

Academic Lecture McGilvary College of Divinity, Chiang Mai Thailand

November 2011

By Rev. drs. Karsten van Staveren

คริสตศาสนศาสตร์ในประเทศไทย

“Christian Theology in a country of temples”

This academic year I will have spent 50% of my life in Thailand. Which will make me sincerely a “ลูกครึ่ง”. To honor this occasion I would like to reflect on my experiences as a person of 2 or more cultures. As a lecturer of Christian Theology and New Testament my interest has always been drawn to the difficult yet exciting dynamics between cultures and the gospel.

It should be made clear from the beginning that my reflections on these dynamics within the context of my experiences as a lecturer in Thailand do not pretend to be the last word on this topic, but I hope that the things I have learned will be of some use for you as well.

When I was at the General Assembly of the Church of Christ in Thailand I saw this cartoon made by a Thai Christian. In short It summarizes the problems Christians are facing in Thailand.



Our Christian language is hard to understand for non-Christian. Many times we feel so at home in our Christian world with our Christian friends, with our beautiful Christian language, that we feel no need to reach out and interact with those outside of our faith community. Even more very often we feel afraid to do so, because we feel inadequately equipped.

Therefore my question is what is required of us to be a witness to God’s grace in a land of temples or to be more specific: How I do theology in the context of Thailand. I will start by referring to

Scripture. Then I will make some remarks concerning methodology and lastly I will give some example how s of Asian/Thai Theologians have worked this out.

1. The New Testament

In 2 Timothy 3:16 it says: “*All scripture is God breathed*”¹. For many of my students over the years this meant that God has inspired the New Testament in such a way that there was very little space for the human side in the writing of Scripture. Coming from churches who stressed divine inspiration in such a way that it becomes divine dictation, questions concerning the culture, creative abilities and choices made by the different authors of the New Testament could become understood as attacks on Holy Scripture and of God himself. And even if people would agree with the fact that Scripture is more than dictation their use of Scripture often denied that by citing scripture without considering culture, context or intention of the author.

In a sense many Christians within Asia and beyond have a talent for copy/pasting Scripture into their lives without taking into account the difference in time, intention of the author and culture. Though this might proof very useful for their spiritual lives it is not very useful for a Christian Theology in a country full of temples.

Lecturing the New Testament at the McGilvary College of Divinity I got more and more amazed by the deep interaction between culture and the gospel. In the bible studies given at the General Assembly of the Church of Christ in Thailand by Rev. Robert Collins, this principle became abundantly clear. God is a God who takes on culture. John 1:14 says “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*”². God is a God who crosses cultures and pitches up a tent in our midst.³

Instead of bypassing culture as a means of divine communication God in Christ is becoming fully part of human culture by “*becoming flesh and making his dwelling among us*”.

¹ (Holy Bible. todays new international version, 2005)

² (Holy Bible. todays new international version, 2005)

³ This principle is also been emphasized by Sang Hyun Lee, an Asian American theologian in his book *Marginality: Key to Multicultural Theology* (Lee, 1995)

If we believe that the Holy Spirit sends his disciple on journeys to the end of the world to witness to the good news of Jesus the Christ as we can read in Acts: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be by witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the world.”*⁴; Then we should also realize that this is not only a journey with the body but a journey of the mind and heart as well.

In the New Testament we find a lot of examples of courageous writers who are adventurous in their way of describing and communicating what they believed to be the best news for the world. The Jewish authors of the New Testament did not have any fear to communicate the gospel in a language which was beyond their own Jewish background. They stretched their creativity over the limits of their own culture to be able to reach out to those of other backgrounds.

For example the Gospel of John.:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*⁵ In Greek the Word is called “*λογος*”. The background of the word “*λογος*” can be explained in 2 possible context. The first context would be the culture of Judaism. The second context would be Hellenism.

In the context of Judaism the word “*λογος*” became the Greek translation of the words for wisdom and/or Thora/ the law.⁶ As early as the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, the Septuaginta, “*λογος*” became a synonym for God’s Word which created the world, God’s Wisdom and even God’s Law/Thora. The “*λογος*” was God’s divine action. God acts through his Word/“*λογος*”. When the translators of the Septuaginta translated Proverbs 8:22-31 they decided to use this word to describe Wisdom as if it was a divine person. So for Jews in with a love for the Old Testament John chapter 1:1 would have been very understandable

At the same time the first verse of the Gospel of John would have been also been very meaningful for readers from a Greek context. The “*λογος*” would be the eternal Reason which governs the universe. This idea was especially worked out by the Stoics. They did not see it as something personal,⁷ but rather see it as something which expressed their deep conviction about the

⁴ (Holy Bible. todays new international version, 2005)

⁵ (Holy Bible. todays new international version, 2005)

⁶ (Morris, 1995, p. 105)

⁷ In that sense this word “*λογος*” would be quite similar to the Buddhist principle of Dharma or Wisdom (ธรรมะ / ปัญญา).

rationality of the world.⁸ In their worldview it was the supreme principle which governs the world and directed all things.

Looking at the characteristics of the Gospel of John we should be able to conclude that the author consciously decided to use a word which was meaningful even for people not belonging to the Jewish worldview. In a sense the Gospel writer moved out of his cultural premises and began the adventure to translate the gospel into words never used before, to let a new group of people try to understand the depth of the story of Jesus.

If we study how the mystery of the cross is explained we will find the same principle. To Jewish people it is explained in the language of the high priesthood of Jesus and the sacrificial system as we can see clearly for example in the letter to the Hebrews, Peter and the gospels. The writers use language which was easily understood in Jewish culture. They used for example the imagery of “the Lamb of God” “Atonement sacrifice” “Messiah” and so on.

But Paul understanding that this language might not be as evocative to people coming from a Roman cultural background does not have any problems in switching to a different set of images and uses language of “Redemption” , “Adoption” “Citizenship” “Freeing of Prisoners of war” etc.⁹

The writers of the New Testament therefore are courageous when they witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. They coin new words. They search for new images. They create bridges of understanding between the story of Jesus and the culture they are interacting with.

Though their writings are not yet a systematic Christian theology, they show us the principle and path we should walk on. They challenge us to go beyond the cultural language we are comfortable with. And in our case this cultural language is often a “Christian” language since many of us have grown up in Christian families. Therefore we need to learn to communicate cross culturally just as God did through Christ and just as the early church and the New Testament writers did through the power of the Holy Spirit. Repeating Christian language and Bible verses will not be sufficient.

2. Christian Theology in a country of Temples

⁸ (Morris, 1995, p. 103)

⁹ (Boon-Itt, 2007, p. 163)

“By saying something in a creative new way one runs the risk that no-one will understand what is being said. On the other hand, by merely saying it in the old way there is nothing to be proud of – and people will not think the person is wise!!!”¹⁰

When it comes to doing Christian Theology in a country of temples the above mentioned citation of Dr. Kirti Bunchua gives us the outline of the challenge which we must face. We cannot simply repeat nor can we say things which are totally out of touch with the things that have been said before. Doing Theology is standing in the tradition of the Christian Faith¹¹ yet being challenged by the different religious and non-religious cultures, languages and faiths/worldviews we meet.

The question therefore arises how we should cope with the reality of a religious pluralistic world. There are many ways how to cope in our theologies with this reality. Therefore it is clear that a religious pluralistic world does not need to lead to a pluralistic theology of religion.

Traditionally the way Christian theologians cope with this questions is put forward in three categories:

1. Exclusivism: Salvation is only available in Jesus Christ.
2. Pluralism: All religions are means to salvation
3. Inclusivism: Salvation is founded on the person of Christ but its benefits are available to all by the revelation of God.¹²

This traditional typology has the drawback that the question concerning the fact that we live in a religious pluralistic world is brought back only to the question of salvation. This approach would be in my opinion be too narrow of an approach. Though the questions that a religious pluralistic world raises also touches the questions of salvation, it is not limited to this question.

For example:

There can be questions ask about truth content of religions. What kind of truths can be found in religions?¹³ Ethical truths, historical truths, ontological truths etc..

¹⁰ Citation from dr. Kirti Bunchua in an article of Steve Taylor (Taylor, p. 9)

¹¹ The mainline tradition of the Christian Faith, or in other words the theology of the Church is not a collection of static statements of the past and present, but it is the living witness to the Holy Spirit which is at work in guiding the Church to be co-workers in the Kingdom of God. “I believe in one Catholic Church, in the community of Saints” translates in my approach to theology to a conscious continuing (spiritual) exercise to be connected to the faith of the Church over the ages yet finding new ways and words to show that God is at the center of things even in the year 2011.

¹² (Kärkkäinen, 2003, pp. 24,25)

Furthermore we could and should ask ourselves questions about the rules of the different religious language¹⁴ of each religion and worldview. How far are we able to understand each other while we are using a different framework of thinking represented in the religious language of our religion and/or worldview?

Though salvation through Christ is at the center of Christian theology it does not necessarily mean that all theology and all truth are about salvation. Though the questions of salvation are true and important it does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that all truth is only and directly about salvation.

Within a Christian Theological approach to religion there are no easy answers. Decisions need to be made about God's revelation, God's covenants, the person of Jesus Christ, the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, the role of the community of believers etc.

Let me therefore try to make clear what a Christian Theology in a land of temples at least should take into consideration.

Firstly an approach whose only focus will be on focusing on the exclusive differences between the religions and especially Theravada Buddhism and Christianity will prove not to be fruitful enough within a Thai context. This has been the criticism of many Thai theologians involved in evaluating and researching the reason for the limited impact of Christianity in Thailand.¹⁵

According to Dr. Kirti Bunchua the general tendency of Thai thinking would be:

"Since 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 to 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

¹³ This question can and should be asked even if you have an exclusivist approach to religion. Believing in the exclusivity of Christ does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that other religions are void of truth.

¹⁴ (Newbigin, 1989)

¹⁵ As has been the criticism of M. Pongudom in his thesis of 1979 cited by rev. Bantoon Boonitt "In contrast to the American Presbyterian Missionaries, the early Church apologists to the Greeks were successful because they understood and used the religio-philosophical thought of the Greeks." (Boon-Itt, 2007, p. 148)

*Aryan thinkers like to do. Rather, Thai thinkers will study the effectiveness of what has already been given and then will think how one may add some new thing to it.*¹⁶

Therefore an approach which focuses only on the differences will reinforce the feeling of many Thais who see Christianity as the “Foreign Religion” even after 130 year of Christianity in Thailand. An approach which does not give room to connect in some way to the worldview of Thai Theravada Buddhist will never be able to communicate the gospel in such a way that Thai people we see the Christian Message as “*Euangelion*” ; Good news.

This has been clearly demonstrated by the experience of many pastors and missionaries working in the context of Thailand. For many Christianity and Thai Theravada Buddhism will be seen as poles apart never able to understand each other.¹⁷

Therefore the extreme approach which treats all the teachings of Thai Theravada Buddhism only as lies created by the devil, void of all truth, will never be able to reach the hearts and minds of the Thai people. Even more it is, as already shown above, totally opposed how God works as witnessed in the Bible.

But even if we would not represent such an extreme approach, but were only people educated in the critical academic circles of the Universities of the West, we will have troubles in connecting to the heart and mind of Thai people. Being schooled in these revered Universities we would have the tendency to focus on clear distinction of the differences and require a choice for A or for B and then maybe move to the similarities. This approach would be an either/or approach while the Asian mind tends to have a much more and/and approach.¹⁸

¹⁶ (Taylor, p. 9)

¹⁷ “Let us imagine a young enthusiastic missionary to Thailand, frustrated by the tedious task of language learning, anxious to communicate ‘the gospel in a nutshell; attempting to take a short cut to effectively communicate his message. ... He spends considerable time memorizing John 3:16..... He begins with enthusiasm to share John 3:16 with his neighbors. They smile benignly and he thinks he has delivered the message with clarity..... With all due respect to the missionary’s enthusiasm, he is in fact communicating unintelligible gobbledygook” (Davis, 1993, p. vi)

¹⁸ “The *deductive* means that you start with the general and you go to the particular. The *inductive* is where you go from the particular to the general. But the Thai argumentation, which I call the *intuitive*, is where you don’t have any reason or argumentation, the intuitive is on the inside” (Taylor, p. 8)

For example when looking at the differences in approach of the different books and thesis written over time it seems to be that the emphasis of Western minds like John R. Davis¹⁹, Winston L. King²⁰, and Steve Taylor²¹ tend to start with the differences and then move to the similarities (if any). While theologians from Asia like Satanun Boonyakiat²², Bantoon Boonitt²³ and Lynn A. De Silva²⁴ tend to start with a harmonious pre-understanding and then move to also show the often fundamental differences in the worldviews of Christianity and Theravada Buddhism.

The importance of a harmony model and confrontational method for theology needs to be researched further but that it has an conscious or subconscious influence in the writings of the different theologians writing on the topic of Christian theology in the context of Theravada Buddhism is clearly to be seen.

But secondly a theological approach which is extremely pluralistic would also be totally inappropriate and contra productive.

This approach would not only be in tension with the biblical witness or the theology of the church. Since: *“It cannot be denied that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, boldly presents Yahweh as the true and only God and that it demands unreserved devotion to Yahweh.”*²⁵ But it would also be criticized by important voices within Thai Theravada Buddhism.

The venerable Payutto is weary of every Christian theological approach whose intentions are not clear or distinct: *“The Catholics imitate Thai architecture and use it for their own, not just “Thai style” but ‘Buddhist style’. Even the Buddhist set of tables for worship replacing the Buddha image with the crucifix, was taken for Catholic use in their churches. Some even included display of the Buddha image. The Buddhist kathin ceremony has been adapted and given Christian meaning for a Catholic ceremony until today. I do not see any logic or reason for doing so, as there is no link whatsoever in*

¹⁹ (Davis, 1993)

²⁰ (King, 1962)

²¹ (Taylor S. C., 2001)

²² (Boonyakiat, 2009)

²³ (Boon-Itt, 2007)

²⁴ (Silva, 1975) (Silva, Creation Redemption Consummation, 1964)

²⁵ (Kärkkäinen, 2003, p. 50)

*the meaning, whether in terms of religious principles or cultural background. It just causes more confusion and thus criticism of it, is justified*²⁶

Even though you might not fully agree with the analysis of the venerable Payutto, it shows clearly the often fundamental differences between worldviews and faiths need to be shown as well. Therefore we see clearly that an approach which does not leave room for distinctiveness will be criticized not only internally within the Christian tradition²⁷, but will also find itself under critique of adherers of other faiths.

It is my opinion that an extremely pluralistic theology of religions is self contradictory.

Firstly because to say that all religions teach us to do good (As is a popular saying in Thailand), leaves out the definition of what good is. What good is in the worldview of Theravada Buddhism does not necessarily need to be good in the context of Christianity. A pluralistic approach which states that all religions in their mystical core teach the same does not take seriously the deep and real differences within the world. It is in a sense trying to make everything look the same.

Secondly: A pluralistic theology of religion which states that an exclusivist or even inclusivist approach to religion is judgmental and discriminatory because of its truth claim fails to see that even an extreme pluralist approach does the same. It takes itself as the measure for other opinions. Because it condones all approaches to the Ultimate reality except the approach which states a truth claim for itself. To say that we cannot make any truth claim is a truth claim in itself.²⁸

Thirdly: The commonalities(if they exist) among the religions do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that there is a fundamental sameness of religions. For example Though my car and my blender may use the same screw it does not follow that my car is like my blender.²⁹

Conclusion: For doing Christian theology in a country of temples, for a Christian theology in the context of Thailand neither the extreme exclusivist approach nor the extreme pluralist approach will

²⁶ Translation of Payutto's lecture 'Threats to Buddhism in Thailand' by rev. Bantoon Boonitt in (Boon-Itt, 2007, p. 132)

²⁷ "Contextualization is needed syncretism is not". (Davis, 1993, p. 11) Or as seen in the approach of Lesslie Newbigin (Newbigin, 1989)

²⁸ For more on this discussion see also (Newbigin, 1989, pp. 155-170)

²⁹ The same point is put forward by Hendrick Kraemer in the notions of "transience" found in Buddhism and Christianity. (Kraemer, 1938, pp. 138,139)

prove to be satisfying. We cannot emphasize only the distinctions nor can we just say that everything is the same. How then should we move forward?

3. Travel light

“Take nothing for the journey – no staff, no bag, no bread, no money no extra tunic” Luke 9:3

Is there a method, a 5 step plan which can be applied to all the different topics of Christian theology in a land of temples, so that people might understand the story of the Christian faith as good news? According to some there is a method which can be used and applied in the communication of the Gospel to Thai Buddhist.³⁰ And though I agree that there are better and worse ways to share the Christian faith I do not think that there is one way in which we can approach Thai Theravada Buddhism and Buddhist to see if it is helpful in understanding God’s given truth for the world.

Doing theology in the context of Thailand is not about a method but it is about a frame of mind inspired by spirituality. It is about searching for the places in this world where the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has left its footprint. It is about finding the places where Christ is dwelling³¹. It is about finding the places where the Spirit of God is at work especially outside of the Church and the Christian community.

When Jesus tells the disciples in the Gospel of Luke to take nothing, he tells them to travel light. The reason for that is that they need learn to trust God and secondly they need to build relationships.³² But to travel light also means that we cannot approach the world and country we live in with a “package” mentality. Doing theology in a land of temples is not about selling a package, not even if that would include Jesus, but it is about an adventure trying to find the places where Christ is present and at work. We should not pack to many preconceptions about what we might find. But

³⁰ Lecture: “A Turn from the Wheel to the Cross: Communicating the Gospel to the Buddhists” by Chaiyun (Chai) Ukosakul, Ph.D. Sep 26 and Oct 3, 2011 in Chiang Mai.

³¹ “When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” Luke 19:5

³² (Hope, 2006, p. 35)

we must go out there to listen: “listening to those whom the journey is made, but also listening to the Holy Spirit’s answer as we ask, ‘What is needed here?...’”³³

This listening approach connects to tendency of the way how Thai people according to Dr. Kirti Bunchua: *“The Thai argumentation, which I call the intuitive..... the argumentation of the Thai people is to jump from particular to particular.The Thai move from particular to particular without working back to the source or principle.”*³⁴

Therefore Christian Theology in the context of Thailand needs to approach the different questions and topics which come up, by listening again and again what Thai Theravada Buddhism and Thai culture has to say on this topic. Trying to understand the questions it raises for a Christian understanding of the world. Finding the similarities as well as pointing out the differences. Agreeing as well as disagreeing with this conversation partner.

Let me give examples of this approach.

1. Wan Petchsonkram in his lectures which have been documented in “Talk in the Shade of the Bo Tree”³⁵ carefully points out that very often Christian language is unintelligible for those who have grown up in the worldview of Theravada Buddhism. If it comes to understanding the highest principle in this world, ourselves or our salvation, we are very often like strangers who come from different cultures and speak different languages. Even so Wan Petchsongkram is able and willing to built bridges between Christianity and Thai Theravada Buddhism. In his approach to creation he makes it very clear that the dogma of creation and the Buddhist teaching of creation lead to a lot of misunderstanding. Whilst Christianity believes in a caring God who created this world good, Buddhism stresses the fact that the world is created by Avijja (unknowingness/ lack of wisdom) and therefore this world has Dukkha (suffering / unsatisfactory). A Christian stressing to believe in the God who created this world, would in Buddhist ears be strange. There is nothing attractive about believing in a God who created a clearly imperfect world.

Having put forward these differences in detail Wan Petchsongkram starts to retell the creation story by using the concept of Avijja, Tanha and Dukkha.

³³ (Hope, 2006, p. 47)

³⁴ (Taylor S. , p. 8)

³⁵ (Petchsongkram, 1975)

When God created this world he had a plan and carried it out. In this plan he had room for man. And as such Adam and Eve cooperated with God and lived in comfort and convenience in the Garden. Until Eve saw the forbidden fruit. It was beautiful and desirable. This was when Avijja was born. Avijja tried to convince Eve to eat the apple and by doing so Tanha arose in her heart. Eve and Adam both could not resist the Tanha in their hearts and they ate. The moment they ate from the fruit they were under the dominion of Avijja and Dukkha came as the consequence of that.³⁶

Even though Wan Petchsongkram sees clear and fundamental differences between the teachings of Christianity and Theravada Buddhism, he does not have any problem in retelling the story of creation by using Buddhist terminology. I therefore conclude that he after carefully listening to Buddhism and Christianity has seen a fundamental God given truth in Buddhism which he wanted to use to explain what Christianity was about.

By careful listening to Theravada Buddhism Wan Petchsonkram finds bridges for understanding, but not by negating the differences.

2. Lynn A. De Silva, in his book on the problem of the self in Christianity and Buddhism³⁷, makes a strong comparison between the Buddhist and Christian approach of the soul. Normally Buddhism is being seen as having no eternal soul and referring to man as being “Anatta” (= no self). Christianity is often portrayed defending the notion of an eternal soul and redemption being about our souls being taken up into haven.

But after careful consideration it shows that the concept of an eternal soul is not something which is part and parcel of the Biblical witness. Old and New Testament only refer to the eternity to the soul in relationship with God, but not by its power. Nephesh /Psyche is emphasizing the mortality of the human being in relationship to God who gives him life. Ruach/ Pneuma is the human being in a reciprocal relationship with God, a relationship which answers the call of God. Therefore there is very little evidence in the Old³⁸ and New Testament about man having a soul which is eternal by its own capability. The words used for soul are words used

³⁶ (Petchsongkram, 1975, pp. 86,87)

³⁷ (Silva, The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity, 1975)

³⁸ For a more extensive approach on the OT understanding of the human being I want to refer to the Convocation lecture given by Klaus Joachim Bachhofer at the McGilvary College of Divinity in July 2010.

to describe the human relationships with God. If therefore humanity does not have the commodity of an eternal soul by itself except for his/her relationship with God, the Christian description of self becomes much closer to the Theravada Buddhist approach of soul which says that we are no-self, Anatta and only nama/rupa.³⁹ Just like the Bible stresses that we are like dust so does Theravada Buddhism stresses that we are Anatta. By careful listening to Theravada Buddhism Lynn A. da Silva finds bridges for understanding, but not by negating the differences.

3. Dr. Satanun Boonyakiat in his thesis: "A Christian Theology of Suffering in the Context of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand"⁴⁰ applies this approach of travelling light as well. In his thesis he listens carefully to Theravada Buddhism and puts that into conversation with Christian Theology. The first conclusion of this listening exercise is that he feels that the question why you suffer is not that important in the context of Thailand. The important question is more how do you cope with suffering. This conclusion is inspired by the first noble truth⁴¹. The second thing which the conversation with Buddhism leads to is the understanding that there are many problems of suffering. In short there are many kinds of suffering. There is suffering which is part of normal human nature. There is suffering because of Injustice. There is suffering because of sin. The ways to cope with these sufferings are faith, solidarity and repentance.

In his approach to Christian Theology you see that dr. Satanun Boonyakiat is going to the process of listening careful to Theravada Buddhism and Christianity. Then building bridges between them and lastly putting forward the often fundamental differences.

In this case he shares the presupposition that it is wiser to focus on how to cope with suffering then thinking about the why of suffering. He also agrees that there are different kinds of suffering and that suffering can be lessened by right actions and attitudes. But he also explains quite clearly; *"A Christian theology of suffering in the context of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand agrees that right attitudes and actions can help the individuals endure suffering and prevent unnecessary suffering to a certain degree, yet it affirms that only Jesus Christ can save humankind from sin and suffering, and bring suffering to a complete extinction."*⁴²

By careful listening to Theravada Buddhism Satanun Boonyakiat finds bridges for understanding, but not by negating the differences.

³⁹ (Silva, The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity, 1975, p. 72)

⁴⁰ (Boonyakiat, 2009)

⁴¹ (Boonyakiat, 2009, p. 215)

⁴² (Boonyakiat, 2009, p. 220)

Through these authors we can see quite clearly how theology in a land full of temples can bear fruit. Not by being a package delivering service but by travelling light and being willing to listen to God and your neighbor; to agree as well as disagree; to learn to see the footprints of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, in this beautiful diverse world. It is a holy adventure in which current and future Thai Christians need to embark upon in their daily lives by relating to non-Christians so that they can experience the mystery of God being already at work at places they never imagined. God is at work even though we are not there yet

This is beautifully described in the following song:

Christ beside me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, King of my heart
Christ within me, Christ below me, Christ above me never to part

I thank you for your time and attention.

- Boon-Itt, B. (2007). *A study of Dialogue between Christianity and Theravada Buddhism in Thailand*. Nottingham.
- Boonyakiat, S. (2009). *A Christian Theology of Suffering in te Context of Theravada Buddhism*. Fuller Theological Seminary.
- Davis, J. R. (1993). *Poles Apart, Contextualizing the Gospel in Asia*. Bangalore: Theological Book Trust.
- Holy Bible. todays new international version*. (2005). Colorado Springs: International Bible Society.
- Hope, S. (2006). *Mission-Shaped Spirituality*. London: Church House Publishing.
- Kärkkäinen, V.-M. (2003). *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press.
- King, W. L. (1962). *Buddhism and Chrisitanity, Some Bridges of Understanding*. Philadephia: Westminster Press.
- Kraemer, H. (1938). *The Christian Message in a Non-Chirstian World*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications.
- Lee, J. (1995). *Marginality: Key to Multicultural Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Morris, L. (1995). *The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Newbigin, L. (1989). *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. London: SPCK.
- Petchsongkram, W. (1975). *Talk in the Shade of the Bo Tree*. Bangkok.
- Silva, L. A. (1964). *Creation Redemption Consummation*. Chiang Mai: Thailand Theological Seminary.
- Silva, L. A. (1975). *The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity*. Colombo: The Study Centre for Religion and Society.
- Taylor, S. (n.d.). *A PROLEGOMENA FOR THE THAI CONTEXT: A Starting Point for Thai Theology*. Retrieved 6 13, 2011, from CRC:
<http://www.thaicrc.com/gsd/collect/MIS/index/assoc/D6867.dir/6867.pdf>
- Taylor, S. C. (2001, September 22). Gaps in Beliefs of Thai Christians. *Evangelical Mssions Quarterly* , 72-81.