

20. The four levels of spiritual attainment according to the early Buddhist tradition are the *sotāpanna* (stream enterer), *sakādagāma* (the once returner), *anāgāma* (the non-returner) and the *arahant* (the Noble One).
21. *Calasahanadasutta*, *Majjhimanikāya* i, 63-66. I am indebted to Lily De Silva for this citation, as well as for the reference to the *Mahadukkhakkhandhasutta*, *Majjhimanikāya* i, 83-90, that makes a similar claim that only Buddhists can adequately understand the nature of pleasure, form, and sensations so as to be free from them.
22. The classic presentation of this developmental model of Tsung-mi is in his *Yuan-jen lun*, T 45. 708-710.
23. T. 54:234-255.
24. See my article on "Early Forebodings of the Death of Buddhism", *Numen* XXVII.1 (Summer, 1980), pp.122-154.
25. See Jan Nattier, Buddhist Prophecies of the End of Buddhism: *Studies in the Candragarbha Sutra* (forthcoming).
26. See the Appendix for a fuller explanation.
27. Zokuzokyo I.31.5, p.473 a-b, translated by Miriam Levering, Buddhism in Sung Culture: The Ch'an Master Ta-hui Tsung-kao, unpublished ms., p.175.
28. See Wang Pi, *Commentary on the "Lao Tzu"*, tr. by Ariane Rump with Wing-tsit Chan (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1979), p.112. This distinction became very popular in later Chinese Buddhism. For example, it is used in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, tr. by Philip Yampolsky (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), Section 14.
29. Ibid., p.182. Wang Pi first developed these terms in his commentary on Lao-tzu.
30. Zokuzokyo I.31.5, p.461a, translated by Miriam Levering, *Buddhism in Sung Culture*, p.176.
31. Ibid., p.190.
32. Ibid.
33. See Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Buddhism and Christianity*, fifth Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lecture Series, 1967 (Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, 5/1 Atsadang Road, n.d.).
34. Donald Swearer, ed., *Me and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1989), p.146
35. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1987), pp.61-64.

BUDDHIST CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO SOCIAL LIBERATION

Liberation from Religion

Both Buddhism and Christianity have sets of doctrine dealing with the social dimension of life. The message of Buddha and Jesus was originally lived and witnessed in community. It was, however, not rules or precepts, but rather the "spirit" that kept the followers together in the form of a movement. Individual and social were two sides of the same reality. They belonged together and were inseparable.

As time passed, both religions became institutionalized. Spirit was overshadowed by rules, movement by institution, socialism by individualism. The emphasis on "authority" suppressed "personal conscience" and freedom, individual conversion suppressed social change. There is only one way to liberation, that is the "authorized" one, the one shown by the authority, who alone has the legitimacy claimed to be bestowed by the founder or God respectively. There is only "individual sin" committed by each person. The classic statement concerning the society has always been and is that by personal conversion one will contribute to the social change.

The religious paradox is clear. Sangha means community of monks in Buddhism, yet one talks of going to Nirvana alone. Trinity means the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in Christian religion, and prayer taught by Jesus is "Our Father" and not "My Father", yet the churches preach almost exclusively personal and individual salvation.

Forty years ago Buddhadasa gave a lecture called "The Mountain of the Buddha Dhamma Path". He shocked most people by stating that Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha were hindrances (mountain lying on the way) to attainment of Nirvana. They are means compared to a raft to cross a river. They are not an end to be stuck to.

Four years ago Buddhadasa repeated the statement in another way. He

said that the great obstacle to practise religion and to attain Dhamma was the "authority".

The message of Buddhadasa is relevant to all religions. The first liberation to be made is to liberate from "religion", here meaning "institution" and "authority". This is the stepping stone of religious freedom. There is a need to liberate from fundamentalism, dogmatism, absolutism, and triumphalism. It is indispensable to liberate from intellectual and metaphysical captivity. It is the time to recognize diversity and plurality of truth, conscience and freedom of each person, of the community, of the society, and to recognize the changing situation of the world.

Up to the 16th century only priests and authorized persons could read the Bible. Formation of Protestant churches made the Holy Scripture accessible and readable to the public by translating it into "ordinary" languages. Only two hundred years after the French revolution and social changes in Europe the Catholic Church convened the Second Vatican Council to recognize the "truth" in other religions and "outside the Church", and to "authorize" the use of local languages in liturgy. It requires hundreds of years for religious institutions to follow the changes of the world.

Buddhadasa was the first monk who gave sermons with ordinary speaking language after the second world war. Phra Phayom, one of his disciples, goes further by using the most common language of common people talking about Dhamma.

Liberation means first of all recognition of the value of common sense, common language, and common people. They are ways that lead to the common goal.

Liberation from Theology

It was during the late 1950s that theology of liberation was being formed. The spirit of the Vatican Council II enhanced its evolution. It was the systematic formulation of the reflection of peasants, workers, and students in Peru, and then in Latin American countries. The common people claimed their right in "doing theology", reflecting their faith in the face of the oppressive situation of their society. They took seriously the social dimension in the life and teaching of Jesus. There are social sins as well as personal sins. Personal conversion is necessary, but there must be also social conversion for a real liberation. That is the social and structural change of the unjust society.

Theology of liberation has influenced not only the countries in which it

took shape, but also other countries all over the world. The 1970s were decade of revolution and political change and unrest in many countries. It was the decade the oppressed and unprivileged claimed their rights and dignity, violently or peacefully. Religion played an important role. It came about not from the "authority" or "institution" but from the common people, the grassroots, assisted by some religious leaders and theologians. Examples are Black theology in North America and South America, Feminist theology in North America and in Europe, African theology in Africa, Peasant theology in the Philippines, and Minjung theology in South Korea.

The characteristic elements of these "theologies" are the awareness of freedom and human rights on the one hand, and from the awareness of self-criticism on the other. Marxism is one of the frames for social analysis. However, not all theologies of liberation could be associated to Marxism. Minjung theology claims itself free from the Marxist class struggle frame. They refer to the spirit of struggle for liberation from Japanese oppression in the Korean history as the roots and frame for analysis and criticism of actual social structure.

Theology of liberation departs from the liberation of theology. Theology used to be a study of sets of dogma transmitted through the history of the churches. For theology of liberation, "Theology is reflection, a critical attitude." "Theology must be man's critical reflection on himself, on his own basic principle." Furthermore, "Theological reflection would then necessarily be a criticism of society and the Church insofar as they are called and addressed by the Word of God; it would be a critical theory, worked out in the light of the Word accepted in faith and inspired by practical purpose – and therefore indissolubly linked to historical praxis." (TL. p.11)

Theology of liberation liberates itself from "theological captivity" which implies fundamentalism and dogmatism.

"As critical reflection on society and the Church, theology is an understanding which both grows and, in certain sense, changes. If the commitment of the Christian community in fact takes different forms throughout history, the understanding which accompanies the vicissitude of this commitment will be constantly renewed and will take untrodden paths. A theology which has its reference only in "truths" which have been established once and for all – and not the Truth which is also the Way – can be only static and, in the long run, sterile. In this sense the often quoted and misinterpreted word of Bouillard take on new validity: 'A theology which is not up-to-date is a false theology.'" (TL. p.13)

To be an up-to-date critical reflection, theology, according to the

theology of liberation, does not exclude the functions of theology as wisdom and rational knowledge. However, it is not a "juxtaposition" of the new and the old formula. "The critical function of theology leads to redefinition of these other two tasks. Henceforth, wisdom and rational knowledge will more explicitly have ecclesial praxis as their point of departure and their context." (TL. p.14)

An up-to-date theology has its stand on the present, is rooted in the past, and views for the future. It has to be a critical appraisal of historical praxis. It has to face the challenge of the present world in transformation. It has to be a theology of hope that inspires man along the path to the future. For this, theology has to have the prophetic function interpreting historical events, revealing and proclaiming their profound meaning. In order to discover the profound meaning a Christian "will be someone personally and vitally engaged where nations, classes, people struggle to free themselves from domination and oppression by other nations, classes, and people." (TL. p.13)

Besides the concept of theology, theology of liberation critically examines the concept of development taken today as purely economic. It has become a new theory of "developmentalism" that is in practice only a reformism and modernization. Development should be "a total process, which includes economic, social, political, and cultural aspects." (TL. p.26) Furthermore, "development must attack the root causes of the problems and among them the deepest is economic, social, political, and cultural dependence of some countries upon others – an expression of the domination of some social classes over others." (TL. p.26) Theology of liberation requests "radical change" of the society.

In its historical evolution, theology has always been supported by or associated to a particular philosophy. Greek philosophy was the main one. It was transformed then into "philosophia perennis" of Aquinas in the middle ages that lasts at least up to the Vatican Council II for the Catholic Church, and up to the 19th century with the German philosophy of enlightenment for the Protestant Churches. Theology of liberation accepts the influence of Marxism in its frame of social analysis. Critical attitude towards the history, the focus on historical context and praxis, critics of oppressive social structure and class struggle derive from Marxist philosophy. However, theology of liberation is not a "Marxist theology", as one cannot say that the traditional theology is a "Greek theology". "Doing theology" is not only a process of going "back to the source" but also "down to earth", to the context of space and time. This is the common ground of all other "theologies" of liberation.

Liberation from European Theology

Third World theologies follow the path paved by theology of liberation. In Asia the term "contextualization" is used to stress the critical reflection of

the Christians. They have to reflect their faith within the Asian culture. Minjung theology is one example. Minjung means "people". The minjung are "those who are oppressed politically, exploited economically, alienated sociologically, and kept uneducated in cultural and intellectual matters." (MT. p.XVII)

"Minjung theology is more than a rejection of European theology; it is an affirmation of Korean culture and history as the context in which Koreans must do theology. Korean theologians begin with the particularity of their own situation as defined by poor people's attempt to overcome their suffering....Minjung theology is Korean theology; it is a theology that is accountable to the liberating history and culture of poor people in Korea." (MT. p.IX)

Minjung theology is a typical "Asian" theology that stresses more on culture than other aspects. The affirmation of culture separates Asian theology from theology of liberation, which stresses on Marxist class analysis. Kim Yong-bock, a Korean theologian distinguishes Minjung Theology from Theology of Liberation, the minjung from the proletariat.

"The difference between the minjung and the proletariat entails different view of history. Minjung history has a strong transcendental or transcending dimension – a beyond history – which is often expressed in religious form. There is close relationship between religion and the minjung's perception of history. Even if minjung history does not involve religious elements in an explicit manner, its folklore or cultural elements play a transcending function similar to religion in the perception of history." (MT. p.XV)

A Japanese peasant movement leader made an observation after many participations in the demonstrations along the streets of Seoul and other cities of Korea, that the whole atmosphere was more than political demonstration, it was a "religious festival" that touched your heart. He felt the religious spirit beneath the political struggle.

The history of the Protestant Church in Korea, in which Minjung theology is developed, goes back to the end of the 19th century. It was the Church of the poor and the oppressed during the Japanese occupation. The liberation movement started already since that period. Christian religion has been playing a unifying force for the movement since then up to today.

Korean minjung theology has its paradigm in the analysis of the minjung in the Korean history. Suh Nam-dong summarizes the historical development of minjung:

"First, for a long time, the minjung were the objects of the ruling

power. Second, the minjung did not attempt to become the ruling power through a revolutionary process, but prepared the way to bring about a historical transformation. Third, step by step, they prepared the ground to become the ruling power.

This is a meaningful paradigm for minjung theology which shows that the minjung gradually liberate themselves from the position of being a historical object and become a historical subject. Minjung history and theology testify to the fact that the minjung overcome with their own power the external conditions which determine and confine them and become the subjects who determine their own social situation and destiny." (MT. p.169)

The Christians in Asia form only a very small minority. Theological reflection in this culturally rich continent varies in scale and approaches. Many are suspected by other religions as crypto-proselytism, or a readjusted strategy to absorb other religions. This happens more among intellectuals than among social activists. This is understandable if a Christian theologian or philosopher superficially tries to "apply" some elements in Buddhism, Hinduism, or other Asian religions, to Christianity without taking into account the whole historical, socio-cultural, and religious context of these religions. It is less complicated but dangerous to take only textual concepts of other religions. The Christian Council of Asia has clearly expressed its concern, and called attention to reality of Asia.

"The wealth of Asia is in its people. Over half of the world's population is in Asia. The wealth of people is not in numbers alone. People in Asia have a long history and a rich culture which spans thousands of years. Many of the world's greatest religious movements started in Asia. Many of the finest expressions of the creative human spirit are in Asia.

The discovery of the wealth of people is in many ways new. Up to now people have been taken for granted. The abundance of their tradition and culture has often been ignored. The reason for this is that we tend to see the people through the eyes of the rulers and the empire builders. History is often written from the perspective of the rulers and their boastful claims to fame.

We seldom realise that it is the work of the people that has made it possible for rulers to do things they claim. Time and again the traditions and the wealth of the people are used by the rulers for their own purposes. There is the need to discover people in their own terms.

A new mood is emerging in Asia – an awakening of the people themselves. A new history is being written in our time. No longer are

the victories and exploits of the powerful the central points for an understanding of history. Now the deep movements of human spirit and the growing solidarity of the people are the reference points for a perception of history. Empires rise and fall, kingdoms come and go, but the people remain as the permanent reality of the history." (MT. p.8)

Thai Context

Though with many similarities, Thailand is not Latin America, not the Philippines, and not Korea. It has its own historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural context. Buddhism has practically been the "national religion" of the country, which has been uninterruptedly under absolute monarchy since the thirteenth century up to 1932, when it was changed to constitutional monarchy. The country has never been colonized, which does not mean that it has never been otherwise exploited and oppressed by other nations.

During the past thirty years, Thailand has been advancing toward being a newly industrialized country. The industrial sector is being rapidly developed at the expense of the agricultural sector which is neglected. The majority of Thai people are farmers. They have become, in the name of development, poorer than before. This is certified by research of Thailand Development Research Institute Foundation, a government associated agency. Consequently more and more people from the rural areas pour into large urban centres. After harvest, most Thai villages are deserted. Only old women and children remain at home. Villagers have to find all possible ways to earn their living and to pay their debts. The environment is deteriorated to the extent that it is almost impossible to rely on as it used to be in the past. Very little or no more forest remains in which villagers can find food. Natural water resources become shallow, dried up, or polluted. Land becomes poorer, as villagers started growing mono crops three decades ago. Jute, cassava, maize, rubber trees were promoted for export. Farmers today cannot grow anything without chemical fertilizer and pesticide. A market-oriented mode of production has gradually replaced the subsistence economy.

Although village structure remains unchanged, community life is being shaken. Changes are taking place also in the villages. Consumerism does not spare even the most remote areas. Cultural life is changing. Traditional values are challenged.

Amidst this changing situation, Buddhism, impacted also by the changes, is making efforts to readjust its role. Among intellectuals and educated groups, Buddhadasa's message has been giving new light and inspiration. Dhamma Kaya

offers answers to urban middle class who seek peace of mind from the chaotic life of Bangkok. They go to the centre for meditation on week-end and special festivities. Santi Asoke offers an alternative for those who seek puritanism. Emphasis on strict practice of Sīla draws attention of those who are not happy with traditional institutional Buddhism. Dr. Prawase Wasi, a leading lay Buddhist, compares the three movements as putting emphasis on Paññā (wisdom), Samādhi (concentration), and Sīla (precepts) respectively. It could be said that they concern mostly urban people. In the rural areas, a good number of monks have become, during the past two decades, socially engaged. They assist the villagers not only in ceremonial matters, but also in their economic and social welfare. The number of "development monks" is constantly increasing.

In political scene, external observers may expect more roles for Buddhist monks and lay leaders as they once saw during the period from 1973 to 1976. During those so-called flourishing democratic years, a group of young monks joined students, peasants, and workers demonstrating along the streets of Bangkok demanding human rights and justice. These observers may refer also to rebel leaders along the history of this country, most of whom were former monks and used Buddhist ideology to legitimize their actions against the rulers. However, these observations seem to be projections of the wishes of those who only look for public "events". One should pay attention also to facts of every day life that lie behind or beneath the struggles of the Buddhists in this country. Then one may see many forms of resistance of ordinary people, the poor, the grassroots, the unprivileged who form the majority of this society, against oppressions, on their turn, which may not appear that evil. These, rather, are experiences that needed a more serious consideration, reflection, and elaboration.

Buddhadasa has paved this new way for more than 50 years. His critical reflections are the most important elements for the renewal of Buddhism in this age. His criticism has been directed not only towards traditional and institutional Buddhism, ordinary and folk Buddhism as such, but also towards secular society. His way of thinking is a most appropriate framework for analysis.

What will be interesting should be the further reflection and application of this framework to the micro experiences of monks and lay Buddhists, who in various ways present their liberative experiences. Phra Rajavaramuni's *Thai Philosophy of Education* (TPE), Sulak Sivaraksa's *Religion and Development* (RD), and Dr. Prawase Wasi's *Buddhist Agriculture* (BA) and other works of these authors are examples of this critical reflection.

Dr. Prawase Wasi's reflection is based on the assumption that the basis of Thai society are "(1) Farmers who are the majority of the population. (2)

Buddhism" (BA. p.17) He states that, from Buddhist perspective, the five pillars of society are " (1) Spirit, mind or soul (2) Production patterns (3) A natural environmental balance, (4) Economic self-reliance (5) Community or social life." (BA. p.31) For him, the greatest resources in rural development are the monks, village wisdom, and local resources. These have been neglected by the government. Village intellectuals are not recognized of their potentiality. If they are given their due role, they will become "subjects" of development and not "objects" as they are today.

Buddhist agriculture, for Dr. Prawase, "is a way to solve problems from below...There is a range of benefits, economic, spiritual, organizational, social and environmental.." (p.35) It is a "holistic" approach in development. The insight of this has to come from concrete experiences of those who practise it in their life. In his introduction to *Religion in Changing Society, Buddhism, Reform and Role of Monks in Community Development in Thailand*, he wrote:

"Isolated materialistic development is disastrous. Human development has to come first. Spiritual development must have a place higher than purely materialistic development. Dhamma has to be spread in all its aspects...Buddhist Agriculture is used to describe ways of life based on spirituality, integrated farming, ecology and conservation, economic self-reliance and developing a community culture of mutual support. This leads to peaceful living, both within individual selves and peaceful coexistence in society and with the environment. The small scale successes of the Buddhist development described in this book are real. The new trend is small but is extremely relevant for world development...Buddhist Development is a new thinking for survival of humanity." (RCS. p.2)

The quotations are made as examples of critical reflection of a Buddhist in the Thai context today. Dr. Prawase, a medical doctor, but actively engaged in education and development, keeps on his contact with the grassroots, with whom he continues his reflection.

There are many relevant themes that are in actuality today that need further reflection. They are, for example, human rights, justice, development, education, children, women, and environment. The "loci" of these reflections should be the "praxis" or the lived experiences of the Buddhists in their actual context. This should not replace the body of Dhamma, but rather it presupposes and needs Dhamma. However, to be a critical reflection, there is a need to redefine Dhamma as Buddhadasa himself has done.

Ideologically, the world has become more and more united. However, it is "secular" ideology that dominates and unites the world. "Materialism",

embodied in economic and political ideologies is the principal one. The Buddhists, the Christians, and all religions must be united, learn from one another, and cooperate, if their message is to be meaningful and liberative for men and women in the world of constant transformation today.

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Abbreviations

- TL *Theology of Liberation, History, Politics, and Salvation*
by Gustavo Gutierrez, Orbis Book, Maryknoll, New York, 1973.
- MT *Minjung Theology People as the Subjects of History*
edited by the Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia, Zed Press, London, 1983.
- TPE *Thai Philosophy of Education* (in Thai Language)
Phra Rajavaramuni,
Kledthai, Bangkok, first edition March 1975.
- RD *Religion and Development* (in English)
Sulak Sivaraksa, first edition, Church of Christ in Thailand, 1976.
- BA "Buddhist Agriculture", by Prawase Wasi, in
Turning Point of Thai Farmers.
edited by Seri Phongphit and Robert Bennoun,
Mooban Press, Bangkok, 1988.
- RCS *Religion in Changing Society Buddhism, Reform and the Role of Monks in Community Development in Thailand*
Seri Phongphit, Arena Press, Hong Kong, 1988.

ON REINTERPRETING THE DHAMMA : TOWARDS AN ADEQUATE THAI SOCIAL ETHICS

If Siam stands	eternal,
We Thai will al-	so live;
But if Siam falls,	how can Thai be?
It's all as if	Thai name perished. ¹

The above poem expresses the ultimate concern for the Thai as Thai. As the ultimate concern, it aspires to articulate the Thai Ideal of nationhood or national identity. For King Wachirawudth, the author of the poem, the identity of the Thai nation involved the total unity of three symbols: *chat* (nation: the land and the people), *sasana* (religion: Buddhism), and *phra maha Kasat* (king). For him this threefold identity was the ultimate reality for which all true and patriotic Thais must be willing and proud to sacrifice even their lives in its defense, protection, and support. Defending and supporting this Ideal of Thainess was conceived of as the only source for lasting peace and honor. Because of its ultimate claim and power, commanding total allegiance and devotion from all Thai, the *chat-sasana-phra maha Kasat* trinity takes on a religious character. It is precisely this kind of "religion" that has served to constitute the Thai nationhood, to unite the Thai people, and to provide the Thai people with a sense of destiny. It is this reality that scholars such as Robert Bellah have called "civil religion."² And it is this reality which is meant here by "Thai Dhammocracy." And finally, it is this "Thai Dhammocracy" which we are attempting to retrieve and reconstruct in this article.

First, I shall briefly describe and evaluate a "typical" attempt to deal with the problem. This is the celebrated seminar on "Buddhism in Contemporary Thai Society" in Bangkok in August, 1969, under the joint sponsorship of the Siam Society and the Buddhist Association of Thailand. Second, I seek to retrieve and reconstruct the fundamental structure and intentionality of the traditional Thai Buddhist ideal social order, especially the *anachak* (temporal) dimension. This is in fact a retrieval of the fundamental intentionality of the ideal Buddhist kingship, since that was precisely the symbol of the Thai order throughout her long history. And in performing this task of hermeneutical reconstruction, I shall draw on the insights and accumulated wisdom of certain selected scholars as well as undertake a fresh reinterpretation of the sacred texts and religious and political symbols. Then finally, I shall conclude