doctor Of Ministry, International Theological Seminary, 1999).

deal of interaction between *Truth* and *Context*, *Scripture* and *Feelings* or *Intuition* of the theologian and it also makes use of the Thai propensity for “narrating”<sup>350</sup>.

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<sup>350</sup> As seen in chapter three. Note again that the Thai word is *panyai* and it implies more than mere *narration* - it includes the ideas of *expanding upon*, *explaining*, *clever use of words* etc.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY

The purpose of this study has been to investigate a prolegomena for theology in the Thai context.

Most theology taught in Thailand was formulated in the West under specific historical, philosophical and contextual circumstances. The Thai context is quite different, and so if Christian truth is to be fully understood and take root in the Thai mind, it must be formulated using the unique mind-set of the Thai. The purpose is not to advocate a form of “theology from below” making the context the prime focus. Rather it is to take God’s revelation and explain it in a relevant and comprehensible way in the Thai context. In order to do this, Thai thought, philosophy and epistemology must be studied.

In Chapter Two, the development of theology and prolegomena in the Western context was first surveyed. It was observed that no one is capable of approaching theology in *tabula rasa* fashion but all theology rests upon presuppositions and principles which in turn have their effect on the doctrinal statements. The often stormy relationship between theology and philosophy was noted, in particular the role of reason in one’s epistemology. Two methods related to epistemology were discussed namely the *deductive* and *inductive* methods and two types of theology, *from above* and *from below*, were explained. The second half of chapter two summarized current thinking concerning contextual theology. Various models were described and Dyrness’s *Interaction Model* was proposed as being the most satisfactory, enabling both God’s

revelation and the context to be taken seriously. From a discussion of various attempts at theology in Asia, it was observed that most are anthropocentric falling into the category of *theology from below* and are therefore unsatisfactory from a conservative point of view.

The main results of the research are in Chapter three. The chapter is devoted to consideration of the Thai context. Its objective was to explore the thought structure, philosophy, epistemology and system of belief of the Thai. The chapter was the result of an extensive research of the libraries and archives of two leading Bangkok universities plus a series of interviews with some prominent Thai thinkers, both Christian and non-Christian. Those observations most pertinent to our study are outlined as follows.

The Thai traditionally have *added* new beliefs into their belief system (as opposed to negating or replacing the old). This has left them with a synthesis of traditional Animism along with Brahmanism and Buddhism. Dr Kirti Bunchua points out that Thai philosophy is not Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism caught on with the Thai primarily through its stories (the *hero* element of the Buddha and his sacrifice) rather than its doctrine and logic, though the concepts of impermanence and karma are strong in Thai thought. The Thai are unlike the Westerner in that they do not find a need to *define* what they see or experience. This is evidenced by the negligible use of the verb *to be* in the Thai language. In contrast to inductive and deductive methods of “knowing”, the Thai move from *particular to particular* without working back to the source or principle. They are strongly empirical and experience oriented. They generally need to experience something before they will believe. Feelings and intuition are also extremely important for the Thai and are often relied upon to “lead the way”. They are not conceptual. They are far more concerned with what may affect or benefit them



here and now than with the unknowns of the future, and in fact *practical personal benefit* is a primary motivation. The Thai have the ability to hold opposites (thesis, antithesis) in harmony without feeling the necessity to synthesize. Just as the Westerners like to define, the Thais like to “narrate” (amplify, relate, find new ways of expressing the same thing). This ability is enhanced by the language which has little fixed grammar but lends itself to *narration*. It is at this point that it is believed that the Thai may make a contribution to Theology, rather than seeking to contribute within the Western model.

Chapter four synthesizes the results of chapters two and three in order to make proposals for approaching theology in the Thai context. Initial comments regarding the primacy of revelation, the important role of the Holy Spirit, the necessity to have some continuity with history and tradition were made. It was also emphasized that although the Thai are not conceptual, they inevitably need to be trained to be able to apprehend concepts if they are to embrace much of the teaching of scripture. It was also pointed out that while Thais do not think in linear logical fashion, systematic theology in the form of systematic reflection on the key themes of the Christian faith is still required. This is especially required in the light of “vernacular” theology which is already emerging through preaching and teaching which could become “lob-sided” if not balanced by the whole.

A specific proposal for “doing” theology in the Thai context, which holds to the primacy of Revelation but also takes notice of the context (as in Dyrness’s model) is as follows: First, a Theological Statement, Idea or Topic is selected. This may be from one of the creeds of the early church. Second, identify the *issues* and *feelings* the Thai have in connection with the selected statement, topic or idea. Third, identify sources of data - both Biblical and natural which relate to these intuitive feelings. Generally these may be to do with the following

*events* 1. Creation 2. Israel 3. Jesus Christ 4. The Cross and Resurrection 5. The Church in Acts. Note that these all relate to specific events corresponding to the Thai appreciation for observable or *particular* data. Fourth, by the leading of the Holy Spirit and with the propensity of the Thai to narrate and describe, the data found in three is amplified upon. Fifth, conclusions are compared to doctrinal passages concerning the topic at hand.

As the variety of topics or statements are studied by the method proposed above, a systematic theology will be built up. As for the question of a first point for starting such a systematic theology, often a problem in the Western system, this may not prove to be a problem for the Thai given their lack of need to define or find a first cause. It is proposed that all topics are seen as forming a circle and all topics will likewise point to the centrality of God. The Thai could start at the point which interests them most and work from there. For instance, since the Thai are more naturally conscious of *man* and *nature* these may well be selected first.

Finally, I am very much aware that this research and the suggestions made are only a beginning. It is very much hoped that some of the material, especially chapter three and in particular the interviews (which appear in full in the appendix) will enable others to further contribute to a relevant way forward for theology in the Thai context.

## APPENDIX 1

### INTERVIEW WITH DR SEREE LORGUNPAI

- 1 Dr Seree – this thing between deductive and inductive, even the west has a sharp line between this is inductive one way and deductive the other way. But for Asia or Eastern people, they don't have sharp distinction they can imitate or be both, but the style of learning in the school, or the Buddhist style, I think is more deductive. But when people have thought deductively, but their practice may be of their own. For example, a scholar that wrote a book on Buddhism, his title is “precepts and practice”, he tried to explain that what they have been taught and what they do is not the same.
- 2 Steve – but what is their presupposition, what do they really believe, because what you do is what you really believe.
- 3 Dr Seree – that is the Western way, if you believe that, then you have to do that, but his argument is even if they believe or truly believe, it's deductively believe, they have been taught like that and they accept that is the teaching. But they don't practice what they believe.
- 4 Steve – OK, so would you say that the basis of the Thai is more on feeling or on rational basis?
- 5 Dr Seree – OK, another thing that is helpful is about guilt and shame. People in Thailand are more concerned about shame rather than guilt. So when you are talking about philosophical, you are talking about guilt. But Thai are more social on shame. So they know deductively it's guilt, but inductively they think about shame. So that means that the teachings of philosophy.
- 6 Steve – but the heart is actually inductive.
- 7 Dr Seree – OK, not only heart, but the face... you mean inside?
- 8 Steve – what's going to actually determine their behavior?
- 9 Dr Seree – it's the outside not the inside. What people in the community control. They aren't controlled by their heart. But controlled about the environment when you talk about shame. If guilt, this is controlled by your heart or your mind?
- 10 Steve – but that's not as strong to the Thai in comparison to the social pressure.
- 11 Dr Seree – so polygamy is a social aspect. For me, maybe it relates to power.
- 12 Steve – somebody has said to me that the starting point for the Thai is not what's real or what's true, but power. That's true. In your message and your preaching, if you can speak and touch their heart and their feeling, then it brings me back to feeling again. Is feeling more the basic thing, rather than the rational and logic. If their feelings are aroused, would that be basic to their epistemology, or an entry point. Because it would tie in with what we're saying that in principal they are deductive, and they are taught deductively. But actually, their practice can be very different, because could it depend on what they feel at the time. So what would they do?
- 13 Dr Seree – there are many things, there are two kinds of feeling in discussion, shame also, guilt also. Shame is the feeling of other people, but guilt is your personal feeling so they are more concerned about other people's feelings towards them.
- 14 Steve – but then Acharn Suntari Komin's basic idea is that yes, Thai people would be concerned on a social level, but their primary concern is oneself, the ego. If they could get away with being by themselves, they would get away and do what they want, but because of

social pressure, they can't exist in society without conforming, so they would conform to society.

- 15 Dr Seree – shame is also ego. Ego in the sense that you will survive in the society. Even shame for me is still ego, because for the Chinese and Thai, the face is more important. Like the Thai have this idea about *saksee* (honor). *Saksee* is also very basic. So that is the primary concern. But when you talk about guilt, you don't care about other people, you care about yourself. Ego in a different way. The ego in Thai is the *jitsamnuk* (conscience). So Christianity talks about guilt. When we talk about our response to God.
- 16 Steve – which is normally absent.
- 17 Dr Seree – yes, you talk about God again. Talk about personal salvation, you're not talking about completing salvation, so the Western and the Thai still have some gaps when you try to convert the Thai. You will always encounter problems in converting the Thai. You are successful in converting the Thai when you separate them from their society. For those that come to Bangkok, those that work in Singapore, those that work in other parts. These people respond when they are away. But if they are in their surroundings, then they cannot.
- 18 Steve – but could *fear* then be the common denominator in all of this?
- 19 Dr Seree – yes, that could be so. But the fear of God and the fear of men.
- 20 Steve – no, more like, fear of living in a cosmos that, I'm in the center, that it has many, many powers, how can I live in that, also in my society, how can I live? How can I exist? And fear, and appeasement is very, very basic. Would you agree?
- 21 Dr Seree – yes, so the point about fear is not actually a concept about fear, because in Christianity we talk about fear like in honor and of God as our judge. But that image is still not vivid compared to the shame, the face, the fear that they are being rejected by the community.
- 22 Steve – which is the immediate that they can see?
- 23 Dr Seree – yes, so they are more concerned about something that you can touch, and not abstract. Because sometimes when Christians explain God, lots of times we use a lot of terms in the way we say, it is still very abstract to the Thai people.
- 24 Steve – yes, and it doesn't come to the heart, it doesn't hit the emotions.
- 25 Dr Seree – it just hits the mind. And it's not enough. So when you talk about rational, they cannot understand rational as such if they cannot understand the practical way of living.
- 26 Steve – but then how and to what extent would the Thai be fearful of spirits? Because they cannot see them unless they think of in terms of a spirit that they can see. Often they would say that they have felt, or there was something that they saw. So they anthropomorphize the spirits, they make them so real. I mean, where does fear of spirits fit into this?
- 27 Dr Seree – for the spirits in Thai, some of them are not all abstract. Some of them are for real and even you believe in the real spirit of activity or not. One of the ways Thai people see is the *khon song* (medium). They have voices that change, they have actions that are different from normal behaviour.

28 Steve – this is very meaningful to the Thai?

29 Dr Seree – yes. This is why sometimes the Pentecostal, is very meaningful. It's actual as people go to worship spirits. You don't worship the idol, but you worship a medium. A medium to stimulate. You don't always just think of concepts. Like if you have a cut, and a knife is put into your cheek. You don't just believe in any spirit, but you see.

30 Steve – so if you take Kant and his noumena and phenomena realms. The noumena is something that you cannot know. God belongs to something that you cannot know by rational means. For the Thai, they could not accept that they are trying to know something conceptually.

31 Dr Seree – they cannot.

32 Steve – they cannot. So it has to be phenomenal?

33 Dr Seree – yes, normally. But there are some specific or small groups that think differently. These are very small and academic. Even the academics, some that may say that Christianity is irrational. A lot of the Thais will have this amulet. Even this friend who is studying in Edinburgh who cannot get a degree on a short term, he makes a vow. And even when they go to the Christian church. And after they accept Christianity, they don't know who granted it. So academically, it doesn't make the Thai people change. That's deductively. Thais who believe. Even when they study in the west.

34 Steve – they could sit all the exams and do everything. But their heart is very different and their practice is very different. And the basis of that then must be phenomenal. So what is true for the Thai is what they can feel, see and touch. And so when we are talking about systematic theology or the starting point for systematic theology in this context. We have to take this into consideration.

35 Dr Seree – but we have to accept that Buddhism is very philosophical in its teachings also.

36 Steve – and the Thai will reason very well. But in the end, reason will not bring them to faith.

37 Dr Seree- they can speak, they can talk about the reason. For many Thais, they would say that Buddhism is more reasonable than Buddhist teaching. They always claim to promote that they are more rational and idealistic.

38 Steve – OK. For the Thai that debate in Western theology of nominalism and realism. Is there a white that belongs to only certain objects. Or is there a universal whiteness? Where would this fit into the Thai mentality?

39 Dr Seree – you mean clean, or mean good, or ...?

40 Steve – yes, goodness, is there an absolute? Or are there only particulars?

41 Dr Seree – I don't think the Thai in general are thinking of any one absolute. If you go talk to a Thai, Thai people can accept more easily. They can accept Christianity easily. Instead of being more hostile to the Christians, they can accept the teachings. Your teachings are good. They can embrace all these things, rather than having only one absolute truth.

- 42 Steve – so Anselm’s argument, the ontological argument that there must be something that is perfect in greatness. That would not work in the Thai mentality. Because they are not working in the universal or something that is infinitely good.
- 43 Dr Seree – you notice that Thai Buddhism is combined with Hinduism from combining with animism, in the Thai life.
- 44 Steve – which actually is an indication in itself that the Thai cannot be just conceptual. Or start from conceptual ideas. If they could, they would have been pure Buddhists. But the fact that they mix everything is an indication in itself that they’re inductive.
- 45 Dr Seree – even the Thai people seem to be only deductive, and very bold in terms that you would not view the Buddha image. But occasionally there are some things that they cannot keep with. The term *nipan wan nii* means that “today you don’t need to die”, before you get the enlightenment or something. Sometimes he contradicts himself, even I don’t think from my perspective using Western measurement, I don’t think Puttatat is a real Buddhist.
- 46 Steve – what about the intuitive side of the Thai? Would you say that the Thai is intuitive, or empirical? Sometimes, the Thai would have a sense that this is the right time to do something. Where does that come from? Or if the Thai is purely empirical, but there is something mystical of the Thai too, and where does that come from? What is that sense?
- 47 Dr Seree – I was talking to an old lady in a car, and we were talking about the Thai style of living, and she said that the Thais have a type of instinct of *kae khai panha chapoh naa*, which means you can do something or make decisions, immediately, but the weak point is that they cannot plan. They always wait till the last minute to do something. And it seems like this is good sometimes because they always seem to be able to get away with it. They can survive, but they don’t think of the future. Whether it is something inside, or laziness, or if you consider it as less responsibility.
- 48 Steve – no it’s basically because the Thai are non-crisis orientated, so they would not plan ahead, because what we’re frightened of may not happen in the first place. So it would be a waste of time doing all the planning. Well, wait until the last minute.
- 49 Dr Seree – yes, because the Thais live in a very comfortable atmosphere.
- 50 Steve – yes, you haven’t had earthquakes, or monsoons, so there isn’t any reason why you actually have to plan ahead, or take and make precautions.
- 51 Dr Seree – so they always do things in the last minute. Another characteristic is to enjoy. Now it comes back to feeling. When you have to think, it’s no fun. They have to work so hard. They don’t want to work so hard, they want to enjoy life.
- 52 Steve – but don’t they enjoy thinking conceptually? Because I find in my theology class, many enjoy trying to think through things.
- 53 Dr Seree – no they don’t enjoy it. They say that when you talk anything about cynics, you can get the impression of Thais in ten minutes. You have one lecture, you can get their attention for ten minutes. If you want to get them to analyse the world cup, they can tell you everything. They can tell you who is in what, and they can analyse it, but they think of it in the fun way. But

if you are talking about the classroom – boring, terrible. But they can talk about football out and out.

- 54 Steve – OK, so what is fun for them has to do with action. What you can see. But coming back to this conceptual, or the intuition. Is there not part of being part of Asia... I mean, Westerners think of Asians as being all mystical and able to think maybe more intuitively rather than rationally. Is that so though? Is there a point where you get a sense that this is the right time to do something. It's a mystical thing, there is no reason.
- 55 Dr Seree – that's why another problem in Thailand is *kan panan*, gambling. Gambling is practically taking a risk, and you feel that you don't *wikro* (study it), but there's a sense.
- 56 Steve – now where does that come from, and why are people willing to put their money on that.
- 57 Dr Seree – I think, time span, because when you use rationally, you have to invest and spend a lot of time. Thai people want something instant, they want something short and when in their daily lives, you go to the river you fish and you get a fish. You don't have to plan a long time, you don't have to work hard. So when you're hungry you go out and get something. When you want money, you go to gamble.
- 58 Steve – and it's a risk, and they know it's a risk. But part of it's fun, and the risk and the fun can go together. It's the excitement that they may get it. but is there a point of sense, that intuitively you feel that you know something's going to happen? Or intuitively you feel that this time is the right time to do this action?
- 59 Dr Seree – but this sense is more covered by the willingness to see, and to see in Thai culture is a short term see. When you miss, you can find it back again. Because there are a lot of easy ways to get anything. That's why *yaa baa* (amphetamines) spreads like fire in Thailand, in every village. If you get caught there's some way out of it. You can bribe the police, then you go back and live again. It's like a lot of opportunities to repeat.
- 60 Steve – but then would you say that contemplation, I'm just coming back to this mystical side which can involve contemplation, more like the Cappadocian Fathers, and the Eastern Orthodox thinkers of contemplation. Would that be something that would appeal to the Thai.
- 61 Dr Seree – I don't think we can talk about the Thais in general terms for this, but I don't know whether *kao samati* (meditation) and contemplation are similar but there are certain people that will try to *nang samati* (concentrate/meditate). When talking about religions.
- 62 Steve – I mean how fundamental is that in Buddhism, *kao samati*, it seems very fundamental to Thai Buddhism. To practice that and...
- 63 Dr Seree – certain people say it's effective, in avoiding or getting out your inside, or your problems. In forgetting about things.
- 64 Steve – it's more an emptying thing rather than anything else. But is there a side apart from the *kao song* (to come under possession of another spirit)? That's very different. But is there a side of the Thai where you are trying to tune into other voices? Spiritual forces.
- 65 Dr Seree – this is not spiritual, in terms of spirits like those of Buddhists. It is more helping you to empty yourself and finding that everything in your life is not real. And get it off your body, get



it off your anxiety, get it off your desire. Focussing, try getting yourself to focus on a certain thing. Not in a logical way, but just to focus.

66 Steve – so is there anything for the average Thai person that you would say is mystical?

67 Dr Seree – if in the Western concept of what you would say is mystical. In a certain group, but their level. Some people I wouldn't say that they're mystical, but some people are willing to listen. Like *ching chok tat* (re. a wall lizard), or *maeow dam tat* (re. a black cat), that is mystical right? But some people, I'm not sure.

68 Steve – that is more superstition I think. Mystical would be more like trying to tune in to different forces and powers.

69 Dr Seree – I don't think they are in to that type of thing.

70 Steve – so when they go to a spirit shrine, they are not trying to tune into the spirits, it's more just a pure transaction. They are not trying to tune into a spirit or sense.

71 Dr Seree – like when they use the joss sticks. They aren't trying to look around, they don't try to get the feel. They just think and make a vow. I don't think they are really mystical.

72 Steve – what about mythology, like the Ramakien, has been very influential in Thai.

73 Dr Seree – I don't think it's been influential practically, but it's been influential in agriculture. But not really many people would go to that. Only the *khon song* (medium) would talk about the spirit.

74 Steve – so more on the spiritual.

75 Dr Seree – yes, but nobody really quotes about the wording of the Ramakien. Like who says what, or *pen yang khon nii* (being like this person). It's hardly mentioned. But for Christians they always talk about David, and Sampson, they always talk about the people. In daily conversation nobody talks about the Ramakien. It's more just a story in the *wat* (temple).

76 Steve – it's just mythology.

77 Dr Seree – but it's not linked.

78 Steve – so there's no link to the mythological.

79 Dr Seree – nobody quotes about it.

80 Steve – so the noumenal realm really does not influence. So if we bring God in a noumenal sense, it's not going to touch them. Somehow it has to become phenomenal. What about revelation. We talk about faith, reason, revelation. Now what could be any equivalent to Christian revelation and how God reveals himself in the Thai world view or how they understand. Is there such a thing as revelation from other beings? Is that a concept that they try to think about.

81 Dr Seree – apart from *khon song* (medium) and how they are. They are the nearest thing to revelation that Thai people think about. Why the people *nang samati* (concentrate, meditate),

and talking about the reason for reason *samati* is that you try to remember or recall the past life. The Thais try to understand why you get some bad luck. Maybe because of what you have done in previous life. That is the nearest to revelation. But in terms of other beings is done by inspiration.

82 Steve – that is totally absent. Or would they be expecting Buddha to be doing that to them? Giving words of advice.

83 Dr Seree – yes, but this part is contradictory. There are two lines of Buddhism. One is temple village, where they come every morning for alms, the amount of pasturing. The kind of monk or people. But the other kind of in the *Isarn* (northeastern region) is the *tudong*. I don't know what it is in English. But it is more like going alone in the cave or certain forest. Like a hermit. That type of monk always has some record there. When they are alone, they get some inspiration or some help from previous *araham* (saint). So it's like you are my teacher in the *wat* (temple), and you pass away, but you may appear to me, and give me instructions on how to reach nirvana. But it contradicts, because according to hinarian, or those that reach the stage, it is different from mahayan. You know the distinction like chao mae kuan tim, they didn't reach arahan, or somdamwan because she still has the concern for people. So she is in the intermediate stage. But according to the records in any books or in some of the books when I studied. I read the articles on how the Thai tudong claim that they reach arahan, because of the previous arahan gives them some enlightenment.

84 Steve – but I think the average Thai, this is very remote.

85 Dr Seree – maybe if we weren't so limited in terms Christian inspiration, another thing we could think about would be the dreams. So if you regard inspiration or revelation through dreams, then they have these dreams.

86 Steve – and why would the Thai believe in a dream they had. On what basis would they believe it?

87 Dr Seree – I think when you talk about dreams in Thai, they would talk about it in two senses. They would talk about warnings, and they would talk about blessings.

88 Steve – but it's superstition in a sense. There is no logical basis in believing what they dreamt. But they believe it.

89 Dr Seree – another example would be that Thai people are reading a newspaper, and people talk about how some people died because of certain people. Or they die and nobody's able to find the body. And the mother or father dream and give them some signal, and then they are able to find the body. Because that person who died cannot go away until the body has been passed through some Buddhist ceremony or something, and then that spirit would be free. This is like a revelation for the family in how to help this person.

90 Steve – but it's related to their practical life, related to like what number they should use in the lottery. It's not a self revelation to them of some other being.

91 Dr Seree – no. they don't talk about that.

92 Steve – or that they may know the Buddha more. That he should reveal himself to them more.

93 Dr Seree – I haven't heard of that kind of talk.

94 Steve – but more that if I get a word or get a number to use in the lottery, that's the kind of revelation.

95 Dr Seree – but according to Buddhist law, any monk that gives that kind of thing is not genuine.

96 Steve – but all the temples that are progressing, they all do it... that's how they get the money in. How about miracles. Do Thais believe in miracles?

97 Dr Seree – yes.

98 Steve – why?

99 Dr Seree – I think this is if we are talking about the need. The need actually like instance, they don't want to plan something. It's something that hits the need. Then it's like *choak* (luck). I think miracles and in the gambling are very close in terms of concept. But when talking about the daily need, then it's very similar it's almost identical. Seeing *choak* and miracle. When you talk about miracles, they don't mind, they would believe in anybody that gives them what they want at that moment. That's why they are willing to believe in miracles.

100 Steve – but they don't know who is giving them the miracles.

101 Dr Seree – they don't mind.

102 Steve – it doesn't matter. Somehow something's going to happen. But they have a lot of faith in that. Because many live their lives on that, on the edge and doing things on the last moment.

103 Dr Seree – yes, that's why coming back to the way people are able to get things done immediately, because that's their lifestyle.

104 Steve – so who do they believe in? Do they believe in some kind of force that's going to give them the right answer at the right moment.

105 Dr Seree – it's more a miracle.

106 Steve – so this is Brahminism more. It's Brahminism, *choak* (luck). The timing, and the *duang* (stars).

107 Dr Seree – so that's why if you pray for Thai people. If you say, can I pray for you? Yes, they have no problem with it. I have never been rejected by Thai people, if they have a problem, and I say can I pray for you, they are very grateful and they thank you. They would not say that they don't believe in God. Hardly anybody would say that they don't want to be prayed for. Unless they have had some bad experience.

108 Steve – Thank you, Dr Seree, for your time and a helpful interview.

## APPENDIX 2

### INTERVIEW WITH DR APICHART PUNSAKWORASAN

- 1 Dr Apichart – In Thai metaphysics there is no reality. It is selfless.
- 2 Steve – so what is reality for the Thai? Is the fact that Buddhism is mixed with Animism and Brahmanism an indication that the Thai epistemology is much deeper than Buddhism. That they do have some reality, what is real? What do the Thai really believe in? If we believe in what we do, then what do they put into practice?
- 3 Dr Apichart – that is ethics. So there is metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. This is my opinion, I don't know whether it is right. The value system comes from metaphysics. What is the reality, how do you know the truth. Then there are ethics and aesthetics. So for me I think it's like Plato. That meant the essence is spirit it's not visible.
- 4 Steve – but then wouldn't you say that the Thai is conceptual then.
- 5 Dr Apichart – there are many levels. In a sense you would say that they are very pragmatic because it comes down to ethics. So I think that metaphysics is like, it's not a chair, many things become a chair, but it is nothing. So I think nothing real as physics.
- 6 Steve – but isn't that a pure Buddhist belief, but there are so few Thais that are pure Buddhist in practice.
- 7 Dr Apichart – that is because they are mixed, but their philosophy is this idea.
- 8 Steve – OK, but say we take about 80% of the Thai people, the *chonabot* (country area), say just the really basic and simple Thai people. What do they believe? Why do they believe what they believe? Are they deductive or inductive? Do they want something they can get hold of? Does it touch me, and therefore I believe it. Or can I believe something that is conceptual?
- 9 Dr Apichart – I think both. Thais are very mixed. Both. That's why metaphysics they say won *nipan* (nirvana). It's something that is selfless, nothingless.
- 10 Steve – yes, but are people looking for that really? Or are people looking for today, what is going to happen today?
- 11 Dr Apichart – both, because they can't go that far upward, to *nipan* (nirvana). But *nipan* has the effect on the ethics. So it is like in Christianity, the head affects the hand, and it is the same. So if you are selfless then you don't want anything, so you can show *karuna* (goodness), because you don't have yourself. Then you would do good.
- 12 Steve – but haven't the sociological studies like that of Suntaree Komin and others, shown that the ego is the very central part of the Thai. So instead of being "no self", self is actually very central.
- 13 Dr Apichart – that's the lower level from the philosophy. If they can go up to become selfless, then it will be very good. Even more, like Buddhists.
- 14 Steve – yes, but are people actually practicing that?
- 15 Dr Apichart – I think they have the idea, but they can't. that's why they are practicing in the lower level. But if you ask the Buddhist itself, the philosophy, they want to go to *nipan*, to nirvana.

- 16 Steve – because the aim of my study is what the starting point of theology for the Thai. Prolegomena for systematic theology in the Thai context. Normally in the west you have a debate between faith, reason and revelation. Now where do we start with the Thai? What is their framework of thinking, because a lot of the Western way of thinking is formulated around Western philosophy. It has gone together. So what would be the presuppositions for the Thai in what they believe? Why do they believe what they believe? Is it because it's a concept that rationally I can agree with, or is it something that touches me? And so it's feeling. There is reason also, but it's because it touched my feeling. It's something very tangible, it's empirical.
- 17 Dr Apichart – I will say yes, they have to see what level they can accept. What is work level we can accept. If it a low level and not a philosopher level. For the general Thai, they are inductive and pragmatic. Everything that works they can accept.
- 18 Steve – so on what basis would they believe in a spirit. Would they believe in a spirit because they've heard somebody talk about that spirit, or is it because they've actually had experience with that spirit? That it's become phenomenal, it's become empirical to them and therefore they believe in that spirit.
- 19 Dr Apichart – they believe in the sense that it will hurt them, so it's pragmatic, it's utilitarian. I don't experience, but when I've heard of the experience, and it's not good, then maybe it gives some blessing for me, then I believe. Then I go and practice.
- 20 Steve – OK, because it's practical. Even though there is no particular rational basis, well that is actually a rational basis, but there is a reason for believing, for benefit.
- 21 Dr Apichart – but when you come to the Christianity they are biased. Even though they say that they have done some benefit, Jesus Christ can perform some miracles, and that he may be greater than some other spirits and so forth, but because of the bias they won't touch it. But some will touch in the sense of benefit. And the bias is that deep down, we are Thai and we are Buddhist. I think that's the main obstacle for Thai people.
- 22 Steve – what about mythology in the Thai epistemology? Mythology of like the Ramakien. Does that have an important place in Thai thinking or belief?
- 23 Dr Apichart – yes yes. I think like this kind of next life and all the mythology, we believe in it. It affects them, and yeah, if they do sinful things, they will become bad in the next life.
- 24 Steve – but that is more conceptual isn't it? It has not touched them. These mythological figures or ideas. Is it not conceptual? It's not like the spirits. How can hold that together as well? Doesn't that defy reason? On what basis do they believe that? Purely on the basis of authority figures who have taught it to them?
- 25 Dr Apichart – I think it's purely on faith. No reason because they can't prove it.
- 26 Steve – so in the noumenal realm, they can grasp noumenal ideas without it becoming phenomenal.
- 27 Dr Apichart – the Thais are like this. They are very slippery. That's why we can survive among the starist (?) Asia.

- 28 Steve – OK, now is there anything deeper than that? What is the motivation behind that. Is it fear? To be able to live and exist? To be able to live in this cosmos that has all sorts of powers and the centre. How can I exist in my society? How can I exist without losing face? Fear can that be a motivation for producing face? Because I fear, therefore I believe certain things.
- 29 Dr Apichart – I think it's a hard topic, but I think that benefit is the main motivation. Now if were to do good. Because benefit will help them to do good. So pragmatic and utilitarian. So I don't think fear would play such a big role.
- 30 Steve – would they fear their bad karma?
- 31 Dr Apichart – no, just as now you said that about the next life, they believe in it, but they are not afraid. So it doesn't play such a big role, but it is mainly benefit. The now. Not next, or the past, it is now. So Thais are mainly existentialists, humanists and pragmatic. That's what I think. They are existentialists, so when you talk about eternal life. They have some faith in mythology, but they are not so interested in it.
- 32 Steve – what about *choak* (luck)?
- 33 Dr Apichart – *choak*? *Choak* is also benefit.
- 34 Steve – yeah, but do they live on the edge? Leave everything to the last minute, and I'll get through. Leave everything to the last minute, and I'll get through somehow. There's a kind of sense that *aow tua rot dai* (to be able to "get out of" something). That there's some *choak*, there's some luck that, like Brahmanism, there's *duang* (stars), that I've got good *duang* and that will carry me through. Now that's conceptual.
- 35 Dr Apichart – and this links with the mythology. Because when in their last life they have done something good and so they have good *choak*.
- 36 Steve – so it is linked with karma, so their *choak duang* is linked together.
- 37 Dr Apichart – but their *choak* is for now, and not for the future.
- 38 Steve – but do they not believe that they'll make it through in the future... that some way something will open for me? It's a little bit like *choak*.
- 39 Dr Apichart – yeah, I would say that some people can have that motivation that maybe if I do good now, in the future I will get something.
- 40 Steve – so it's still based on what I do now, it's empirical. Not so much conceptual that somehow something will carry me through, or that I have good *duang*.
- 41 Dr Apichart – I'll explain again. I think that *duang* is very important for Thai people. *Duang* and *choak*. Because people talk so much about *choak dee* (good luck), *chaok rai* (bad luck). But what do you mean by it?
- 42 Steve – well, somehow that fate will carry me through. Somehow I'll have good luck in the future. Somehow I don't have to prepare myself so much now, I can leave things.

- 43 Dr Apichart – no, not in that sense. But the sense that I must do something good, and then I'll get luck.
- 44 Steve – so it's more karmic than pure fate.
- 45 Dr Apichart – so I think they look about now.
- 46 Steve – yeah, they look about now. I've got so many worries today, I don't have to think about tomorrow.
- 47 Dr Apichart – no they think, but not right now.
- 48 Steve – how about feeling? You know, feeling. There are so many Thai words with *chai* (heart), and *rue suek waa* (I feel that...). Feeling and reason. What would take priority? If I feel good about this. If that touches my feeling then I will follow it. Or if it's rational. If I can think through *mee haet mee phon* (there is a reason), then I will follow it. What will take priority?
- 49 Dr Apichart – let me just think... I would go rather rational rather than feeling, because we don't talk about feeling so much. Even when we use *rue suek waa*, it's talking about thinking. Like *chan rue suek khao mai took* (I feel that he's not right). It's thinking, but we use *rue suek*. It's not *rue suek* is thinking.
- 50 Steve – but in preaching, if we use the emotions, people will respond. Not necessarily because it is correct or uses the right theology, but it has touched the emotions. Because they like *sanuk* (fun). What's produced that?
- 51 Dr Apichart – life is now.
- 52 Steve – so enjoy it.
- 53 Dr Apichart – mmm... I think about future has some consequences, bad karma.
- 54 Steve – anything can happen, so why not live for now? What's real now.
- 55 Dr Apichart – I think we are very much existentialists. Thai people *chai ngun yeu* (use lots of money). Why keep it for the future? Live for now, I think.
- 56 Steve – Thai Thai, not the Chinese. Like in the *chonabot* (country areas) if they have a hundred baht now, they'll not go to work, they'll use it first, and then go and find work. That kind of idea. What about intuition. is there a sense where the Thai can be led by some intuitive feeling about something?
- 57 Dr Apichart – yes, because they believe in the spirits, so intuition can come this way.
- 58 Steve – but do they believe that the spirit is going to lead them and guide them, or that the spirit is purely going to do something for them? When they go to the spirit shrines, are they looking for inspiration for something? Or are they looking for a favour and it's more a transaction?
- 59 Dr Apichart – the majority will go for a favour. Few will go for inspiration. But they believe in both.



- 60 Steve – it has a place. So like I just feel inside me, there's no reason about it, but this is the time to start this business, or this is the time to speak to this person. It's like a mystical intuition, there is no reason, does this have a part for the Thai at all?
- 61 Dr Apichart – not really, but then they go and say that they got some *cim-cee* (?). Perhaps some huge things, not some pure intuition in the mind, that they've got some sign or hint, then they connect. Like they got *huay* (lottery), some sign or some link, but not just imagination like they've got this number and then they go and buy the lottery. I think they've got some sign, they seek for signs.
- 62 Steve – could that come through a dream, could dreams be important?
- 63 Dr Apichart – yes, they could dream, oh last night I... OK, won!
- 64 Steve – and so they could take that as some sign.
- 65 Dr Apichart – yes, a dream, or trees, or anything could be a sign when they look for them.
- 66 Steve – so it's still phenomenal.
- 67 Dr Apichart – not just pure intuition. more empirical; humanism, empirical, pragmatic, understand?
- 68 Steve – yes, I think it's veering towards...
- 69 Dr Apichart – Aristotle
- 70 Steve – yes Aristotle, more than Plato.
- 71 Dr Apichart – but as I said, if you go up, the higher Buddhists, it becomes more like Plato. So as I said, they have both ideas, Thais have both.
- 72 Steve – but then one would expect that Anselm's proof for the existence of God would have some meaning to the Thai.
- 73 Dr Apichart – no. I think they already believe. With Platoism, they believe it. But with Aristotle's idea they ignore it. It doesn't prove it. Or they want some phenomenon to happen. So I guess it depends on which side they go on more.
- 74 Steve – but because of the bias, I think they bias themselves away from either, then they'll fall into the other, and switch back and forth to avoid. But then to prove they must have some experience or something like that.
- 75 Dr Apichart – so Thais are very slippery. They are all smiles. You can't tell all smiles. Inside it can be very hard to say. It could be hate or not. Thai people are very nice generally in appearance.
- 76 Steve – how about miracles, where would they be placed in the Thai scheme of things? Where does the miracle come from? Would they believe in miracles?
- 77 Dr Apichart – *choak* (luck). Miracles is *choak*. Something supernatural comes to them for benefit now. And then some God has helped them, this is *choak*.

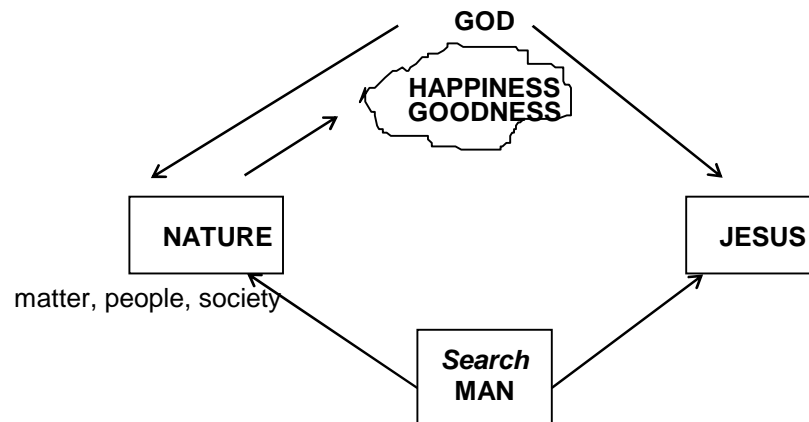
- 78 Steve – so would they believe in a noumenal realm and a phenomenal realm, or would these two be both together for the Thai? Only what's real can be experienced? Are there pure conceptual things out there that cannot really be known that are there, that we believe are there? Or is it all one?
- 79 Dr Apichart – as I said, it depends on which level you are at now. Like say, those that are *buat* (entered the priesthood), or *prah* (priest), they can be conceptual, they can have peace that is not just phenomenal peace. You can have peace inside among worries, and bad society. That's conceptual. You can ask Buddhists that are at this level. So it's both.
- 80 Steve – so contemplation for the Buddhists is conceptual, or is it emptying. It's more emptying rather than taking on any concept.
- 81 Dr Apichart – but the way to help you, you need a phenomenon. You need some object to help you concentrate, and then they'll go to the priest. They need some rules some laws, some practical matter to help you to go to this level.
- 82 Steve – what about revelation. In the Christian understanding that God reveals himself, is there anything equivalent to that in the Thai idea?
- 83 Dr Apichart – I think it's more on self. You must have knowledge, or get taught by some other to have knowledge, and this knowledge can help you to go through.
- 84 Steve – and you have the knowledge, so it's humanism
- 85 Dr Apichart – it's humanism. Not outside. Giving in. I don't think they believe in revelation.
- 86 Steve – so that's a big gap in the whole approach, because actually we start in revelation.
- 87 Dr Apichart – but they can in that sense be empirical. Stones, they can give them some sense and they can understand the world. So in that sense it's inductive. It points to some big concept.
- 88 Steve – points to some big concept yes. It shows things around them that will point to something conceptual.
- 89 Dr Apichart – if you say the *khon phut* (the Buddhist), they take blessing also as karma.
- 90 Steve – and they must do something to alleviate it. But would they feel that they are under a curse? I mean, can deliverance come in a sense that they are relieved from a curse?
- 91 Dr Apichart – no
- 92 Steve – no, not to the general Thai. It's exceptional.
- 93 Dr Apichart – they themselves either in the past life, not the curse from generations. It is so very self. You are responsible for yourself.
- 94 Steve – and nobody could be responsible for you.
- 95 Dr Apichart – but a curse in that sense, you can go the shrine, and they can go to a medium.

- 96 Steve – so it is something that had occurred on earth. It's just because once I heard a farmer, when he became a Christian, he was so excited and he felt that he had come out of being under a curse. And so I wondered if it was general. A curse on his land, a curse on his family. That he was going to have to be poor, that caused him to be poor, that caused him not to have any success, and he felt that he had been delivered when he became a Christian. But maybe that was exceptional in the particular case.
- 97 Dr Apichart – it may have come from *kam kao* (past bad merit), or maybe a medium.
- 98 Steve – OK, that may have been the cause of either of those. But interesting that there is no place for revelation in the whole scheme of things.
- 99 Dr Apichart – no, because the mythology is not. It's if you are human and you do good, do good, do good, then you become a God. So the knowledge is built up from inductive and then becomes a God. And it teaches you that you can still become a God from a human.
- 100 Steve – except for some, how they got up there, they say that somebody who has already reached it showed them the way or something like that. That's what I heard.
- 101 Dr Apichart – are you calling this revelation?
- 102 Steve – I don't know. Something that comes from above, that is showing you the way. Or is it more inductive that I will see what's around and I will work my way through and up, rather than being drawn up.
- 103 Dr Apichart – like Buddhists. Buddha himself is human. So he studied by empirical, inductive, and he got knowledge. So he became like a god. So he preached. It's not like revelation.
- 104 Steve – so that's not revelation. It's a theology from below, it's a theology from below.
- 105 Dr Apichart – then you teach again. It's not revelation in that sense. Even people forget already that Buddha started from here. It's still teaching his knowledge. It's not revelation, it's accumulated knowledge. That's what I think.
- 106 Steve – so there's going to be a big jump to take place if were to teach a theology from above. And our starting place is God's truth, it's God's revelation. So we've got a big gap.
- 107 Dr Apichart – so now when I teach, I would say both ways, inductive and deductive. We need a general revelation and a special revelation. I would start with general revelation first. Yes, truth in the nature. I think that if you want to talk to Asians, you must start from below. So many truths you can learn. But these are not absolute truths. These are truths you can find through discovery, like scientific. You are discovering.
- 108 Steve – but this means that the church has to be very practical and actually show God. If the church is not showing much, it's just conceptual it's not going to mean much, it's not going to have any impact on the Thai society.
- 109 Dr Apichart – that's why Catholic people like Catholic works, because they are down to earth, they are empirical and pragmatic.
- 110 Steve – it's important.

111 Dr Apichart – but we always emphasise on the world and revelation on this side.

112 Steve – yes, yes.

113 Dr Apichart – but I think we need at the end to introduce revelation, because that is very good news. So when I teach now I use this model. We've got nature here. So we have *sasahn* (matter), *khon* (people), *sankhom* (society). So we know truth. We research the truth from nature. This is very humanism, empirical, Aristotle. I think Thais go this way. But why do you want to know? Because you want something good. Something happy. A happy life.



114 Steve – yes, that is a concept there that you are wanting.

115 Dr Apichart – so they go this way (i.e. man to nature). So if you start theology the Buddhist way, you go this way. People would go this way, good life, or good things, or something.

116 Steve – they have a concept of happiness, they have a concept of goodness?

117 Dr Apichart – yes, I think this is very universal, I think people always have this kind of concept. It's just that they start from here.

118 Steve – so they are realists, rather than nominalists.

119 Dr Apichart – what do you mean by that?

120 Steve – you know, the debate whether there is a whiteness, or whether there are only objects that are white. This object is white, that object is white. But there is no universal whiteness. But the Thai would have a concept of goodness, of justice, of happiness.

121 Dr Apichart – I think yes. But they go this way (man to nature). But because of this, they know this because they search from nature. From nature they think of something. It doesn't come down. From nature we search and then we say that it must have something.

122 Steve – but do they not see happiness from nature. This thing is happy, this thing is joyful, this thing is good. These things, that would be nominal.

123 Dr Apichart – OK

- 124 Steve – whereas the realism, which is the scholastic movement of the 13th, 14th century says there is no universal. But the Anselm and Aquinas era would say that it points to some universal goodness.
- 125 Dr Apichart – then I would say it depends on level. The level of the Buddhists. Some they will stop here, but some will go up here like Buddha. Buddha himself went up there (to the top of the diagram).
- 126 Steve – but in general, not many will look beyond nature. That's a problem.
- 127 Dr Apichart – they will not look for, but they will know from the outside now. Even they themselves stop here (i.e. at nature). But they know of something higher through others. Some would get to here and know something about the upper level, but they will not search it. They don't continue to search to the next level. So it depends on the level. Buddha teaches that there are four levels of *dok bua* (lotus). Those who are *dok bua mai kot nam* (?), they are not *traseru* (enlightened). But the enlightened ones, they go there.
- 128 Steve – but we are talking about 70%, 80% of the Thai population that would have this problem, they would only see the sanuk or the goodness of what they are looking for actually in the present, that is what they can get hold of.
- 129 Dr Apichart – so I will go this way (from bottom to left), but I would say that that is not enough. Or that you don't have absolute truth, everything is relative now. So we have to discuss about relativity.
- 130 Steve – so why would you say that this is relative? Because there is relative goodness, relative happiness in this what you can experience this way. And everybody gets different levels.
- 131 Dr Apichart – yes, there is no absolute here. That's why I would say. Then I would show that God created this, and this is not enough and then it is very sinful. Sinful, we are sin. And so our searching is also our error. If we are not sinful, our searching may be pure, not error.
- 132 Steve – because we are sinful, then we commit errors in what we are looking for. And so there's need for special revelation.
- 133 Dr Apichart – so I will like say, we are here (left hand side of the diagram). We are in that area, but there is so much more. But I would start from here. Your world is just like this.
- 134 Steve – and if they are looking for something more then you show them what's more.
- 135 Dr Apichart – and then you go there (right hand side of the diagram), and you have special revelation and general revelation. Then you show them that we are very ignorant, because Buddha himself taught us that we must be enlightened. Buddha himself teaches us that we must go beyond this world to this level (God, Happiness, Goodness).
- 136 Steve – OK, but this one I can be sure of (nature/natural). I can be sure of that. How can I be sure of that (God)?
- 137 Dr Apichart – so this one said that the revelation must come in here.
- 138 Steve – illumination. The opening of the heart by the Holy Spirit has to take place.

139 Dr Apichart – and so we introduce the historical proof of Jesus.

140 Steve – but when Anselm says “I believe that I may understand”. What could, what must take place in the Thai mind that they could say that. That I would believe in order that I may understand.

141 Dr Apichart – because they are very humanistic themselves. They must help themselves. They must *tom chai* (humble themselves).

142 Steve – see my need. Knowledge I’m looking for more. Knowledge I need something more. This opening for another force to come upon you.

143 Dr Apichart – you will need somebody to help you. In this particular area. Only one area.

144 Steve – the Holy Spirit is at work in me or on me... that’s something unique then. That’s never happened, there has been no other thing similar to that for the Thai.

145 Dr Apichart – no, because *ton pen ti pung kawng ton* (you must depend on yourself). Here is the very core of the Thai. Like people die for you, it is impossible.

146 Steve – but you have the idea of *tii pung tang chai* (a dependence point).

147 Dr Apichart – still, you must help yourself. They are just *tii pung* (a dependence).

148 Steve - oh, you still help yourself. It helps you to help yourself.

149 Dr Apichart – yes, you must help yourself. Self is very important.

150 Steve – so, it doesn’t become above me, or lord over me. I’m still, my ego is my lord. Myself is my lord.

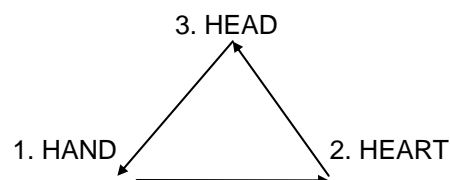
151 Dr Apichart – right. That’s a blind spot for Buddhist idea. Self. They can’t think beyond self.

152 Steve – which is a contradiction in terms, because it’s supposed to be no-self.

153 Dr Apichart – right. But self then no-self means you help yourself to no-self. Then you are above everything. But it’s still self. You have to help yourself to become no-self. Then you are above everything. That’s the new path, but individual. So humanism, individualism, pragmatic, empirical, inductive, Aristotle, but yet, some Plato ideas. Follow to the higher levels, they go up. There is nothing. It is nothing. It isn’t a chair.

154 Steve – so you have to make that appeal to the Thai. Touch their heart that you would make them agree. Emotionally too, because emotion tends to lead higher than the rational. Somehow touch the emotion by God’s word to create in them the recognition of their need to be controlled.

155 Dr Apichart – so if we go in education, as in head and hand.



156 Steve – it is hand, heart, head.

157 Dr Apichart – it is phenomenal. So I think the approach we should use for. But this is not just generally, it can go high and enigmatic. People should see something. It works.

158 Steve – God did something for me, and therefore I believe and commit. So many testimonies that you hear. It's not so much about sin, it's more that God helped me. God healed some member of my family, God did something for me, and therefore I believe. And that fits very much into that frame more.

159 Dr Apichart – some can use reason and then understand.

160 Steve –well yes. If they can believe at this point and then they will understand.

161 Dr Apichart – still,they can stop.

162 Steve – yes, they can still stop at this level (the heart).

163 Dr Apichart – they don't grow.

164 Steve – and when the hand stops, then they stop.

165 Dr Apichart – so that's the part of the Thai people who become Christian. 160 years goes by and they don't grow. And individual, I say that it has nothing to do with community, and fellowship. It isn't.

166 Steve – yes, Acharn Chaiyan's dissertation was on that. Distancing. Because if I get involved, then I will suffer too. So I'm seeking salvation from suffering.

167 Dr Apichart – so that's the problem of Thais, self. Because they call that impermanence. So they look for now.

168 Steve – so they aren't too worried about the future, because it's not permanent anyway, because it's going to change.

169 Dr Apichart – yes, and *tookta* (suffering) and *annata* (no-self), if you don't have *annata*, then you don't have *took ta*.

169 Steve – Dr Apichart, than you very much.

### APPENDIX 3

#### INTERVIEW WITH DR CHAIYUN UKOSAKUL



- 1 Dr Chaiyan – I was thinking a little bit about the things you mentioned: epistemology and the way we reason. I don't know how to start
- 2 Steve – I'm looking at Thai epistemology. Would you say that the Thai are more primarily inductive or deductive in the way they think?
- 3 Dr Chaiyan – in my opinion, I would say that it is more deductive. One statement to support that would be that the Thai would say *chak mae nam tang haa*. Are you familiar with that statement?
- 4 Steve – no
- 5 Dr Chaiyan – *chak mae nam tang haa* means literally draw the water from the five major rivers. What it means that, in order to make your point, to make it convincing, you need more facts. You need more evidence that will bring you to a conclusion. Like Buddha said, that this is suffering, that is suffering, and his conclusion is life is a possibility for suffering. And for me although I do use something to support what I think, or the real situation in the church. I mean, of course inductive should be used. And even Jesus is very inductive by nature. I have no problem with that because from one point we generalize. In the other way round in what I have said just now, from many evidences we tend to draw before we make a conclusion. Which is the opposite direction as such. It would be good if we could find an effective deductive approach. Like a deductive bible study approach. I think that would help.
- 6 Steve – So you are saying that the Thai start from a generalization and take it to a particular?
- 7 Dr Chaiyan – well, in inductive, you take one passage, and then you make a general statement. Like if the Bible starts with a point, you start from small and then you generalize it. But in the other way round you should explore and go through further.
- 8 Steve – so you start with something general like the love of God, and then work towards how that works in practice?
- 9 Dr Chaiyan – no, it can be, let's say: this statement helps to understand that there is a God, and then we move on to say look this is also a statement or a fact that there is a God the creator. And because of that, we can make a conclusion so deductively there must be a God the creator.
- 10 Steve – I think it comes from an evidence and then goes to conclude that God exists, would that not be inductive? They want something tangible, would the Thai go for something that was more empirical rather than intuitive.
- 11 Dr Chaiyan – empirical is another thing in epistemology, but yes, rational is one thing, but experience is more important.
- 12 Steve – would you say then what would the Thai put more emphasis on? Their rational side or their feeling?
- 13 Dr Chaiyan – it's not necessarily that it has to be feeling, but it's more experience.
- 14 Steve – so having some kind of phenomenal encounter with something.
- 15 Dr Chaiyan – I think they want to realize something. Realization is important.

16 Steve – so more phenomenal.

17 Dr Chaiyan – in Thai, for inductive or deductive, we start from a particular and we derive to a general truth or thought. Such as from the Bible, because it says that God is consistent, and therefore we can make that statement. So in opposite, deducting will be probing the other way round from a general to a particular and one thinking of this is suffering, and the experience from my life it gives me suffering, so my conclusion is that there is no use in being in this life, and therefore the general so Buddha concluded, so therefore, everything, life is just a gift and opportunity to suffer. Therefore we should not continue. So moving the other way round and I think in one sense, inductive approach, we work from data for the theory. And this one in deductive, we work from a theory to data. And deductive also such as there are opposites for everything: light and dark, hot and cold, heavy and light, and so he reasons that if there was suffering, there must be a state without suffering. And this is a state of *annata* (no self).

18 Steve – but would that still not be inductive, because he is going from what's observed or what could be sensed, going to a principle.

19 Dr Chaiyan – this way in this reasoning, if bright and dark, hot and cold, it is the general, there are many things. Therefore he draws to the conclusion that in the same reasoning process, based on opposite, if there is a *tuka* (suffering), there must be a non *tuka* state. And that is why he introduced the *anata*. Because Brahman would talk about *ata* (self). And it is important that they should reach the *annata* for the Brahman. But because of this reasoning, he says no, there should be an *annata*, and when you reach *annata* that there is no self and that is nirvana.

20 Steve – so if we are taking just the average Thai though. The one that is not too far into pure Buddhism or whatever, say like 70% of the country, like the village person. What would be the basis of them believing anything? Would it be because it's empirical, or would they use something else? Where does reason come in? where does feeling come in? and on what basis would they say that this is true for them?

21 Dr Chaiyan – it is the realization. And they would have to experience. It doesn't mean that we don't use reason and we don't use logic. Everybody has reason and logic. Just now we were talking about the deductive way of reasoning too. So I think they would rather seek the experience. That's why realization is one thing. And to a great extent, as you would see the Thai or the Asian as a whole, I might accept the experience of somebody I might trust.

22 Steve – because of the sense of authority or the leadership structure that they will accept? Something that's authoritative that's given to them?

23 Dr Chaiyan – because of the experience that the person may have, and that's why experience is important. In order to understand the truth, you have to realize it. And that is very Asian and distinct. So often the Western approach we tend to say what you know, and I think the Western philosophy would go to that extent.

24 Steve – like they say I believe in order that I may understand. But it seems that the Thai may want to realize something before they believe it.

25 Dr Chaiyan – or experience it

26 Steve – or experience it yes. So say for instance the belief in spirits, to what extent would the Thai have to have some experience with that spirit in order for them to believe in it?

- 27 Dr Chaiyan – I'll just say that for the average Thai, in the beginning I was mentioning, *chak mae nam tang haa*. Thai people use it, that if you want to convince somebody, you will sometimes it is negative, or you don't have to *chak mae nam tang haa*, as in you have said enough, or you say a lot of things in trying to convince me. And so that is why deduction is associated with *chak mae nam tang haa*.
- 28 Steve – but even if you came with all the reasons, if it was still only reasons, would the person believe if they didn't experience something themselves?
- 29 Dr Chaiyan – usually it comes when the experience comes as well
- 30 Steve – yes, so it is not pure apologetics.
- 31 Dr Chaiyan – yes, although then again, the reasoning, although we talk about the deductive, it is the whole process and you can see that even Buddhism, it can be very abstract in itself, even though Buddha would say move from the node to the anode or the concrete to the abstract. We have to accept that Buddha, probably you are familiar with the *bua* (lotus). Some people cannot understand it. Which is opposite of Jesus' way, the seed is not so much for the intellectual. But Buddha you see that your intellectual ability not there. But Jesus is more the responsive to the word.
- 32 Steve – receive the word.
- 33 Dr Chaiyan – so you can draw from five rivers, actually they are the five main rivers in India, but so we use that this means that one must help the audience see what point they mean by working from several kinds of evidence or arguments, before they can accept any proposition. So I'm going back again to the deductive. I personally see deductive as the way that is more convincing and I'm more familiar with.
- 34 Steve – just to be clear on this though. If you can work from evidence and if it's evidential, to make your point, isn't it more inductive?
- 35 Dr Chaiyan – no I see it if you are drawing from many evidences to draw on a conclusion, then I see it more as deductive.
- 36 Steve – OK, it may be our uses of the term that is not quite the same. So to what extent would a Thai need to experience a spirit in order for them to believe in that spirit, or would they just have faith in a certain spirit and not have experience?
- 37 Dr Chaiyan – the can have faith, in fact, even the monks that advocate Buddha's teachings in the formal setting, I was reading from the writings of one professor, and he said that in order to teach Buddhism effectively, you have to first support it. You have trust in Buddha himself. In other words, you trust in his experience, you trust in his self proclaimed truth which he called enlightenment. And even like enlightenment is in the west, you call it enlightenment, but here he truly realized what he knew has really become part of his life, and that is not only the thought, but he must go there in action, and it is so important and it is also very Jewish. I say that the Buddhist and the traditional Jew and the traditional Christian are more on the same line. The preaching way of the more modern Western approach is a completion in itself. And I think Buddha wants to say that if you say you know, but you don't do it, in fact, it's like you are counting somebody else's harm. In other words it is useless, you don't experience it yourself.

- 38 Steve – so then you are suggesting that faith could start from somebody else's experience in somebody you trust, but then it has to become your experience too.
- 39 Dr Chaiyan – that would be the ultimate. But there is no problem to begin with somebody, or to have faith in somebody or something.
- 40 Steve – what about mythology, like say the Ramakien, how important is that for say the Thai epistemology? Would they believe in the mythology, or see that it is relevant to them even though it's abstract?
- 41 Dr Chaiyan – that is something that explains something that Buddha explains, and that is the cosmology. So it is the magic, and mystic. And that is something that is fine for them. It is just similar, because Buddha never talks about that there is never any creation. Although he was close as, if there was a creator then that God did not imply.
- 42 Steve – is there anything that is equivalent to the Christian revelation for the Thai? Seeking some illumination from some other source.
- 43 Dr Chaiyan – they don't believe in revelation, it is Buddha himself that has arrived at enlightenment by himself.
- 44 Steve – in working through his own reasoning and thinking and came through to it himself, but below, it is a theology from below.
- 45 Dr Chaiyan – even Buddha himself did not say that he will bring any revelation, but he said that he is only a guide, but you have to have enough discipline, enough intellectual ability to perceive. Because in fact the word *phut prah* itself means cognition. And that is very intellectual in itself.
- 46 Steve – but it is going back to the average Thai like say 70%, that have not gone very far into the purer side of Buddhism, would they be looking for some form of revelation from something?
- 47 Dr Chaiyan – because they don't seek it, they are not so called *deparning* Buddhists, they are *karmin*, because *deparn* is far too rich. So it doesn't mean that he cannot reach it, but it is too difficult, so what he tends to do is seek to be a *karmin*. So how can I do good, or doing good may not be the case, but make sure that the *karmin* is good.
- 48 Steve – OK, but it is centered on one's own work. But then at what point does *choak*, luck or fate come into the Thai, because that is apart from *karmic* isn't it?
- 49 Dr Chaiyan – and that's why they seek fortune tellers, and they seek whatever that can reveal the future. But that is different from revelation, your sense of revelation of God. It is in a sense revealing, but it is what you observe from the stars, what you observe from whatever with a sixth sense. You can say this is what it says. Although Animism, Protestants may say that there is some kind of revelation in this, but this is not the ultimate truth.
- 50 Steve – but then, apart from the karmic side, they would believe in fate, or their *duang* (stars or fortune), and that's going to carry them through.
- 51 Dr Chaiyan – they use the word *duang*, and that goes beyond karma itself. And karma is one of the extreme teachings. It's one of the governing thoughts that is in fact protecting them from believing in God the creator. But you cannot explain why I do good karma, and why I have this

fortune. It is because of the *duang*. Or it could be I owe too much and am too much in debt. In Buddhism, they tend to want to avoid *duang*, but they may say that their past karma is catching up with me.

52 Steve – what would take precedence, fate or karma? Like if I'm going to succeed in this business? Would it be karma first and then fate, or fate first and then karma?

53 Dr Chaiyan – simply karma first, because it is an apex of Buddhism, and in fact it is an old concept from Hinduism.

54 Steve – are the Thai contemplative? Would they be reflective or would they be reasoning?

55 Dr Chaiyan – what happens is that if you talk about the high Buddhism *wiprasana khamatan pawana*, the Buddhism in itself is contemplative. Meditative, because when you meditate, you are contemplating.

56 Steve – or are they trying to empty themselves.

57 Dr Chaiyan – when you meditate, you are *pawana* (thinking/meditating), you are focussing on something. And that's why from the very basic they say *phut ton na mo* you don't have to do anything else but just contemplate on *phut ton na mo* you just focus on that.

58 Steve – but are you focussing on something that's abstract? Or something that's very concrete?

59 Dr Chaiyan – the next thing is that you can walk in a circle, it's your pilgrimage. You can do it so when you walk in the morning you *tu dom*, it is your *chom klong*, you walk in a circle. You meditate, and they will give you one problem, from the more basic to the more complex, and you meditate on it. Think about this today for this matter.

60 Steve – but these are concepts that they are giving you to think about? So it's conceptual.

61 Dr Chaiyan – yes, and again, is say that because of this, you have that, and because of that you arrive at this. So it's meditation, contemplation or even reflection. It is a skill as well. Those that do reflection well, they can do journals well then.

62 Steve – so we are talking about the minority of the Thai people now.

63 Dr Chaiyan – yes, those that do meditation are only the ones that seek nirvana. The serenity, they seek the better, more comfortable life.

64 Steve – OK, how much does fear govern the thinking of the Thai?

65 Dr Chaiyan – that is probably the basic nature of humans. So you may have fear in one sense, because in daily life, because the answer can cause fear. But fear of going to hell, fear of doom day, then yes go to hell, yes, that is why they want to do karma, and hopefully they have enough karma to take them to heaven. But doom day is different, the last day, the judgement of God, they have no concept of that. So in that sense it may have to specify in what area.

66 Steve – well, fear of whether I can live in the society, fear of whether there's going to be some power that will influence or effect me?

67 Dr Chaiyan – so maybe that is more a psychological issue than an anthropological, or philosophical, or a religious issue. So it has to be with the security, the upbringing, but that is more a psychological matter. One thing that I can say about epistemology, is also that Buddha is agnostic and there was one disciple was asking him. He said sir, can you tell us what really happened at the beginning. His response is that there was a long question, because there is nobody here now that was there then, who can confirm what really happened. So in other words I don't know. But that is the wrong question. The right question is how can you get out of this vicious circle? Suffering that is the cause.

68 Thank you very much Dr Chaiyan.

## APPENDIX 4

INTERVIEW WITH  
DR KIRTI BUNCHUA

- 1 Steve – some of the areas that I have just jotted down where I have seen differences and it would be good to know what is the bias of the Thai. I guess the best point to start with would be inductive or deductive? Which would the Thai be predominant? We're talking about the general layman Thai. Not the very highly educated and along the line of Buddhist philosophy, not so much. But to the extent that he lives his life. What presuppositions does he live by in his thinking and beliefs? What does he think, what does he believe? Would he be more deductive? Or inductive? Would you say?
- 2 Dr Kirti – you mean about Buddha?
- 3 Steve – no, the Thai, the general Thai person. About 80% of the Thai. The general Thai people. Because the aim is to find a starting point for systematic theology for the Thai context. So I'm thinking of where the Thai start, and where do you start with the Thai in the Thai thinking.
- 4 Dr Kirti – ok the general people. The Westerners like to define, but the Thais have no interest to define. Why? My reason to why the Westerners like to define is because the Westerners are familiar with the verb "to be". Words such as "I am" are very frequently used in Western languages. For the English "I am strong", in Thai language, they use "*chan kheng raeng*" (I strong), which is an adjective. So in Thai language they don't use "to be" that much. And when you say "I am running", in Thai it's "*phom wing*" (I run); there is no word "to be". So for the Westerners, to be and not to be is the problem. The Thai has no problem because they don't have it. If we prohibit the Westerners from using the verb "to be", it would be difficult to communicate any significant subject. But in Thai language, you can talk the whole day without using the word "*phen*" (am). And to me that is the fundamental philosophical source of the Thai people. Before Buddhism, Buddhism is from India. Indian languages are similar to that of the Western people, because it is in the group of Aryan languages. So the Buddhists may influence the Thai people with the teaching of the beliefs, but Buddhism does not give the basics, or as we may say, the contemporary philosophers may use the pre-understanding, that is, the pre-belief, the fundamental belief, the most basic assumptions of the human source. The Thais have their own, and this does not derive from Buddhism. The Buddhists may give the more superficial source but the most basic comes from the Thai. This is affected by the Thai language, that is without the familiarity of the verb "to be". That will mean that, what is the importance of the verb "to be"? when you are familiar with the verb "to be", when you are familiar with the verb "to be" as a Westerner, the language, including Sanskrit and Pali (because they come from the same family as the Western). So when you start to think. You start to think, what does "is" mean? What does "is" mean? Because this is a very familiar word in your language. And then comes in metaphysics, so with Westerners emphasize a lot on metaphysics. What is being? Because being is the most familiar word in the Western language. But when we come to the Thai, when you teach Western philosophy to the Thais, the most important thing you have to do is make sure they understand the word "is". What is the meaning of "being"? and for the Thai people, it is very difficult to explain. So that is why the Westerners in the basic form is the preoccupation with the verb "to be", with "being". And from being, you may argue with the other topics, all being based on the understanding of the being. The being is "God", or "matter", or the being is "whatever". But it is not the topic of Thai interest.
- 5 Steve – but then is there any valid Thai philosophy? because philosophy is based on being. What is real? What is true?
- 6 Dr Kirti – that is the introduction. So the Thai don't like to work with "being". So when you want to speak, you have to define, what is the definition of anything. Like what is x? the definition is "to



give the meaning of 'is'. What "is" that? What "is" the table? What "is" man? So when discussing with the Thai, you have to think further. You must understand first "what is your being?" what is man? So when you learn philosophy in the Western way, you always start with a definition. "what is?". You are very much preoccupied with this meaning. But the Thai have no interest at all with definition. What is the preoccupation of the Thai? According to me it is the *thai siam chawp barryai* (the Siamese Thai like to narrate/tell) description. Instead of giving and copying the definition "what is man", you explain, you try to go to the being, to the substance, to the ontology. But the Thai are not interested in that description. The Thai are more interested in "what is the appearance of man?" "what does he look like?", "what does he do?", "how does he act?". They are interested in the description according to feeling, not to the understanding. And you can observe from the Thai language the use of "*reuw suek*" (feel). Everything is to do with "*cha*" (heart). Instead of asking "what do you know about this?" you ask "what do you feel about this?". So it is more feeling orientated than reason orientated. And you can observe it from the language. When you use the European languages, even Pali and Sanskrit, you must stick to the grammar. Subject, verb and etc. every sentence must consist of a verb. Who does what? And when you stop, you must begin again. The structure of the language is set. But in Thai, there is no need to stick to that. So when you try to speak the language, you must try to understand first. Understand "who is the subject of doing?", "what is he doing?". But in Thai, you have to know that you can observe that the Thai language, when they speak, sometimes they don't know where the subject is, and what does he express? The feeling, the Thai feelings and they speak out the feelings, and when they want to understand, they have to reformulate the feeling into the understanding. The Thai starts with the feeling and comes to the understanding later. But the Europeans have to start with the understanding, and if they want to feel, they just add it later. As the qualification, add the adjective, the adverb. The feeling is the secondary for the European language, but for the Thai language it is the primary. You feel first. For example: *ti nii wang nangsue dai* (here place book can). Where is the subject? There isn't one, it's anybody. So if you want to try and understand, you have to think of the subject. But when the Thai finish, they don't worry about the subject. What is the subject "the table"? but what is the feeling behind this saying? The feeling is that the owner of this table is very kind and generous, he is good. So he put this table at the disposal of anybody. He is expressing his feeling. So when he says "*ti nii wang nangsue dai*" (here place book can), what is the subject? Why do you have to know? Ok, that is more fundamental. You have expressed your feeling, and that is enough. That is the first point of my research of Thai philosophy.

7 Steve – this is going to be groundbreaking, because there is nothing like this at all. I have looked all over, but there is nothing like it. There has been one attempt with a magazine called Praty Thai, there was a series and they gave one edition on a certain philosopher.

8 Dr Kirti – but mostly it would be about the Thai belief. About the *phii* (spirits)...

9 Steve – it's about the practice of culture, but nothing about the thought. Nothing about the way people think. Why has nobody written about it before? Is there any reason why?

10 Dr Kirti – well, I have got this, so I started to write. It isn't printed as a book yet, I'm trying to find, and if I have success I might be able to find somebody who is interested and can translate it into English. I think it might be worthwhile.

11 Steve – it will sell well.

12 Dr Kirti – that is the first point of the Thai philosophy according to me.

- 13 Steve – but why is there a lack of the verb “to be” in the Thai language - because of feeling? Why does feeling come first? Is there any reason?
- 14 Dr Kirti – and that is the start of Thai philosophy. That is the pre-understanding of the Thai philosophy. That is the assumption of the Thai philosophy. You see, the language explains the thought. You learn the philosophy from the way the language is spoken. So that means that for the Thai, the human nature for the Thais is that of being a rational animal. Having rationality. If you thinking the Western world, the Thai may not start with the point, because that is the meaning that the foreigners like to state. The Thai will think that the human nature is the feeling. But purely the feeling. Not the superstitious feeling. But the feeling in the Western world may be compared with intuition. So the human nature is the intuition as such. Not as the quality of the being. Because the Thai has no interest in the being. In Western minds you have intuition. You have to ask “who has intuition”? but the Thais don’t have any interest in asking that. It is the intuition as intuition. And from this intuition, you understand from the others. In fact, the Thai people, in the history of the Thai people, many religions have come to Thailand. And many religions have come to be the belief of the Thai people, but no religion has the real root in the Thai people, except the Buddhists. Why? When the Buddhists come they said that the real major is the *annata* (no self). Though Pali is an Aryan language and emphasizes on the verb to be. And although Buddha used Pali, he reacted to the Aryan philosophy. You see, his philosophy is unique. His philosophy is negative to that of the Aryan people. And because of that, the Indians themselves don’t have that much interest in Buddhism itself. And Buddhism had to take rule in the Thai people. And though it traveled to China it has been modified, the real root of Buddhism is here, because it satisfied the need of Thai philosophy. So when you ask the Thai people, what is the most important teaching of Buddhism. The Thais would say immediately “it is *annata*” (no self). So the human nature is the pure intuition, and the intuition will create an understanding for all the other things. So you know the body because you have intuition. So Thai philosophy started with epistemology and not with metaphysics. With intuition, and intuition will give you understanding for all the other things.
- 15 Steve – what does the intuition proceed from? From oneself?
- 16 Dr Kirti – that is the Western way of thinking. You must ask “who has intuition?”. The Thais aren’t interested in that. That is the derivation of intuition, and that is why when you try to prove the necessity of the necessity being. Necessity of the Creator, most of the Thais have no interest in why you have to know that. It is a different way of thinking. And if you look at me, you have to realize that I came to an understanding with Western philosophy before I came to realize the Thai sort. You need both before you can get to understand and analyze your own. So now I understand. Because you are a Westerner in thinking. When you say that the Thai people start with the pure intuition, you have to say that “but who possesses that?” “who are the owners of the possession?” “what is the subject”. That is the Westerner’s thinking. Not the Thai, you see. And then you want to find some way of the Thai theology. You have to accept that is the way of the Thai thinking. And not the Thais who have been educated in the Western world. Because many Thai scholars now may not think like the Thai because they have been trained and have been brainwashed by the Western thinking.
- 17 Steve – but in practice, do they still act as Thais?
- 18 Dr Kirti – well in theory they would think like a Westerner. But in decision making and the way of living, they would act like the Thai people.

- 19 Steve – and it is the same with the Christians, they may still act like a Thai or a Buddhist, but they are still Christian. But in practices, then they are still acting out because it has still not taken root. This is why there is such a big challenge to develop a systematic theology in the Thai context.
- 20 Dr Kirti – if you want to get the Thai philosophy of the Thai way of thinking you must try to forget the Western occidental arguments. You should not try to ask the Westerner questions, you should try to have insight into the Thai system of thought.
- 21 Steve – but is there equivalent language you use? I mean, how do we use language when we talk about this. There is a cross cultural problem because what language do you then use? Would you say it is then mystical language?
- 22 Dr Kirti – mystical language?
- 23 Steve – I mean, is it mystical what you are talking about the intuition?
- 24 Dr Kirti – but the intuition is different from the mystical, because mystical thought must proceed from the belief, so it is something superimposed onto the original thought. Mystical thinking does not come spontaneously from basic nature. It is trained. Mystical thinking comes from training. You have to believe in something first. But most of the Thais are not mystical, they are intuitive people.
- 25 Steve – but they would not give a reason then why they did something, they just know it is the right thing to do? Or that was the right time to do that.
- 26 Dr Kirti – and the Thai people have to study in school where they have to argue like Western people. And why is that? Because reasoning. When you say reasoning, what to prove? We imitate, we take this habit from Aristotle's logic. And Aristotle's logic starts with the term: "man is mortal". And you argue according to this proposition. With the subject, predicate, something like that you see. But the real thought of the Thai people, they don't try to. They have no equivalent of the argumentation or reasoning in this way. The reasoning of the Thai people come from the feeling. You feel something like this, what do you feel next. You see, for example, when you feel that your mother is very good, you have the feeling that your mother is very good, so if your mother is very good, what do you have to do to her. So the feeling of giving back to her, so you have to do anything for her. With the feeling, there is no argumentation, like this is the premise, and this is the conclusion. It is not in that way, what is the derivation of this feeling? What is the next feeling? And that is the way of the Thai language. When you read the Thai books which are written by the Thai who are not trying to imitate the Western way of thinking. Surely the Thai scholars who are educated in the Western way, they may argue in the books. But if you read the Thai literature you will not see the real argument, but you will see the feeling in one sentence to another sentence, and even in the text.
- 27 Steve – but do you not have an expression: *mai tong yok mae nam tang haa* (no need to give all the five rivers - i.e. you don't need to give lots of reasons)? You know, why do you have this reasoning, why do you have to give all these reasons in order to explain something. Where does that expression come from?
- 28 Dr Kirti – you see, from this, Thais have no need to put the subject: *yok mae nam tang haa, mai tong yok mae nam tang haa*. What is in the heart of the Thai people to speak this? They

are in the land full of rivers and canals. You see, and so they feel that in the rainy season when the rain falls, all the arteries will be full of water and then will come to the big river. You see, and the feeling is that in the rainy season, we have too much water, we don't need that much water. And when we say *mai tong yok mae nam tang haa*, we say that we don't need the five arteries to enter the river because by that way we have too much water, and we have the floods, and we have difficulty with the flood. We don't have that. And so yes, say directly what we want, there is the water that we have in the river, we have no need to get the river from the arteries, or from the newest arteries, that would be too much. the feeling is like that you see.

29 Steve – so no need to add reason

30 Dr Kirti – yes. But instead of the role of Aristotle the river, to use the reason by analogy. From one feeling, they compare it to another feeling. The feeling that there is too much water, the arteries give too much water. So in the speaking also, don't try to introduce too much things. Just say directly what you want, otherwise we can have a flood of words. So is the logic of comparison, not the logic of argumentation, that will be the Thai way. Commences from one feeling to another feeling. And in the real Thai language, you will find that if you read the Thai literature, if you want to find the argumentation you will not find too many argumentation as in the way of Westerners or Aristotle's logic. But the reasoning by comparison, from this compared to that, and that compared to that.

31 Steve – so by analogy

32 Dr Kirti – yes

33 Steve – so it is a very different system.

34 Dr Kirti – that's what I think yes.

35 Steve - But would that then mean that is it inductive or deductive? Could you put it into those words?

36 Dr Kirti – well inductive and deductive are very Aristotelian words.

37 Steve - Because intuitive is more deductive isn't it?

38 Dr Kirti – it is indifferent from inductive or deductive, it is more similar to the inductive.

39 Steve – inductive is where you base it more on a feeling or a sense, because often the Thai would have the feeling, now is the time to do something. It's intuitive isn't it? There is no particular reason, but they just think that now is the time.

40 Dr Kirti – I can give you the difference. The deductive means that you start with the general, you come, you go to the particular. That is the inductive is where you go from the particular to the general. But the Thai argumentation as I call the intuitive is where you don't have any reason or augmentation, the intuitive is the inside. You feel what it is. But the argumentation of the Thai people is to jump from particular to the particular. And this particular is not based on the understanding, but on the feeling. What do you feel? A particular feeling to the particular feeling. It is the reasoning of the Thai people. Intuition is here. If you have the feeling that is your intuition, because intuition is not what you see. You see water in the rivers, and you experience that the water from the river comes from many arteries. That is experience. That is

not intuition, it is experience. You see that is what Aristotle wanted to argue from the particular. From the general he finds that. But when the Thai see that they don't work from the particular to the general, but they'll work from that experience from what they see, they have the intuition. That is the feeling that something useful, but with the overflow of water in the river, they see that it could be trouble. This is the experience. No real argumentation but just from experience.

41 Steve – not thinking where the water comes from.

42 Dr Kirti – they don't have real interest in that.

43 Steve – but what's the effect of the water and how it may affect me in the future...

44 Dr Kirti – yes. And that is the analogy with the words and the thinking.

45 Steve – but where does karma fit into this? Because karma's conceptual isn't it? Karma is not something that you necessarily feel is it? The law of karma? Where does that fit into this?

46 Dr Kirti – that came from Buddhism. But before Buddhism, what did the Thai people feel about karma? You see, and even now only the Buddhist scholars understand the real meaning of karma from Buddha's teachings. But the normal people, when they say karma, they think differently from what Buddha teaches. Even the Thai people use this karma, but according to the real feeling, it is another thing. And in fact that is the first oscillation in the law of karma in Buddhism, it is the law. It is indifferent to good or bad, useful or not. Because if you do well, you will get good results. If you behave badly, you will be punished. That is the law of karma for Buddha. But when the Thai people think about karma, you say that for example: *pen wen pen kam* (it is karma). When the people speak about karma it has a bad meaning, and never a good meaning. When you are a good son, and you are for example: if somebody give appreciation to his father and the next month wins the lottery, the people will never say that it is the law of karma. Because it is too good for karma. But it is *choak* (luck). But according to Buddhism, that is the law of karma, but the understanding of Thai people doesn't place that a good thing would come out of karma. The law of karma is limited only to the bad things.

47 Steve – when they are experiencing something bad as well, when they are suffering and experiencing it. So it is experiential as well. When they feel the bad thing, they will say it is karma. It is a concept.

48 Dr Kirti – it is not necessary to have a cause. If you have bad luck, it means that you have karma. In the Thai meaning it is that. It is different from the meaning of karma according to the Buddhists. *Kam* means bad luck. And Thai people don't want to think what the cause of it is. Only that you have bad luck, and bad luck may come any time. There may be a *phii* (spirit), but anyway, it means bad luck. Surely you may try to think what the cause of it is. But that is not the real interest of the Thai people. Example *phii tam* (the spirit did it), and what the reason of the *phii* to do that, then they would just say that it is the pleasure of the *phii* to do that. No real cause at all, it is just the pleasure of the *phii*. The *phii* may be favorable to you today.

49 Steve – but do you not think that they may think of how they may have offended the spirit and then they could go back and appease. Would they not think that?

50 Dr Kirti – that is the way the Westerners would think. But for the Thais, they do not think like that, they have no interest in that. But basically, intimately they have no feeling that they would want to test the cause of it happening. It is not the main interest that they may think because of

imitation, because they have read or learned from somebody. But it is not the real need of the Thai heart.

- 51 Steve – the need is how to change my feeling. Or how to get good feelings from the bad feelings.
- 52 Dr Kirti – and you see that the Thais, very few Thais believe and really understand the true Buddhists. But most of the Thais even if they have accumulated merit and have done good deeds all their lives. At the end of their lives they can feel the capricious nature of the *phii*. I am not sure if they feel that the Buddhism would give protection for their future life. They would try to make friends with the *phii*, because the *phii* are very capricious. The *phii* may do anything they like. Even though you may have done good deeds all your life, you may not be sure that your good deeds may protect you. But the real Buddhism teaches you that you don't even have to fear the *phii*, you don't have to fear anybody because your goodness will protect you.
- 53 Steve – what about Thai cosmology as portrayed in the Trai Phum Pra Ruang, where there are the different worlds and it can be represented in this world too, how the cosmos is and how we reflect that on earth and how we become in harmony with that here.
- 54 Dr Kirti – the story comes from the Buddhist belief because that is in appearance Buddhist cosmology. There are three worlds or maybe the fourth if you call nirvana as another world. But they emphasize on the three worlds. Desire, and then semi material, and then immaterial. Impermanent worlds are triple. The higher, this world and the lower world. But nirvana is outside this cycle. If you read the details of this, you will see the Thai philosophy or the Thai belief where the writer is one to describe the Buddhist cosmology. But in the details you will see the beliefs of the Thai people. Even with the Thai people, always have the feeling of fear in their life of the unknown. In fact *phii* (spirit) is the unknown. The unknown is capricious, you cannot control it. It capricious, today they may favor you, but tomorrow they may now. It is not controllable, and you cannot guess it. You would not know what each *phii* may want. You are the victim of the capricious nature of the spirit, or as they call them in appearance. But the deep feeling is the unknown power that may appear to you at times, but it is unknown. And this unknown, you cannot hope too much to gain the favor. You have to fear them more than hope to get their favor. If they favor you or something, it is really something extraordinary. You have to fear them because of even today even with the Buddhist belief, people live in the fear of the unknown and their power.
- 55 Steve – ok, so the two things in my mind are. One side is that, wouldn't the Thais use the spirits more for their own purpose rather than fear the spirits? So would they use the power for their own good, like a *choan* (a thief) would go and *wai* the spirits for protection when he goes and steals something? He's using the power of the spirit for their own benefit.
- 56 Dr Kirti – that is hoping, but they fear that the spirit may at any moment try to hurt you or harm you. They always fear that.
- 57 Steve – so it is still very basic. That's one of my points. So fear, where would that be a common denominator for the Thai and that their faith is built on fear. That is one definition of faith too, that something they formulate to overcome fear. So would that be a very basic thing for the Thai.
- 58 Dr Kirti – if you observe, even among the scholars, in the deep, deep feeling, and the first assumption in their hearts and they have fear in their subconscious. Fear of everything. Can I

live in this society? Can I live in this world? Can I be at peace? And this trust among the friends and relatives, they always discuss that they aren't 100% sure of anything. And that is maybe the racial complex of the Thai people. It wants friendship, but they are afraid in their heart that one day you may change your mind. There is always something like that. In the family, if the husband and wife, there is not full trust of each other.

59 Steve – but has Buddhism compounded that with its concept of impermanence, or would that have been there before Buddhism?

60 Dr Kirti – yes, but Buddhism give the solution. That is appropriate in human life that Buddhism gives the solution. But the positive aspect and solution doesn't penetrate the Thai hearts so much. They are more ready to accept the negative side and to come out and withdraw. In Buddhism they have the world of change. And this is the Thai people. But Buddhism says that outside this there is nirvana which is outside the world of change. But this does not take the Thai people so much. They remain in the books and the teachings. And you see even the life of the monks that teach nirvana.

61 Steve – it is existential. Now, what will affect me now. That is where the Thai people are. Rather than thinking about tomorrow.

62 Dr Kirti – exactly. From this point we may help each other to develop, to observe, to see more, but today I come to this point. But the effect, and to the effect, and what we shall develop as the full philosophy of Thai, I have to have more time to think and develop it through.

63 Steve – Dr Kirti, thank you very much indeed.

APPENDIX 5

INTERVIEW WITH  
DR WARAYUTH SRIEWARAKUL



- 1 Steve – you know we can just talk around different areas, I've jotted a few areas I think would be helpful. Perhaps start with presuppositions that the Thai have with what he believes. Must he feel something first before he'll believe it, or what would his basic presuppositions be for his belief?
  
- 2 Dr Warayuth – You see when you talk about Thai people in general, such as the layman, the farmer or somebody not too very highly systematized; if you turn to the assumptions behind the way of thinking of the Thai people, we can talk about three main doctrines. The first one I would like to call it animism, so they believe in *phii* (the ghost). The ghosts of the Thai people can be divided into two kinds of ghosts: good ghosts (benevolent) and bad ghosts. Good ghosts could help people and support them, like *phii ten* (the ghost of the sky), so when the land is dry and you need water and rain, they have to do something like in the *Isarn* (northeast provinces) they would have *bongfai*. The idea behind *bongfai* is that they make the *bongfai* to grow to the sky to make the *phii ten* happy and know that they are suffering and need rain. Once the *phii ten* knows that they need rain he would give rain to them.
  
- 3 Steve – would they still believe that though?
  
- 4 Dr Warayuth – they still believe
  
- 5 Steve – or is that just tradition?
  
- 6 Dr Warayuth – they still believe
  
- 7 Steve – deep down they still believe?
  
- 8 Dr Warayuth – yes, yes deep down, especially in the up country, in the north and the north east of Thailand. But in the south and central they may be different. In the north and the north east animism is still very strong. Even in their daily life they still believe in *phii*... like *phii pork*. The *phii pork* is not considered as a good *phii*, it's a bad *phii*. The *phii pork* could kill people and eat the blood of the people. Many people still believe in it. That's like the Catholics in *Isarn*. We can have these kind of people converted to be Catholics, because the Catholic village in the *Isarn* don't believe in the *phii pork*. But the Buddhists in the *Isarn* believe in the *phii pork*, so when the villagers believe that somebody is a *phii pork* they would try to do something: like through a stone at the person's house in the night and try to hurt him or something like that. So they have to leave the village and come to the catholic village where they are safe because the Catholics don't believe in the *phii pork*.
  
- 9 Steve – or they have none
  
- 10 Dr Warayuth – yes, so they are converted into Catholics. This is an example OK?
  
- 11 Steve – so fear from the spirit could be a motivation for conversion?
  
- 12 Dr Warayuth – yes yes, and feelings like this can be very strong in the up country; especially in the north and the northeast. Another thing is if you look at the history of Thailand, you would see that at first the kingdom is Sukhothai. During the Sukhothai period the form of government is like the father ruled the children. At that time during the reign of king Ramkamhaeng, he adopted Buddhism, and Buddhism became dominant. When Ayuthaya became the capitol of Thailand, Ayuthaya adopted many things from Khmer culture; you see the way the king thought about himself and the people thought of the king differed from that of during Sukhothai. The

king from Sukhothai thought of himself as just a man, as a father, and considered his subordinates as his children. So when the children had any problems they could come and see the father, and he would cool down the problems. The people also felt that he was a father, a big father for everyone. But when the Ayuthaya kingdom arose, the way the king thought about himself and the way the people thought about himself changed. Now the people thought that the king is not an ordinary man, but the king is a God who became incarnated. So you could observe the name of king at Ayuthaya. It would end like *ramathirat* or *ramathibodi* or something like that. This would come from *ram*.

13 Steve – but it's Brahmanist

14 Dr Warayuth – yes, *ram* is one form of the incarnation of Vishnu, so this means that even though Ayuthaya adopted itself as Buddhism, but at the same time it's got Brahmanism. So we could say that since then until now, we could say that the belief that runs through the blood of the people, even in the central part of Thailand and even in the south is that the king is a special person. the way they act or think you can see that there are many beliefs and presuppositions that belong to Brahmanism. One of my friends that came from India, Dr Redi, when he came to Thailand he didn't see any true Buddhists in Thailand. He just saw Brahmins, he just said that he saw Brahmins everywhere, Brahmanists. So you see, even though as we call ourselves Buddhists, Buddhists lay persons, but in fact we still adopt Brahmanism, and at the same time people adopt animism. So it's three in one in Thailand. We have Buddhism, Brahmanism, and animism. So this belief comes through the acts. We can observe that on May 1 every year, the King would come and you would see the Brahmins with a cow and the king would plough a field. There is also the astrology and people would predict whether there would be a lot of rainfall in a year or not so much. From what the cow eats, if it drinks, or eats corn or rice, what the relevance is. That is from Brahmanism. Among people if you observe, there are many traditions that come from Brahmanism. There are also many traditions that come from Brahmanism and Animism.

15 Steve – to what extent in Animism must the spirit make itself visible or phenomenal to the person to make the person believe it? Would the spirit believe any spirit, say if it was abstract, or must the person experience that spirit to make the person believe? Must it be phenomenal for that person to believe or can it be noumenal?

16 Dr Warayuth – Not purely noumenal, they still believe that the Gods have influence, the ghosts the spirits.

17 Steve- and must they have experienced some influence in order for them to have believed first?

18 Dr Warayuth – yes

19 Steve – normally

20 Dr Warayuth – yes, you see that when I ask the people who are scholars of Buddhism. I asked him why many people still go to the temple and pray, and why they lift up the joss sticks and pray? You see according to Buddhism, we believe that the lord Buddha got enlightened and reached nirvana. But for the Christians, Muslims and Jews, it's not strange because they believe in God and they think that God still takes care of the world.

21 Steve – he is immanent

- 22 Dr Warayuth – yes, because our belief is different from Aristotle's Deism. Because in Deism, where God created the world but he didn't know afterward. But we believe in monotheism so it means that God still takes care of the world
- 23 Steve – he is immanent, he takes care, he is involved
- 24 Dr Warayuth - so it's not strange for these people to go to the church, synagogue to pray. But why do Buddhists still go there? And he said that yes it's true that the lord Buddha could not help because he has gotten to nirvana already, but the Gods would help, so the Gods would be pleased when they see the people who are there... so the Gods would give hands according to the needs of people.
- 25 Steve – so the Buddhist temple is more a temple of Gods than it is a Buddhist temple?
- 26 Dr Warayuth – it can be that way, you see when you go there, the people are still asking for something and praying for something, whereas in true Buddhism, it isn't that way. If you would like to get enlightenment, nobody could help you, even the lord Buddha, you would have to get it by yourself. You would have to listen to him, and then reflect on your own, and put it into practice. Otherwise you would never stop suffering. If you would like to stop suffering, nobody could help you except yourself. Which is different from Judaism, Christianity and Islam where they believe that God could do everything. There is nothing impossible for God. So you see that these are the beliefs behind. But you see that people get familiar with Buddhism. On Sunday when people watch TV or when they go to the temple, when they listen to the monks and read the books of the scholars, so it means that the influence of Buddhism is more and more in comparison to the other two, animism and Brahmanism. Even though people still accept those two, in comparison with Buddhism, Buddhism is the strongest. And then when Buddhist doctrines become the strongest, in the blood of the people, they would consider themselves as Buddhists. According to the intellectuals, they would see the people as laymen who believe in not deep and profound Buddhism. But my point is this: when Buddhism influence the way of thinking, so they would consider Buddhism as in terms of metaphor, a special kind of medicine which could cure all kinds of sickness. So no matter what field, area, science, they believe they could use Buddhism to explain and solve the problem.
- 27 Steve – the more intellectual?
- 28 Dr Warayuth – yes
- 29 Steve – so it's almost like a Gnostic idea, you go higher into a special knowledge in special honing, but it's more for the elite, more for the intellectual
- 30 Dr Warayuth – they believe that the lord Buddha got enlightenment, and so his teachings are wonderful, so they adopt that. When they adopt that if you ask me in terms of epistemology what methods they use, we could say that they use deduction. Why? Because they adopt those doctrines as the general, perfect, eternal laws. The laws of karma, the laws of the three characteristics, like everything is impermanent. So they would adopt these as "these are the laws". So when they adopt it, they have no argument against it, they have no doubt of it. So they just apply them. So when they've got those rules and try to apply those rules to new areas. So we could say that they use deduction. In the case of some scholars, especially the practitioner, if they try to discover these laws by themselves; sure they believe in the lord Buddha but they try to practice in order to reach those laws. In this sense, we shouldn't say that they are going on trial and error; they have insights from the authorities and the lord

Buddha. But anyway, they would try to discover those laws themselves from their practice. In this sense we could consider them as mystics. So for these people, they would say that if you would like to discover the truth, you wouldn't be able to talk about them, because it is not a matter of discussion, but the matter is that you have to discover from the practice. In this sense, it is similar to Taoism, where the speaker never knows, the "knower" never speaks, only the practitioner knows. So if you want to know, practice! Just like you see many monks in Thailand who follow this tradition, just practice. And when they see that they have finally discovered they would have their preaching. But their preaching would correspond to the eternal laws.

- 31 Steve – Are we talking about say 10% of the population of people , are those that have gone along this line?
- 32 Dr Warayuth – I think it would not even be 10%, it's probably 1%
- 33 Steve – So for the majority of the Thais, would they be more inductive in their methodology or still deductive?
- 34 Dr Warayuth – I think they are still deductive. You see that the Thai people are not the kind of people that believe in induction. Why so? As I have mentioned before, they believe that the lord Buddha has discovered the eternal truths already.
- 35 Steve – So this is the general person, they still believe that.
- 36 Dr Warayuth – yes, yes, so there is no reason to doubt, this is for the Thai people in general; not for the lord Buddha, not for the intellectuals. Because for the lord Buddha in karma sutra, if you remember there are 10, don't believe rumors, don't believe tradition, don't believe reasoning, don't believe text, don't believe masters, something like that; but just reflect on your own. After you reflect something that is good, you adopt something, when you reflect on something that isn't good, you reject it. That is the lord Buddha, and the intellectuals follow this too. They try to stimulate the Thai people to think before you adopt anything, have a critical mind like as in karma sutra, but don't adopt. but it is hard just very few. I think that the people who think this way follow the karma sutra. I think just if I consider it, there is just another 1%.
- 37 Steve – so the majority would just accept what has happened to them, what's been given to them?
- 38 Dr Warayuth – yes
- 39 Steve – OK, comparing feeling and rational. Would the general Thai be more feeling orientated or more rational orientated?
- 40 Dr Warayuth – this is a good question. You see that there is one person who tried to read the *teritakat*, and tried to search for the word rationality or reasoning in the *teritakat*. Because some people who'd say that usually in the Eastern world rationality or reasoning did not play the important role in the way of thinking. And me myself agrees with this idea.
- 41 Steve – it's more intuitive?
- 42 Dr Warayuth – yes I would say it like this; OK suppose we talk about philosophy: philosophy in general according to my own ideas. We can divide it into three main trends. The first trend is

analytic philosophy and grown philosophy this is British and American. Usually these trends take sides with empiricism and finally for the Americans they developed to pragmatism. And for sure as you know empiricism believe in the inductive method. Because even though induction is risky and invalid, if it is true, it gives you new knowledge. But when you turn to ants, if you observe you can see that the analytic nature is very close to that of science. But maybe not all, but the majority from my observations. Maybe they just feel indifferent to religion, or worse than that, they become enemies. They consider religion as a social product or considered as a fraud, as a mental defense mechanism or something like that. It's no more than that. It's just an illusion. But when you turn to another trend of philosophy continental or European philosophy except British, you would see that sure there are many schools and many trends over a year. It can be from phenomenology, to existentialism, to humanities, it can be structuralism to post structuralism, or another group could be Marxism to critical theory. So some people, some groups don't believe in God or don't believe in religion. From my observation, the majority, for continental philosophy, because their method, their common major method is historicism. If you want to have true understanding, you could not deny history, so it means that it makes them become close friends to religion, and many try to become indifferent to science. And many try to turn their back to science to become enemies. This is the general observation. But it doesn't mean that all Europeans adopt religion, no. you know already that even existentialists the people like Jean Pontsatt, Kamu you see that they are atheist, but another existentialist like Kierkegaard or Gabriel Marcell, they are existentialist, but they believe in God. But from my observation you see that because the trend, I mean the common method used by this philosophy is induction, and no more logical... I would say neumerologicalism.

- 43 Steve – you can't know empirically the concepts of God
- 44 Dr Warayuth – yes, yes they just believe that if you use the induction method to discover the laws. And once you discover the laws, you can use them in the sense of induction. But first you use deduction... trial and error to discover the laws. When you discover the laws, now they believe in neumerologicalism
- 45 Steve – in the continental?
- 46 Dr Warayuth – no, no, in the analytic. That's why they ignore historicism. It's like if you want to know about the movement of the stone. If you take the stone and go to the corridor and drop it, it would fall down. You don't need to know its history to know its movement, you just learn the law and apply the law.
- 47 Steve – inductive
- 48 Dr Warayuth – yes yes
- 49 Steve – not deductive
- 50 Dr Warayuth – not deductive, but
- 51 Steve – for the historical continental it would be more deductive
- 52 Dr Warayuth – yes, and if you go back to the history of philosophy you would see that in the continental, in the time of emerging of rationalism like Descartes and Spinoza you would see just deduction. Deduction alone because from deduction it is come very valid if you read the

works of Spinoza you would see qu midi qu midi every moment. Just deduction over there. But to compare between empiricism and deduction, the foundation of empiricism is wider because they adopt both induction and deduction. First they use induction to discover the laws and once they discovered the laws they use deduction to apply the laws. With the phenomena. Whereas the continental they believe in induction and more than that they believe in historicism. When you see two men at the distance. One man hands money over to the other, without history you would never have true understanding. If you just see it, if you are not blind you see that one gives money to the other. But you will never know what it means. You need history to know. Maybe that man just paid back a debt or maybe that man was just doing it for charity, or maybe that man was lending money, he could do that, there are many possibilities. But how could you understand that action? You need history, that is how continental philosophy I feel differs from the analytic. But now the third trend which is ignored by the Western world but now it is emerging is processed philosophy. Processed philosophy is booming because of the work of Whitehead. Now we have philosophers like Hut Sean, John Cop, and David Laygriffith. But still it is not popular among the analytic tradition or the continental tradition. I don't know why. I don't know why it is not popular, but some people say it is too difficult, some people say it is not only difficult but it deals with metaphysics. So when it deals with metaphysics, it implies that it welcomes idealism, because empiricism is afraid of metaphysics. Just like the pragmatics don't try to deal with any metaphysical problems. Continental also they don't want to deal with metaphysics. You see people like Heidegger, he just threw away all the traditions before him and he considered niche as the last philosopher that used metaphysics here. Before him he threw metaphysics. He just turned his way to ontology. So existence precedes essence, not essence precedes existence. So he just changed the game from Descartes, where Descartes said "I think therefore I am", so he said essence comes first and then existence, so Heidegger said that no, I am therefore I think, so he said that I exist therefore I think. Existence comes first, he just changed the game. So maybe in this sense according to my belief that many people in the Western world are not interested in processed philosophy. Another reason is this way I think. Because the Western world is still being influenced by Pamilides, OK, Pamilides deals with being. Being comes from being, being could not come from non-being. And then you see the fight between Herecticus and Pamilides. But for Herecticus the reality is becoming. Becoming is something between being and non-being. So it is a dialectic. But for the Western world after that Plato and Aristotle I could say that the gang of three: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle still play the most important role in the Western world. So they just believe in substance. They just believe in being. Even Heidegger used that as an identity of the Western world. In his word, being and time. Even being over there he does no reply as a substance as the others understand. But I think that is the same identity as they follow, and that is Pamilides' and they ignore Herecticus. So processed philosophy was ignored in the Western world. But in the Eastern world, no, in the Eastern world we are good friends of Herecticus. If you go to the vedas in India and go back to China. I could say that most if not all most schools are focused as processed philosophy. You see that we don't believe in substance, we don't believe that there is substance that endures true time, no.

53 Steve – it is all impermanent?

54 Dr Warayuth – yes, we just believe in process, we just believe in events. Everything is events, not substance, even though you are a man, a woman, it is an event. So you see that's why the Eastern world's ideas is very close to process philosophy, very close to quantum physics. Very close to impermanence, everything is developing.

55 Steve – but how do you as a Thai hold a dichotomy, or a dialectic thesis and antithesis. Do you have to synthesize them in your mind or are you happy to hold a thesis and an anti-thesis

at the same time? Because for the Western mind you have to synthesize it. But for the Thai mind can you hold this dichotomy, without having to synthesize?

56 Dr Warayuth – very good question, very good question, you see this is the question that is always raised by Westerners. Because as I mentioned to you before, the Western people were influenced by Aristotle. Aristotle wrote his book *organon*, or logic, and according to Aristotle, the appropriate method for science is deduction not induction. But later you see that Francis Bacon just changed the game. He wrote the books *lowu organum*, he said that the proper way for science is induction but not deduction. But for Aristotle it was deduction, so he spent most of his time developing deduction. But he doesn't mean that Aristotle didn't know induction, no, he was an expert at both. Then when you go back to Aristotle logic, I like to call him this, but many Westerners do not get familiar with this word, but for me I just call it Aristotle logic. Because it is based on three principles, the first principle is the principle of identity. If  $p$ , then  $p$ . even though it was not explicit in his work, it was implicit. So we can imply about this rule. But the other two rules in his works are explicit. This rule is the rule or the law of the excluded middle. So it is  $p$ , or not  $p$ ; not both. The third law is the law of non-contradiction. It is not true that  $p$  and not  $p$  are true together. So it is not true that  $p$  and not  $p$  are true together. From my analysis you see that the most fundamental among the three is this last rule. Why? Because for example in this rule we can use some principle. We can use the principle of material implication we would have not  $p$  or  $p$ , and then you can have  $p$  or not  $p$  by the rule of commutation, you just change the place. Over here we can use the rule of demorgan, when we use demorgan, we can have not  $p$ , or not not  $p$ . and then when you use double negation we have not  $p$  or  $p$ , then when you use the rule of commutation we have  $p$  or not  $p$ . so this is the most fundamental for my belief; maybe I am wrong, but this is my belief. I think this is the rule that was in the blood of the Westerners, you cannot hold contradictions, you cannot accept contradictions, there is no way. It produces dissonance, and you can't live with dissonance. If you say this marker is red, and somebody says that this marker is not red. According to the Western mind, they would say that just one statement is true, the other must be false. But I would show you that this never happens to the feelings of the Eastern people, not only for the Thai, we have no problem at all.

57 Steve – now why do you not have any problem with that?

58 Dr Warayuth – no, no

59 Steve – why?

60 Dr Warayuth – I will come to that later, but let me come to the Western first. And this just comes since then until now. Even though I would say that there was some philosopher that has tried to create a revolution in the Western world. That philosopher is Hegel, Hegel would work as a dialectic. He would say that  $p$ , and then not  $p$ , therefore, both  $p$  and not  $p$ , no problem. But the logic of Hegel was different from the eastern world, I would show you. The logic of Hegel is the logic of synthesis. Even though you would call it dialectic. But I would not like to call it dialectic, because dialectic according to different philosophers have different meanings. Dialectic according to Socrates and Plato are different from Kant, and that is different from Hegel. But this is the logic of synthesis, how could you see it? It would seem like this:  $p$  is true, not  $p$  is also true. Then when you get it together it's also true. Suppose we use a metaphor. Suppose  $p$  is white, then not  $p$  is black, when black and white synthesize it would become gray. This is Hegel, but I don't think that many people are happy with this idea. What's why it doesn't change the Western way of thinking. But when you turn to the Eastern world, now I'm coming to the Eastern tradition. If you see the similarity of Taoism.

- 61 Steve – it's got the opposites together.
- 62 Dr Warayuth – correct. It would say the same thing like this. But now I would not call it the logic of synthesis.
- 63 Steve – you don't combine them, they can coexist
- 64 Dr Warayuth – correct. That's why we see that this logic is the one system in the Western world that can go together with this logic. Just only processed philosophy. So it's only processed philosophers in the Western world that have similar ideas as the Eastern people. Because they don't need to do it like Hegel. You see a husband can be only a husband if he has another thing, a wife. Otherwise, how could you call x a husband? It's impossible. But according to the Western way of thinking... if you go back to ancient Greece to atomism. An atom is still an atom even though there are no other things; that is the way of thinking. But not the way that the Eastern people think. An atom could not be an atom if there is no other thing. How can you call it an atom if there is no other thing? How can you call day if there is no night? How can you call a man a father if he has no child? So co-existence; that's why processed philosophy believes in dipolar. So that's why we see that they way the explain God, is that it is an eternal dipolar. The way they explain anything eternal is a dipolar. But because of Aristotle has made the Western very confused about...
- 65 Steve – dipolar
- 66 Dr Warayuth – no, no
- 67 Steve – and that's why we have the problem between our Arminianism and Calvinism, God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, we can't hold them together, we have to synthesize them, but we can't synthesize them.
- 68 Dr Warayuth – absolutely
- 69 Steve – but then does it cause a problem because my area is systematic theology, that you produce a system or you produce a harmony or a synthesis or does that mean that biblical theology is probably more appropriate. Or what approach should we take? What is the implication of this for systematic theology within the Thai context? What should be our presupposition for holding these contrasting truths without having to synthesize?
- 70 Dr Warayuth – I think this is the big question. Because to me, even though I am Catholic, to me I have read a lot of work in systematic theology. But for me, I adopt process theology, because in processed theology I see it this way. I have no problem with something like p and not p. now when you turn to the Buddhist mind I just gave you an example of Taoism. But now turn to Buddhism; you see, Buddhist logic is just very special, in the sense that, you see in Aristotle it is just either or. Either p or not p. if not p, it would therefore be this line, if it isn't, you just choose only one. P or not p. and then among this, one only. So if p is true, then not p is false. But for Buddhist logic, I would say that it could be infinite in results. For example, number one, they could say that p is true, that is the first choice. The second choice, not p is true. The third choice, maybe both p and not p are true. The fourth choice, maybe neither p or not p are true. And still more. Maybe partly p is true, partly not p is true, and then both partly three but all are infinite.



- 71 Steve – now what's caused the Asian mind or the Thai mind to accept all of this? Because of the absence of Aristotle in your history? Or because of your cosmology of many, many conflicting things, that it is unpredictable and that you have spirits that are not definite. So therefore nothing is really definite. But then the problem with processed theology is that you also bring God into the process too, that God is changing, and that is a problem to orthodox Christianity, because God then becomes part of the process of change, and ceases to be absolute. And also how would you hold the absolute laws of Buddhism too? I mean how do you have absolutes in that system of process?
- 72 Dr Warayuth – very good question. Ok, you see this is the reason why many people could not accept processed philosophy in the Western world. But these aren't the big questions for the Eastern people. Why? Because they still think in dipolar. So when God is dipolar, one pole is absolute, no change. This pole is his like his loving kindness, his goodness, his benevolence, his power, it never changes. But the other pole, like say his aesthetic experiences, his knowledge is immanent with us. Now changes. Like the God of Abraham and Isaac is different to our God today. Why? Because God in our world today has more experience. In this polar. But this polar changes, so the domain that changes for God is his aesthetics. His knowledge. But the domain of his goodness and his power doesn't change. It's a different pole.
- 73 Steve – what about his immutability, his unchangeableness?
- 74 Dr Warayuth – no problem. I could explain it this way: I could give you the example of the first law of the three characteristics of Buddhism. This law states that everything is impermanent. You see that but according to processed philosophy, everything over there is everything actual. Everything actual is always permanent. But if something conceptual it would lead to permanent. So the law or principle itself since it is conceptual, it is permanent. So that pole is permanent, it never changes, but the content changes.
- 75 Steve – but the revelation is changing, it's immanent, phenomenological interaction with us is changing.
- 76 Dr Warayuth – now when we turn to God I don't have a problem. When the church explains God as in the Trinity I don't have a problem. For me if the church talks that way, OK, it depends on the church. But for me I still believe God in terms of a dipolar, and God for me is really clear, God is God. I can quote from Saint John's Gospel: God is love. And this is the way that process philosophers do, God is love. And I went further than that. For me God in one pole is abstract love, it never changes. So that pole we can just consider in terms of the trinity as God the father, abstract love. Nobody could see him, no one could touch him, no one could feel him. But God has another pole, concrete pole. That pole is the son, Jesus Christ. So that pole is concrete love. But how could abstract love and concrete love become one? It becomes one through the word I like to use: life. So the church could use that word life, the holy spirit. But I just call it life. To observe ourselves, we have mind and body. But how could mind and body get together? What I could say is just life. So the way that concrete love and abstract love combine between different poles is life. And then you can call that something you combine as the holy spirit or the life. So it's made it clear and I have no problem. But if you use Aristotle's theology, it is still very hard to accept. It would state that it's impossible. But if you follow the reasoning I have just explain, you would see how the Thai intellectuals think. That's why we have no problem with p and not p. we have no problem at all. This marker is red, this marker is not red. There is no problem for the Thai. When somebody says that this marker is not red, maybe his is meaning something, maybe his wants you to reach enlightenment, something like that. What he means is that red or redness is just convention, and maybe if not convention,

maybe of conviction of just today. It's true that it's red today but maybe next thousand years it isn't red. It's just like the tree. If you look at the tree over there you could say that the tree is green. But yes, today it's just opinion. If you go back to Plato, he would say that he could not understand, because it's just opinion. If you were to understand you would have epistemology, but he could not see. This is for Plato.

77 Steve – how about the whole area of revelation? Is there an equivalent of revelation in the Thai area of understanding? Or Thai experience, where another thing is revealing self to them. Because the foundation of the Christian faith is actually revelation. But how can that be understandable to the Thai? Is there anything equivalent to that in their own experience, or is it purely through Buddhist laws being given or the actual phenomenon of experiencing spirits in their health in their lives. The spirits are not revealing themselves, or are they not going to a higher understanding of something that's opening up to them? Is there any connection with the Thai on this level?

78 Dr Warayuth – the Thai people in general don't believe in revelations at all. You see that some people try to compare between dharma and God. But anyway according to the Thai people they still have no idea of God in the same way that people in the west feel. Because God for us is a person. But for Buddhism, they don't have God in a capital G. what they have is a small g, plus s at the end. The Gods over there are equivalent to angels or angelines. They believe they are in heaven. But someday when they have no merit, they will lose their excellence, they will come to the world born as men. So Gods for them are still in the life cycle. They would leave the life cycle when they reach enlightenment. So they have no idea of revelations like us. For us we believe in God, God as a person, and God reveals truths to us. Otherwise we would never know God because God is abstract. So we understand it this way. But the Thai people don't. they believe in dharma, but dharma is there, no beginning, no ending. But how did we know? Through the lord Buddha. For the Thai people, it is through the lord Buddha who discovered dharma. So dharma is not a person. So it is not a person, so it is not dharma who presented the truths to us, no no, they have no concept at all. So dharma is there. If you would like to know it like the lord Buddha, there can be two ways, first you just follow Buddha's way. The other way is your own, you can try your own practice, and maybe if you are lucky enough you would discover it. But many people still believe that it would be the short way to follow the lord Buddha's way, because he has already discovered it. And then most of the Thais follow this way. That's why it is here. Thai Buddhism adopts Theravada Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism means that there would be only one lord Buddha, there is no other way to have another lord Buddha. So what the other could have only becomes arahans. Arahans would become like the saints in Christianity. But they would never become the lord Buddha. This is different from the Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism you see you can try your own way as the *bodisathawa*; maybe someday you would become another Buddha. That is Mahayana Buddhism, which is different. But for the Thais they believe Theravada Buddhism. So they have no idea at all about revelation. So if you would like to discover dharma, because dharma is not a person. So what you need to do is just follow what the lord Buddha would teach.

79 Steve – so is there any sense in which they would be lead by a force? I know that the Chinese have this *palang pai nai* (inner power), but for the Thai do their contact with spirits and powers are they looking to be lead by a spirit? Perhaps as we would talk about being lead by the holy spirit; being lead by God and God lead me to do this. It's similar to revelation but do the Thai have anything equivalent in their cosmology or their understanding?

80 Dr Warayuth – not at all

81 Steve – it's purely themselves

82 Dr Warayuth – correct. That's why you see that according to my understanding Buddhism is the religion of self help. Whereas other religions such as Judaism, Christianity, no it isn't self help, we need grace. We need love we need help from God. But for them, no, not at all.

83 Steve – but even for them, the contact with the spirits, they are looking for help, but not that kind of help? They are looking for help in their lives, there is no lordship of the spirit over them?

84 Dr Warayuth – no. that is correct.

85 Steve – but they are using the spirits for help in particular events.

86 Dr Warayuth – correct, absolutely. So when you go to the temple, people believe that the Gods could help you. For example, if you lack money you pay respect and then you lift up the jo sticks and ask for luck and fortune. They'll just help you in that sense. But the Gods could not help you reach enlightenment. You have to do it by yourself, otherwise there is no way. But for us, you have faith in your heart and God gives his hand to you. In this sense you see why it is difficult to make the Thai people believe in revelations. That is unless they become Catholics or Protestants, then they jump out. But if they're still Buddhists they would have no idea, because dharma is not a person. So dharma is there, it is immanent, it is also supramundane, but it is not a person who cares for you. No, but it is you yourself who has to search for and discover. That is for Buddhism, so Buddhism is a religion of self help. Even the lord Buddha could not help if you don't follow his teachings and what had happened to him. What he taught.

87 Steve – thank you very, very much, we have covered many areas here and I think being helpful.

## APPENDIX 6

### INTERVIEW WITH DR SORAJ HONGLADAROM

- 1 Steve – there's not a lot written on the actual thought process of the Thai, but there is a lot on Thai traditions.
- 2 Dr Soraj – I have thought about the conceptual issues that rise when you compare thought systems when you compare one culture to the other. And then you reflect on what does this comparison have in relation to the questions of truth and knowledge. So the issues like relativism, universalism, particularism. These philosophical concepts are central to my work. So I have not been to the field and observed what Thai people.
- 3 Steve – but at least you have at least the framework to think about it.
- 4 Dr Soraj – this is a monograph. It has not been published. And I talk a little about philosophy in Thailand. There is philosophy in Thailand and there is Thai philosophy. I talk a little about how the two are related. They are not quite identical.
- 5 Steve – may I ask you a few questions from your observations. They might not be real conclusions, but from your observations, using the terminology that you would be familiar with. From your observation we could perhaps we could start with whether the Thais are more inductive or deductive in their way of thinking.
- 6 Dr Soraj – it is very hard to say. I think it very difficult to categorise how people think.
- 7 Steve – I'm talking about say the general Thai. Not necessarily highly educated. Like the 80% of the Thai, the general Thai. The way that they would think. Would they need something very tangible, something that they could observe before they could think about more conceptual things. Or do they start with concepts or what?
- 8 Dr Soraj – I think this could be true to other people also that they tend to believe what they can experience rather than what they think for themselves according to the rules of logic. So in that sense one may say that the Thai people tend to be on more the inductive side of the issue. But of course they don't understand the word inductive. But they understand, I think they would like to believe what they can feel and touch or see through their eyes. Rather than just thinking about it. Because they have the tendency to confuse the imagination with the conceptual or the logical thinking. This is very, very intuitive saying.
- 9 Steve – I'm interested in why the Thai embraced Buddhism. It wasn't embraced in India, but it was embraced in Thailand. Why would you say that happened?
- 10 Dr Soraj – it is a very complicated issue. You see, Buddhism flourished for about a thousand years in India. You probably know this already. It started more than 2000 years ago in India and the prospered very much for about a thousand years and gradually died down in starting from the 8th or 9th century AD. And after the 10th and 11th century, it started to disappear from the subcontinent, and the monks travelled to Tibet or south east Asia to carry on the practice of Buddhism, and went to Sri Lanka. Many scholars have written about the probably causes of the decline. And obvious physical cause is the invasion of the Muslims. Buddhism cannot survive without the temples and the monks in the temples because that's where the transmission of the texts and the teachings are transmitted and kept. So when the Muslims destroyed the temples and killed the monks, the lay people had no place to rely on and no place to go to in order to keep on the faith. And this is quite different from Hinduism. Hinduism is integrated more with the practices of the lay people. There is no equivalent of Buddhist monks in Hinduism. The Brahmins are house holders and they don't put themselves in

monasteries. They have wives and families and they are an integral part of society. So it's very difficult for the Muslims to do away with the Hindus. So there is no separate target for destruction.

- 11 Steve- but in Thailand what caused the Thai to embrace it? Because there was the animism, the Brahmanism. But to embrace Buddhism was it conceptual, was it concept things that caused them to take on Buddhism, or was it more practical. It's coming back to the inductive deductive faith.
- 12 Dr Soraj – I think politics must have something to do with it. The decision of the king in the past to accept Buddhism, more specifically Theravada Buddhism, rather than Hinduism or Mahayana Buddhism. And once the king decided to do this it became their policy that Theravada temples were supported by the king, by the political power. So that is one cause. And that I think doesn't explain much in terms of what you are asking. If you are looking at the lay ordinary people, they don't understand the complexities and difficulties of the Buddhist teachings. For them they look at Buddhism as a way that when they have problems, they consult the monks. When they have something that they need and somebody to advise them. And the teachings for the lay people are geared towards going to heaven. If you do all these good things, you will go to heaven. But that is not the ultimate theory of Buddhism. But for the ordinary people, they are not very interested in nirvana, because they think it's too remote from their lives. And they don't think that they can become liberated in their lifetime, so they go one step closer to what can happen in their lives. But as for why Buddhism rather than Hinduism, because there are only two options in the past several hundred years. Because those are the two major religions in this region before the Europeans came. I think one possible explanation is the decision of the king and why the succession of kings, it is continual, and not just one king. I think, I have to look this up, but I think Hinduism has a lot to do with magical powers and the worship of many Gods, which to the Thai, or to the educated Thai who prefer buddhims who look at the decisions of the kings and monks. They look at Hinduism as the worship of the statues of the Gods and Goddesses as something that one should get away from, because as a lot of supermagical powers and a lot of things that are scary, that the powers of the Gods that could do good things or bad things that one has to practice.
- 13 Steve – but would the Thai not be very interested in power
- 14 Dr Soraj – they had their own gods
- 15 Steve – yes so they already had something. They didn't need anything to replace that animistic belief.
- 16 Dr Soraj – the indigenous gods are not so personal as the Hindu ones. I mean, they are not so powerful, as they try to enter the minds of the people at that time. The indigenous Gods are like the household Gods, the Gods of the ancestors. So *chao tii* (local lord), and they have the power only to a limited area and people talk about *chao paa*, Gods of the forest. And his only has power in that particular forest. But if you look at the hindu Gods, they are supreme Gods, they have power everywhere. Like Shiva and Vishnu. For a Thai, the Hindu Gods are too powerful and they have the power to cause a lot of trouble for the whole people if they want. According to their beliefs.
- 17 Steve – the Thai want more peace and harmony.

- 18 Dr Soraj – right, so Buddhism with its teaching of release of suffering, nirvana and samsara, without any intervention of God, it suits the Thai mind frame. Because if you compare the old Khmer, who are Hindus, with the Thai. They are not so serious as the Khmers. They want to have fun, they don't take life so seriously, the word is *sanoook* (fun). Whereas the Khmers, when they are in the temples, they are very square faced and stern looking, they are always in awe and fearing the gods. It is a little bit aggressive looking.
- 19 Steve – why are the Thai like that?
- 20 Dr Soraj – I don't know. It is like asking why the Germans are like the way they are.
- 21 Steve – is it anything in their history? The Thais are so alike to China, but Chinese philosophy has been taking place for thousands of years, whereas only now, the Thai philosophy is starting to develop. Is there any reason for that? Was the Thai isolated from communication with other places? Is there any reason for that?
- 22 Dr Soraj – I think when the Thai came to this region in southeast Asia, before they came, this area was already Indianised with Hinduism and Buddhism, they were already established here. The Khmers were already practicing Hinduism and Buddhism. The two religions were already competing with one another. The Chinese didn't have much influence. The Chinese came as traders and the Thais took the technology from the Chinese. But they don't receive any kind of philosophy from China, like Confucius and so on. They are very foreign to the Thai. They don't know anything about that. Why is that? The Chinese did not come as teachers or as astrologers in the royal court. They were always traders.
- 23 Steve – so they didn't have influence from the top part, they were down on the lower levels, but they didn't influence the power that did influence the country, because it's still very patron client situation. Coming on another track, but it's still very similar to Chinese thought. When you have opposite or conflicting thoughts or a paradox, how does the Thai handle paradox? Would they need to try and synthesise things that are opposites, or can they live easily with paradox. Because like the Hegel idea, a paradox. Because in the west, we can't live with paradox, we can't live with dissonance. Now can the Thai live with dissonance.
- 24 Dr Soraj – I think so, because they don't typically put them together. A is left in its own place, and not A can be left in its own place.
- 25 Steve – and they can exist together.
- 26 Dr Soraj – yes, as long as you don't put them together, as long as you don't put them in a juxtaposed position.
- 27 Steve – but in separate environments, they are valid.
- 28 Dr Soraj – right, if you put them together they clash, but if you look at A in its own constant, it is alright. For example, people studying veterinary sciences at Chulalongkorn University usually have merit making ceremonies for the lab rats that they kill here. They have to kill them in order to do the research. But they are Buddhists, so once every year, they invite monks to chant and they give offerings to the monks to make merit. And they ask that this merit goes to those animals. I think that's the example.

- 29 Steve – yes, both are valid. I must do the experimentation, and that is valid. But also it's non meritorious to kill animals and therefore I need to make the merit. Or else, perhaps the lady selling the bird in the cage and the man paying to release the bird. He doesn't think that somebody had to catch the bird in order for him to release the bird. But he doesn't necessarily think it's wrong in that way. The average person doesn't think it's wrong to catch the bird. They just think that it's right to release the bird.
- 30 Dr Soraj – somebody buys a lot of cages with the birds and then travels a long way away from the original location, and so the birds become disorientated, and won't be able to survive.
- 31 Steve – but thesis and antithesis doesn't particularly need synthesis. It comes down to theology too, to think of the sovereignty of God. But we also think of man's responsibility. How do you hold those two. In theological circles, that has been debated for centuries and trying to synthesise. But they cannot synthesise. Is there a need to synthesise, or can they be both equally true? But, so this is of interest. But is it an issue for the Thai then? Are they able to live with paradox, or thesis, antithesis.
- 32 Dr Soraj – most people don't think they need paradox. They just go on with their lives.
- 33 Steve- each individual point of their life. So they're existential in that sense.
- 34 Dr Soraj – yes it could be, so in one area of their life, they believe in one way as Buddhists, and in another area they may just temporarily forget about them being Buddhists, I mean, not necessarily Buddhist. In one area they may think as a Thai, as a Buddhist, but in another area, they may be thoroughly modern. Like sciences.
- 35 Steve – but they don't think that is inconsistent.
- 36 Dr Soraj- no, they don't think about it. They think that they need to do something for those animals, because they need to do experiments on them, and a lot of them die, so they feel kind of guilty about it.
- 37 Steve- in one big area for theology is revelation, that we believe that God reveals himself, and the whole foundation of Christianity is based on revelation. Not just natural revelation, but particularly special revelation of God. Is there anything equivalent to that in the Thai framework of things? Would the Thai be looking for some particular revelation of some being, or not?
- 38 Dr Soraj – I don't think so.
- 39 Steve – they are working from the empirical.
- 40 Dr Soraj – right, they look for the answers from other people who they trust. As for spiritual matters they go to the monks, and the source of ultimate authority for the monks from Buddhism is in the texts, and the teachings of Buddha himself. So there is no tradition here of God revealing himself to a chosen person.
- 41 Steve – so that's totally alien. They are not expecting that at all in their whole framework of thinking or belief system. What about miracles?
- 42 Dr Soraj – yes, since Buddhism, or the Buddhist times, they don't believe in one supreme theistic God, and the belief in miracles are influenced by this basic Buddhist belief. So when



they experience something that can't be explained, or something supernatural, they are very interested of course and you find in the news papers, the popular ones about supernatural occurrences, and people are very interested in interpreting these into numbers so they can buy the lottery. They don't think about what the cause of the miracle is. They are very interested in the effect and the very occurrence. They are very interested in the phenomena. They are interested in the effect it can have on them.

43 Steve – that's very interesting. So they're not thinking very automatically the cause and effect. This is the effect, and what is the cause?

44 Dr Soraj – they don't really care. It could be God himself, but it doesn't matter.

45 Steve – so the noumenal realm is left totally abstract.

46 Dr Soraj – so a reflecting person, you see that a person tends to think too much. They tend to think of the causes of the phenomena, because they assume they just want to go on with living.

47 Steve – Dr Kirti gave a thought that in his perspective, the Thai are not inductive and not deductive in the sense of from the general to the particular or the particular to the general. He says that they are from the particular to the particular.

48 Dr Soraj – yes it could be.

49 Steve – that's just generalising though. But going from one particular to the other particular in just generalisation.

50 Dr Soraj – paradoxes and how contrasting things can exist together. They aren't put together. They don't have to find some ultimate cause that unites things and brings it into a system.

51 Steve – this is a problem for systematic theology too. In my line. Is systematic theology possible for the Thai.

52 Dr Soraj – it is possible if you train them enough, so you have them thinking in the line of the Westerners.

53 Steve – what we're trying to do is root the theology in the Thai context. So it is not going to help the general.

54 Dr Soraj – yes, I have been teaching Western theology for a long time, and it is very difficult to get the students to grasp the basic theories.

55 Steve – and get them excited about it. What I want to do is get the Thai to be excited about theology and so something that will introduce them into the basic framework of theology in the Thai context. That's what I'm trying to do. So contemplation, when the Thai contemplates, which is a Buddhist practice. Are they contemplating on something abstract? It's more an emptying rather than taking something on isn't it?

56 Dr Soraj – contemplating is not the same as meditating. When you contemplate you think about the general matters. Meanings of things. They do meditate a lot, and they try to still their mind to one focus or one point of focus. Their briefing, and practicing their mind to be in that

type of position. But for general contemplation, there are poets and writers that contemplate a lot.

57 Steve – and does that appeal to the general Thai?

58 Dr Soraj – to those that are educated, yes. To those that have completed school or have gotten some degree in university. But for the villagers, they contemplate in their own way. But they don't know much how to articulate their thinking.

59 Steve – so if one was to ask the basic question, why does the Thai believe what he believes?

60 Dr Soraj – that is very difficult. You could look at it from a historical point of view. But there is a gap, the history goes this way, but how does that way of history influence it? How the Thais are thinking in this way? It's not so determined. It doesn't explain it all.

61 Steve – very sensual, sensual as in their experiences. Or say for instance, somebody says that there is a certain spirit in this village, would the Thai immediately believe that there is that spirit in that village, or would they wait until they have some experience of that spirit and then they will believe?

62 Dr Soraj – right, right. They have to wait for something that could be explained no better but by invoking or referring to this spirit. Some phenomena that happens.

63 Steve – we find this a lot in why the Thai become a Christian. The normal Western way is the feeling of guilt and the need for forgiveness of sin. Very conceptual. But for the Thai normally it's because God did something for them. Maybe helped them when they were sick, or helped some family member when they prayed to God and then thought, when that happens then they believe. There is nothing conceptual about it. Because really the cross, and how Jesus died to forgive people of their sins, that should really be the central point. But for the Thais, that isn't really the central point for their belief.

64 Steve – Dr Soraj, thank you very much for your time.

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