

THE ASSIMILATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE THAI CULTURE

Philip J. Hughes

The anthropological theorist, Mary Douglas, has developed the Durkheimian thesis that certain aspects of religion and cosmology tend to reflect the social structures of the society in which they are found. She has argued that the type of cosmology in a society tends to correlate with the amount of pressure on individuals to conform to the wishes of social leaders or to general social expectations and regulations, and to the extent to which there is a shared system of classifications in the society. For example, Douglas suggests that in societies in which there is a strong emphasis on the position and role of the individual in the social system, and in which there is a rigid system of classification defining how the individuals are to view the world, the cosmology tends to be highly structured. The world is seen as morally just, in which individuals are invariably punished sooner or later for their misdeeds, and in which they are rewarded for their virtues. On the other hand, in societies in which the structures are loose, and there is a constant struggle for individual power, the cosmology tends to be seen as the open arena for the struggle of powers.

Douglas has argued that these basic cosmological ideas are absorbed by the child in socialization partly through the social control system as it operates through discipline in the family and the community. She has developed a principle originally formulated by Basil Bernstein:

Any (social) control system, since it has to be made reasonable (be justified, validated, or legitimated as Weber put it), must appeal to ultimate principles about the nature of man and of the cosmos. This applies even at the family level.¹

Thus, in the process of socialization, the child learns what are the primary evils to avoid and the primary virtues to emulate. These values are related to a conception of the social order, which is understood in terms of 'the nature of the world'.

Douglas's thesis contrasts with the popular idea that religions are major determiners of cosmology, suggesting instead that the form of religion and the construction of cosmology correspond to social structures. One might

deduce from this theory the hypothesis that within any one social structure, and for a particular position within that structure, one might expect to find similar cosmological forms, even for people of different religions. While Christianity and Buddhism, for example, give a very different content to cosmology, where they exist within one structure one might expect to find the forms of the cosmology to be similar, if the adherents hold similar social positions within that structure.

Douglas herself would not want to give unqualified support to such a deduction. Some religions tend to take a person out of one social context and into another. Religious sects may become independent sub-cultures. Within that context they develop their own internal social structures and corresponding cosmological views. Douglas discusses the Brethren sect as an example of this.²

While noting this possibility, it will be argued in this article that, despite differences of terminology and the explicit content of concepts, there are striking similarities between the central cosmological themes expressed in the beliefs of Thai Buddhists and Christians as found within the Thai social and cultural structure. These similarities support Douglas's thesis that social structure, rather than religion, is a major determiner of the structure of cosmology.

This article has arisen out of three years' research in Thailand on the religious beliefs and values of Thai Buddhists and Christians. A number of methods were used in the research. Apart from an extensive review of the anthropological literature on the area, numerous interviews were conducted with both Buddhists and Christians through the Chiang Mai and Lamphun provinces in northern Thailand. Some of these were unstructured, but most of them followed an interview schedule. The researcher attended both Christian and Buddhist ceremonies, recording and analysing rituals, sermons, and written literature. Three different questionnaires were used in the research. The major questionnaire was completed by nine hundred Buddhist and Christian tertiary students in northern Thailand, and also by some control groups of American students and missionaries.

In order to test the deducted hypothesis that two religions within one cultural setting will share a similar structure to their cosmology, it is necessary to analyse and compare the cosmological themes of each religion in the culture. This article will proceed with a discussion of the dominant cosmological themes in the Thai Buddhist culture. Then the major cosmological themes among Thai Christians will be compared with them.

COSMOLOGICAL BELIEFS IN THE THAI CULTURE

There are two clearly marked and distinguished aspects of Thai religion: Buddhism and animism. While ninety-five percent of Thai people claim to be

Buddhists, almost all Thai people also believe in spirits. Most houses and villages have spirit houses where local spirits are remembered and venerated. Such spirit houses may even be found in the grounds of Buddhist temples. Something of the extent of animistic practices is indicated in a comprehensive survey of Thai people. Thirty-nine percent said that they had made an offering to a spirit house in the last year. This percentage is not as high as those who had listened to a sermon in a Buddhist temple (seventy-five percent). However, it is interesting to note that the older people, the rural people, and the less educated people listened to sermons much more frequently than the younger people and Bangkok residents. On the other hand, the younger people, the more educated, and the urban Bangkok residents turned more frequently to the spirits. While women made more offerings to the spirits than men, men and women were equally involved in listening to sermons.³ Nevertheless, animism and Buddhism are not at all exclusive of each other in Thailand. Most people are involved in both Buddhist and animistic rites from time to time. Nor can they be clearly distinguished from each other. For many people, the Buddha and images of him have power similar to that of the spirits.

The analysis of the relationship between religion and social structure and cosmology in Thailand is complicated by the presence of these two streams of animism and Buddhism. These two aspects of religious life in Thailand are related to cosmological systems. Each of these systems is capable of existing independently, and could be used as a framework for explaining the nature of the universe and everything that happens in it. In as far as one system sees the universe as morally ordered and structured, and the other sees it as amoral, the two systems appear to be contradictory. Yet both systems exist in all parts of Thai society.

From one perspective, the universe is seen by Thai people as being hierarchically structured, an extension of the hierarchy they perceive in Thai society. L. M. Hanks, an American anthropologist who has studied Thai society, described this generalization of social structures to cosmic structures in Thai society.

The Thai perceive that all living beings stand in a hierarchy of varying ability to make actions effective and of varying degrees of freedom from suffering . . . Above man in shimmering space stand the angels and gods who, with a single word, can stop the course of rivers. Man, however, must dig and delve to turn a rivulet, feeble efforts that may be wrecked in a moment by a sudden freshet. But man's effectiveness in action and freedom from suffering exceed those of the animals standing beneath him on the hierarchy. Animals share with man a corporal existence limited to the surface of the earth, but man is somewhat more able to cope with rain and cold. While animals wander in search of food, man has learned to produce and store his, at least until the next harvest.⁴

This structured cosmos is seen as ordered morally by the Buddhist law of karma. The law of karma is a basic law of cause and effect, and is applied to the moral realm: 'A good cause invariably produces a good effect and a bad cause a bad effect.'⁵ Its essence is summed up in the popular phrase which every Thai person knows: 'Do good, receive good; do evil, receive evil'.⁶ This teaching of Buddhism is often portrayed in terms of a field in which one can sow seeds which will bear certain kinds of fruit. 'Evil seeds will bear evil fruit; good seeds will bear good fruit'.⁷ Or, to put it another way, Buddhism teaches that all of a person's actions will bear results comparable to those actions. Beings, be they spirits, gods or human beings, high in the cosmic hierarchy, are reaping the rewards of good actions. Animals and forms of life lower in the cosmic hierarchy are bearing the consequences of evil actions.

The law of karma is used as an incentive to 'do good'. People are taught that if one produces good karma, one will receive the rewards. This is interpreted in a personal fashion. The individual will experience the good results of his own actions. On the other hand, the law of karma can be used to explain the failures and disappointments a person experiences in life. It suggests that these must have been caused by his own evil deeds which were performed in the past, either in this life, or in previous existences. In this way, the law of karma enables people to see the universe as being morally just. Suffering and evil are explained as the just results of the evil actions of human beings, while the joys and pleasures of life are the results of meritorious acts.

Ideas about karma are used to justify social status and changes in it in this life. It is believed that a person receives his status in society, his power over other people, and his wealth because of his good deeds, mostly from past lives.⁸ This idea has been used by the ruling class to support its own social status and use of power.⁹ At the same time as giving a justification to the social hierarchy, the ideology of karma is also used to explain social mobility. One never knows, it is said, when one's store of bad karma will be used up, and one will strike lucky. Or, one's good karma may suddenly come to an end, and one will lose one's position.¹⁰

There is recent evidence to show that it is still generally accepted by most Thai people. In a comprehensive survey of Thai values and attitudes, Suntaree Komin and Snit Smuckarn put the following sentence to their sample of Thai people. 'I believe that in regard to what we did in the past, some day the consequences of those deeds will return'. Seventy-five percent of the sample agreed with the statement. Thirteen percent disagreed, and twelve percent said they did not know whether it was true or not. In the rural areas, belief in the statement was stronger: eighty-four percent were willing to affirm it.¹¹

Most Buddhist activities in Thailand are conceived in terms of the making

of merit, which can be considered as one particular application of the more general law of karma. One makes merit by doing good deeds, and particularly by engaging in religious activities such as by giving gifts to the temple.¹² One's balance of merit and demerit are thought to determine whether one goes to heaven at death, or to hell, and how long one stays there. It is also considered to affect what one's life will be like, and what status one will have, when one is re-born on earth.¹³

The good effects of merit can be found not only in one's status, in wealth and social position, but in many other smaller and more immediate ways in everyday life, it is believed. In the responses to a questionnaire, thirty-three percent of Buddhist tertiary students who responded indicated that they thought that making merit was appropriate in cases of sickness. Merit may also help one to win a lottery. It can help to ensure a good harvest.¹⁴

Concepts of evil in Thai culture also reflect this idea of a structured and moral universe. While the value of respect for authority maintains the social and cosmic hierarchy, disrespect is seen as a critical threat to it. In a questionnaire that was given to Thai students, a series of twenty-eight 'sins' were presented that the students had to rate their seriousness on a four point scale. The two 'sins' which were rated the most serious were disrespect for a Buddha image and disrespect for the monarchy.

Breaking the laws which maintain the order of the universe is also seen as very serious. In a second questionnaire, a number of 'evils' were presented to students for their ratings. The items which gained the highest ratings as 'evil' were 'breaking the laws of the government' and 'breaking the Dharma' (which could be interpreted as the laws of Buddhism), along with 'insincerity.' It is interesting that the traditional Buddhist evils of 'unsatisfactoriness', 'ignorance', and the 'flow of existence' were scored as 'not evil at all' by the majority of the respondents.

Douglas suggests that there is a tendency in this sort of society to attribute magical efficacy to symbolic acts.¹⁵ This tendency has been clearly documented in a study of Thai religion by B. J. Terwiel. He argues that many of the activities which the Buddhist monks perform are best understood in terms of magical efficacy. Within the debit and credit system of merit, for example, merit is made by the chanting of sermons. Listeners who make merit by listening, can make more merit by listening to several sermons at the same time.¹⁶ The sermons have often been in Pali, particularly in former years. Few monks, let alone the laity, have been able to understand them in terms of being able to translate them into Thai. Thus, the effects of listening cannot be conceived to come through the understanding. They are conceived as arising through the effects of the actions themselves.

For the purposes of relating cosmology to social structure, Douglas has

used a two-dimensional diagram, in terms of which she has classified social structures. The first dimension, represented by the horizontal axis in Figure 1, she calls 'group'. It refers to the experience of having pressure exerted on one by other members of the society to consent to their demands. At the centre of this dimension, where the vertical axis crosses the horizontal, the person is free from the pressure of others, but also exerts no pressure on others. To the right of the axis, there is strong pressure to conformity from the group on the individual. The individual to the left of the centre is in a position to exert pressure on others.¹⁷

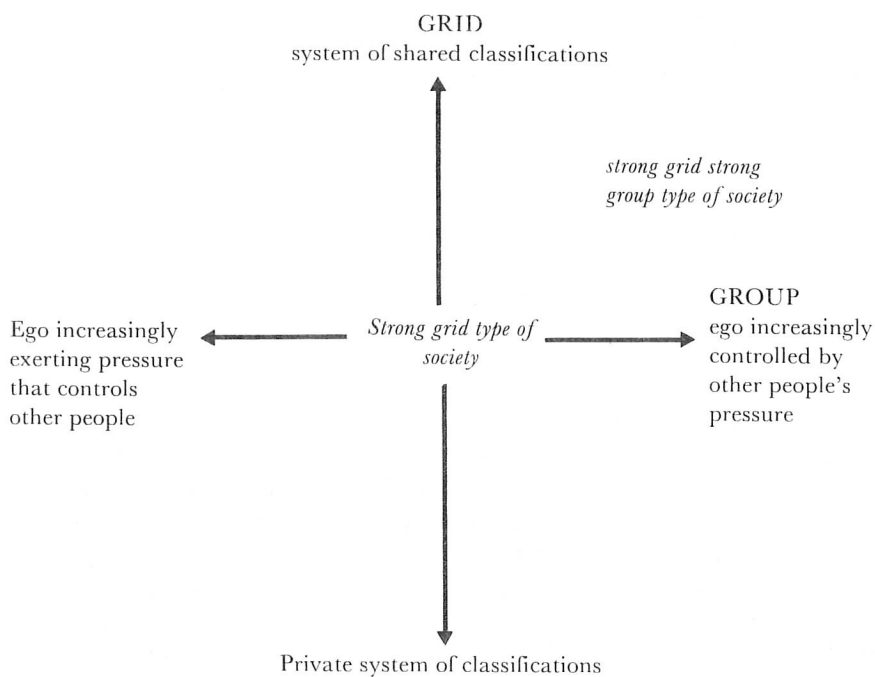


Figure 1. Dimensions of social structure identified for the purpose of comparing cosmologies with types of social structure. (Based on Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, diagram 4, p. 84.)

The other dimension, the vertical axis, relates to the symbolic system of classifications used in a society. Societies in which there is a strong system of shared classifications, in which there is a publicly accepted system for organizing most human experiences, would be placed high on the vertical

axis. At the other end of the spectrum are those causes in which private systems of classification dominate, and where there is innovation.

Douglas has suggested that societies in which there is a public system of rights and duties for every individual, in which conformity to the system is highly prized, would be placed in an area at the top right-hand side of the diagram. She has called this sort of society 'strong grid, strong group'. In such a society, there would be a strong emphasis on position within the society. Respect for position and its accompanying authority would be a prized virtue, and rejection of that a grave sin. In such a society, the universe would also be seen to be highly structured, working according to moral laws. Offenders against the universal structure would be punished. Those who obeyed its demands, fulfilling their roles within it, would receive their rewards.¹⁸

There are many aspects of Thai society which reflect the characteristics of 'strong grid and strong group', of a society in the top right segment of Figure 1. For example, linguistic structures in the Thai language reflect the strong emphasis on social position and the firm system of public classification. Every sentence in the Thai language expresses the public classification of social hierarchy. The use of pronouns in Thai depends partly on the familiarity one has with the person with whom one is speaking, and partly on one's relative social status.¹⁹ Even within the family, a strict sense of hierarchy is maintained. The primary distinction amongst siblings is not between males and females but between 'elders' and 'younger'. Brothers and sisters, and even friends, refer to each other and to themselves in terms of this distinction. There is a clear conception of corresponding roles and responsibilities. Elders are expected to be the leaders, to make the decisions, and to care for the younger, while the younger are expected to obey their elders.²⁰

The Thai education system tends to reinforce the social and cosmic hierarchy. The distinction between teachers and students reflects the general social distinction between elders and younger. The teacher has knowledge, which is graciously given to the students, as from an elder to a younger. As the student is filled with knowledge, so he becomes higher in social status. Most teaching is conducted by rote learning which gives no encouragement to originality and positively discourages creativity. It suggests that the students are empty vessels, to be filled by the knowledge that the teacher passes on to them.²¹ This emphasis on conformity to authority as against individual creativity, and the corresponding emphasis on a shared system of classification and rigid personal hierarchy, and the order of the cosmos, is expressed in many forms of Thai art, including painting.²² Thai classical dancing, also reflects the importance of passing on traditions, in contrast to developing creativity.²³

The distinctions in social hierarchy are indeed reflected in distinctions between the parts of the body in Thai culture. The head is considered to be the most sacred part. Thai people do not carry things on their heads for that reason. It is also considered insulting to have one's feet higher than the head of another person. Touching the head of another person is generally considered to be very insulting or demeaning. Even the hairdresser apologizes before cutting one's hair. An ultimate insult is to point to something, or even worse, to someone, with one's foot. The feet are very low in status. It is not only impractical not to remove one's shoes before entering a home, but it is also considered impolite.²⁵

The most dramatic expressions of this hierarchical structuring of society with its shared classifications of the social world and the pressure to conformity are found within the Sangha, the Buddhist monkhood. The monks wear identical robes, and shave their hair and eyebrows. This has the effect of depreciating their individuality. There is little place for the individual or creativeness in their rituals, many of which are learnt by rote in Pali. They usually do not learn the meaning of these chants unless they reach high levels within the Sangha. Although occasionally a monk will preach a sermon that he himself has prepared, or will preach extemporarily, most sermons are written. Many of those used are issued by the government department of religious affairs.

The Buddhist monks maintain a rigid hierarchical structure. The most senior monks have positions most close to the Buddha image in the temple during services. The most junior monks are farthest away from the Buddha image and nearest the lay-people. The order of seniority is maintained outside the temples. When the monks go to collect their meals each day from the lay-people, they walk in single file. The most senior monk goes first, and others follow in strict order of seniority.

These, then, are just some examples of the ways in which Thai society reflects Douglas's concept of a strong grid, strong group society. The language, the education system, and particularly the Buddhist order provide some examples of the expression of a clearly defined social hierarchy and system of classification, particularly of persons and roles. The social hierarchy has been extended into a cosmic hierarchy, and is legitimized through the law of karma and the concept of merit, central themes in the popular understanding of Buddhism.

Yet, strong grid and group are only one side of Thai society. There is another side, which, in many ways contrasts with the tight social structures and rigid hierarchy. Many Thai anthropologists have noted the loose structure of Thai society, and the lack of pressures to conformity.²⁶ They have noted the individualism in Thai society, and the value placed on it by Thai people.²⁷ While there is an outward conformity expressed in politeness

and respect for position, this is not always matched, nor expected to be matched, by obedience.²⁸ This second side of Thai society has a number of characteristics which correspond to the strong grid type of society which Douglas places in the upper half of the diagram, but spread across the central vertical axis.

Douglas describes this sort of society as one in which there is a constant struggle for personal power. No one person stays in a position of eminence over others. There are a number of Big Men who are constantly competing for power. They are motivated by the desire for success; and the greater their success, the greater their influence over their followers. Douglas says that 'the Big Men live in a world of noble pacts, hard bargains, dastardly betrayals and revenges'.²⁹ The cosmology of such a society tends to be amoral. It is not highly structured, and is not ordered in respect to moral laws. Rather it is an environment which the leaders see themselves as being able to manipulate. It is an arena in which amoral power has control.

The struggle for power in Thai society is clearly visible in the government activities. There has been a constant and on-going struggle for power between civilian politicians, bureaucrats, and army officers. This struggle has manifested itself, among other ways, in a series of coups, many of which have involved fighting between the followers of the various factions. While the locus of these struggles for power has appeared in the parliament since the advent of constitutional government, it has been argued that such struggles for power have been a feature of Thai society since its emergence about one thousand years ago.³⁰

These struggles for power are not only to be found at the highest echelons of society. Within the rural areas, the bigger farmers and landowners struggle for power with the local government. With increasing use of higher agricultural and household technology, a capitalist class is emerging and is also entering into the struggle.³¹ These struggles for power were also evident within organizations and institutions, such as schools and colleges.

Individuals compete for power in many ways, but particularly through the Thai system of patronage. People seek power, and its accompanying security, prestige, and material benefits through developing relationships of clientship with those who are higher up the social hierarchy than themselves. Peasants attach themselves to wealthy land-owners by offering their services, and serving with obedience and loyalty. In return they expect their patrons to care for them and their families and to give them benefits.³² Business people may find outlets for their business by seeking patronage. Teachers at a college may cultivate the personal patronage of college administrators through loyal, obedient service as one way of seeking promotion.

People also seek greater power by increasing the number of people who may be considered to be their clients. These clients are those who look to

them for patronage and who can be called upon for loyal service. The patron may increase the number of his clients through his kindness, and through the benefits he is able to give.³³ The Thai social hierarchy may be rigid in its classifications, but, particularly through the patronage system, there is a constant movement of people on the social ladder.

A number of anthropologists have noted the individualism of Thai society. Herbert Phillips, an anthropologist and psychologist, came to the conclusion that Thai people did not generally strongly identify with the community as a whole. The only major communal activities were religious activities and reciprocal work groups for rice transplanting and harvesting, and that people entered into these for rewards which were strictly personal. While the nuclear family was the primary focus of interpersonal relationships, even this could disintegrate comparatively easily. Phillips noted that,

Individuals of all ages recurrently move in and out of families; families splinter, in full or in part, sometimes permanently, but more frequently to be formed again with the same or new members.³⁴

Phillips considered that this flux was easily tolerated. From this perspective, Thai society appears as a very loose collection of individuals, struggling for personal power, prestige, and material benefits.

Douglas suggests that in a strong grid type of society, in which there is a constant struggle for power among individuals, the world will tend to be seen as a morally neutral, technical system. It will appear to be vulnerable to exploitation, manipulatable by straight-forward rules. Religion will therefore be a technology for overcoming risk. Moral feedback in the system will not be expected.

Corresponding to this second side of Thai society, there is also a second side to Thai religion. It is found most clearly and centrally, but not exclusively, in Thai animism. People seek the patronage of the spirits in ways similar to those in which they seek the patronage of people higher up the social ladder. They seek the help and support of spirits for being successful in business for passing examinations, for developing relationships with human patrons, for finding spouses, and for good luck in gambling. The help of spirits may also be sought to avoid road accidents, personal accidents, and danger from other people. The aid of spirits may also be sought for healing in times of sickness. Spirits are blamed, at times, for misfortunes, for sickness, accidents, failure of harvests or business arrangements, and personal misadventures. Many Thai people also seek the aid of magical types of power in a large variety of techniques and objects.

In many respects the appeals to the spirits reflects the sort of religion Douglas associates with the 'strong grid' sort of society. These religious

practices are techniques for overcoming risks, and for attaining benefits. Animism provides the individual with a range of powers to which that person may refer to help him or her achieve success and to overcome risks, whether in business, farming, relationships and courtship, study or travel.

There are few hints of any moral obligations associated with the spirits. Indeed, their power is not seen in moral terms at all. The powers of the spirits are available equally to the thief and to the person trying to protect his possessions against theft. The benefits or harm that result from the use of these powers depends partly on how well the ritual is performed in which the spirit is appealed to, and on the whim of the supernatural agent involved.³⁵ The appeal to spirits and magic is *ad hoc*. They are approached anew in each situation. Past experience is no guarantee of success, but there is always the possibility of benefits.

It is interesting to note that the body symbols associated with animism contrast starkly with those associated with Buddhism. The spirit mediums are usually women, although they sometimes confuse sexual categories by dressing in male clothes. The ceremonies in which they are involved often include the use of alcohol, prohibited in Buddhism. While the spirit mediums dance, the Buddhist monks remain almost motionless while they chant or meditate.³⁶ The spirit mediums often have long hair, while the Buddhist monks shave not only their heads but their eyebrows as well.

The spirit world is part of a cosmos perceived as an arena in which naked powers compete for pre-eminence. It is a matter of luck or fortune and one's own cunning use of these powers by which one achieves one's position in society and attains one's personal goals. What happens is the result of the competition of agents of power and of their irrational whims. One's best course of action is to try to align oneself and to appease the most powerful patrons that are willing to accept one as a client.

Thus, there are two cosmologies in Thai culture which can be used to explain events. The first sees the cosmos as morally ordered according to the law of karma, popularly expressed as 'Do good, receive good; do evil, receive evil'. The second sees the universe as the arena of competing a-moral powers with unpredictable results. The best course of action is to align oneself with the highest power with which one will be accepted.

The problem of how these two sides of Thai society are related has been at the heart of much of the literature on Thai culture. The problem has arisen in terms of the distinction between 'power' and 'merit' in understanding the dynamics and justifications of the social order. It has appeared in the debate between those maintaining that the Thai social structure is 'loose' and those emphasizing the position and hierarchy in Thai society. It has appeared as anthropologists have tried to unravel the connections and relationships between Thai Buddhism and Thai animism.

Some anthropologists and commentators have suggested that one particular pole is the major one. Others have tried to reduce one pole to the other.³⁷ Some have suggested that one pole is dominant in urban society, while another is dominant in rural society. It is not the purpose of this paper to comment further on the relationship between the two poles, except to say that both can be found throughout Thai society, rural and urban.

THAI CHRISTIANITY

If it were true that religion is a major determiner of cosmology, one would expect the cosmology of the Thai Christians to reflect that of the missionaries who taught them about Christianity. On the other hand, if Douglas's thesis is correct, that social structure is a major determiner of the structure of cosmology, then one would expect to find parallels in structure between the cosmology of Thai Christians and Buddhists. The complexities of the Thai cosmology with its karmatic aspect and its a-moral power aspect make the situation particularly interesting. It will be argued that the two cosmological themes found in Thai Buddhism and animism are both also found expressed as major themes in Thai Christianity.

Superficially, it would appear that the expressions of Thai Christianity in Thailand reflect the influences of the Western missionaries. There has been little attempt to use Thai cultural forms or patterns in worship and other church activities. In 1931, Carle C. Zimmerman, an American sociologist wrote a report on the Protestant Thai church. He argued that psychologically, the church was foreign to the culture. The literature, music, art and architecture, and even many of the social customs practised in the church were foreign. He argued that the absence of concrete symbols in worship, and the very method of a confronting, aggressive, crusading type of Christianity were incompatible with the Thai culture.³⁸

Similar comments still could be made about the Protestant church in Thailand in 1982. The orders of service, for example, were very similar to those used in the West. Out of approximately 247 hymns in the hymnbook of the Church of Christ in Thailand, the united Protestant denomination, only eleven were written by Thai people, and about 95 percent were translations from Western hymnbooks.

The practices of the Thai Protestant churches have been imported by the missionaries, most of whom have been American Presbyterians. This is consonant with the attitude of the large majority of these missionaries that they were introducing a completely new religious system. They were not attempting to add new elements to traditional religious ideas, or to help develop traditional patterns. Christianity has been introduced as a completely new way of life. It was intended to replace Buddhism and its ideology

of karma and merit. It was also intended to replace animism. It has been the general practice to discipline, sometimes with excommunication, any Christian who participated in animistic or Buddhist rites.³⁹ It was not considered inappropriate, then, that the forms of the activities of the church should be completely new to the culture. The missionaries used the forms and patterns they knew from their home churches in the West.⁴⁰

The missionaries went to considerable lengths, particularly prior to World War 1, to take their converts out of Thai culture. The missionaries established their own school system, and the children of Thai Christian converts were strongly encouraged to board at these schools from an early age. The missionaries also encouraged the formation of a sub-culture through employing a considerable percentage of the Christian converts in their own Christian institutions. Between 1910 and 1915, there were at least several hundred people in the direct employ of the mission in northern Thailand. The larger circle of missionary dependants, both direct and indirect, would have run into thousands. The total number of Christians in northern Thailand in those years was around five thousand.

The missionary emphases in the proclamation of Christianity were, in many respects, dualistic.⁴¹ The world outside the church was painted as being thoroughly evil and sinful. Becoming a Christian meant a radical change of life, described as receiving salvation. Central to the missionary proclamation was the claim that God has provided a means for dealing with the problem of sin through the death of Christ on the cross. Salvation was available through forgiveness of sin. In practice, Christians were seen as those within the confines of the church. The boundaries of membership were drawn very distinctly. Members of the churches were not allowed to have anything to do with Buddhist or animistic institutions, ceremonies or rituals on pain of excommunication.⁴²

Yet, despite the superficial adherence to missionary patterns in the churches, and despite the tendencies for the Christians to form a sub-culture, the forms of the cosmologies of the Thai Christians continued to reflect those of the Buddhist and animistic culture.

One major theme in the Thai Christian understanding of their religion was that Christianity is a way of life. It is a series of teachings about how one should live. If one follows that way of teaching, it is said, then one will reap the rewards for doing so. This reflects the perception of the cosmos as being morally ordered. In the words of the Thai people, it is another expression of the idea 'Do good, receive good; do evil; receive evil'. Indeed, in responding to one questionnaire, Christian students affirmed even more strongly than Buddhist students that if one does good, one will receive good, and if one does evil, one will receive evil.⁴³

One northern Thai Christian explained that the way of Christianity is

higher than that of the Buddhists just as the way of the monk is higher than that of a lay-person within Buddhism. The Christian has more rules to keep and a higher standard of morality to maintain than the Buddhist. One can change from the lower standards of Buddhism to the higher standards of Christianity through repentance and acceptance of God's forgiveness for the failures and inadequacies of the lower way. After that, one is expected to keep the higher way, with God's help.

Further evidence that this theme was central in the way of thinking among Thai Christians was found in the sermons they preached. The theme of doing good and reaping the benefits, or doing evil, and reaping the consequences, was a major motif in almost every sermon recorded for the research. It was often couched in terms of following the will of God. Ninety-three percent of sermons recorded had to do with 'doing God's will'. Preachers called people to live better lives, and reminded them that they would reap the consequent blessings. In contrast, out of the thirty sermons recorded, only six as much as mentioned Christ's saving death. The idea of atonement was never mentioned or expounded in any sermon.

In one questionnaire given to Thai Christians, Thai Buddhists and missionaries there was a question on why religion was important. Out of ten possibilities, the missionaries scored 'forgiveness of sin' most highly. For the Thai Christians, it was sixth in importance, and for Thai Buddhists it was tenth. One of the chief reasons given by both Christian and Buddhist students for the importance of religion was that religions teach one how one should live. In this same questionnaire respondents were asked what would most help human beings to overcome the problems of their predicament. The problem was not seen as one of a radical need for salvation through forgiveness. Nor was the basic human problem one of ignorance, for people have the Christian and Buddhist teaching which describe how they should live. Both Thai Christians and Buddhists agreed that the major problem was one of self-control in following these religious teachings.

Most of the northern Thai Christians believed that one would be rewarded for following the teaching of Christianity not only in this life, but also in the next. They generally affirmed that if one did good, one would go to heaven, and if one did evil, one would go to hell. A few people did want to qualify this. Thirteen percent said that this only applied to non-Christians, and Christians who had faith would go to heaven irrespective of their deeds. Nevertheless, the dominant attitude seemed to parallel the Buddhist beliefs about the short-term and long-term effects of merit-making.

The terms for karma and merit are generally regarded by the Thai Protestant Christians as distinctively Buddhist ideas. In the interviews in the churches, a number of pastors and elders said that they could make no comment about 'karma' and 'merit' because they were Buddhist terms. Some

were willing to offer interpretations of karma and merit in Christian terms, however. For example, a number suggested that merit was similar to 'dedicating one's treasure', a term used for the church offerings, and more generally for helping other people.

The content of the Christians' beliefs is somewhat different from that of the Buddhists. The actual rules describing what is good and what is not, particularly in relation to religious observances are different, and their sources in religious tradition are different. The terminology in which the cosmology is described is different. Nevertheless, the general principles underlying Thai Buddhist concepts of karma and merit-making are generally affirmed. The Christians are just as sure as the Buddhists that if one does good, one will receive good, and if one does evil, one will receive evil.

This theme of Thai Christianity contrasts with the emphases of the missionaries. They have consistently argued against the conceptions of karma and merit at several points. Firstly, they have said, it does not take sin sufficiently seriously. And it does not provide the radical remedy required for forgiveness. Secondly, karma does not lead to a high morality because it is based on the idea that one does good because of what one gets out of it. Missionaries have argued that Christianity would lead to a new altruism that the ideology of merit did not produce. Good actions would be performed out of a love for the other person.⁴⁴

The contrast between the beliefs of the missionaries and those of the Thai Christians is particularly striking in respect to the concept of salvation. In interviews conducted in northern Thai churches, elders and pastors were asked what they understood by the term 'salvation'. There was a wide variety of answers indicating some confusion about the term. As one Thai Christian student at the Thailand Theological Seminary wrote,

This word [salvation] does not make sense to most Thai Christians, even to the writer himself who was born in a Thai Christian family. Salvation is of no interest at all; what is expected in a Christian life is the hope of a future life, a life after death, a life with Christ in Heaven if we walk carefully with him in the present. That means if we keep morals and follow them carefully, trying to do only good things. This idea is also possessed by a large number of Thai Christians.⁴⁵

The idea that Christianity is a system of teaching has not won converts from Buddhism. While some may have been convinced that it is a 'higher' system, few have felt the need for such. There are, within Buddhism, various levels of 'doing good'. The ordinary Buddhist layman has five rules to keep, the novice and the nun have ten, and the monk has two hundred and twenty-seven which he is rewarded for keeping.

The major attraction to Christianity for those who have been converted

has been the 'power' they have seen displayed in it. The major movements to Christianity, particularly in the north of Thailand, where the strongest Christian communities are found, occurred prior to 1915. It seems that most of the people who turned to Christianity did so because they saw God as having great power, greater than that of the local spirits.

There were some occasions when the local spirits were seen as malevolent and oppressive, when simple acts of placation were not enough to satisfy them. It was on these occasions that the transfer of allegiance to the higher and always beneficent Spirit of Christianity could be experienced as a real liberation. The two types of occasions were when the spirits were understood to be the causes of sickness, and when people were unable to control their spirits and were accused of witchcraft.

The effectiveness of the medical work in evangelism was frequently noted by the early missionaries. The superior power to heal was seen as demonstrating that the missionaries had access to a power superior to that of the local spirits. L.J. Curtis, one of the missionaries, wrote,

It is impossible to estimate the power for good of the medical work, for there is no way of reckoning the conversions resulting there from. Certain it is that it is one of the most efficient agencies in planting the gospel in the Laos country [Northern Thailand], for it breaks down the universal belief in the spirits.⁴⁶

From 1911 to 1913 there was a great epidemic of malaria in northern Thailand. It was accompanied by famine. Dr McKean, one of the missionary doctors, tells that, at first, people made a lot of offerings to the local spirits. But these did not help. The epidemic continued, and the famine grew more severe. The people became poorer through the cost of the offerings. Finally, as a last resort, many tried the Christian medicines which evangelists distributed, and turned to the Christian God.⁴⁷ Large numbers of people became Christians at this time, some records indicating as many as two thousand in one small part of the north of Thailand alone.

The missionaries helped a significant number of people who had been accused of witchcraft. If someone became ill in a village, it was common practice to call in a spirit doctor. He would then go through a ceremony in which the sick person had to call out the name of the spirit causing the sickness. The person who was responsible for that spirit could then be identified. In some cases, the homes of those people, and all their possessions, were burnt to the ground, and they were ostracized from the community. Other villages would not accept them because they were considered to be dangerous. Many such people found shelter and help from the missionaries, who were not afraid of the spirits. Some of these people came to believe that Christ was more powerful than the spirits and could release them from the

curse of the spirits who had been blamed for their misfortune. Others were even able to avoid some of the ostracism by publicly cutting all connections with the spirits and by placing themselves under what was generally recognized as the higher power of Christianity.⁴⁸

Help given to people accused of witchcraft was quite significant in the early growth of the church. Through the accusation of witchcraft, one missionary said, 'the devil has over-reached himself and unwittingly driven hundreds, possibly thousands, to Christ'.⁴⁹

This theme of the power of God, which was so significant in early conversions, has continued to be an important theme in Thai expressions of Christianity. God continues to be understood as a powerful and beneficent spirit patron. Most Thai Christians believe that he gives blessings to those who seek his help in prayer. Like the spirits, it is considered that he may cause sickness sometimes, and even such occurrences as road accidents. He does this, they say, to teach people. But like the spirits, God can also cure sickness, and protect people when they are travelling.

One of the major resources used by the Thai Christians when facing problems is prayer. In prayer, they seek the help of the beneficent power of God. As with the spirit patrons, the Thai people do not expect God's blessings to be granted on the basis of ethical principles. One does not need to earn special blessings by good deeds. Many Thai Christians believe that God will give blessings to all who come to him in prayer and believe in his power and beneficence.

While God is a beneficent spirit patron, he differs from other patrons in that his power is considered to be very much greater, both in scope, and in the fact that it is not limited to particular geographical areas. On the other hand, there is a tendency for his greatness to make God remote. Special language is used to speak to God and about him, the same language as is used for royalty in Thailand.

Within the Thai conceptual framework, God can also be compared to a king, who is, in the Thai social system, the highest human patron. Like the ideal king or patron, God has infinite merit. He is all good, and all powerful, and is thus able amply to bless his subjects. Both spirit and royal patronage are examples of what one commentator on Thai culture, Norman Jacobs, has called 'Thai patrimonialism'. What Jacobs says of patrimonialism within the Thai political structure applies very well to the way in which Thai Christians tend to view to God.

Thai patrimonialism is paternalistic; its rulers are viewed as fathers. For example, the king is the father of "his" people (ph๑๑ khun). Ideally, the paternal father punishes his wards when they are naughty and rewards them with prebends when they are upright; he receives

obedience and respect in return for dispensation of tangible, material benefits. . .

Thai patrimonialism is benevolent; the patrimonial leader, above all else, must be compassionate and understanding to those below him because the client's fate is in the grace of his hands. Benevolence refers both to the grant of material favours (positive) and to the client's ability to live in peace with a minimum of patronal demands imposed upon him (negative). Although modern patrons tend to stress responsibilities to clients, as is typical of patrimonialism in general, whether the positive or the negative element will be stressed at a particular time depends on the patron's personal predilections rather than on any formal statutes defining patron-client relationships.

Although it is neither absolute or despotic, Thai patrimonialism is autocratic . . . Arbitrary decision making by superiors not only has been accepted but is expected.⁵⁰

For the Thai Christians, God's love is his benevolence, which is demonstrated in the blessings which he, as a father, gives to his children. These blessings include prosperity, health, and protection. In return, his children believe that they must show him respect in worship, and obedience by following his will.

The word used in Thai for 'God' has two parts. The first part is 'phra' which refers to the idea of 'holy power' or 'sacredness'.⁵¹ It is a word used for Buddhist monks, and is part of the words used for the Buddha and the King. The second part of the word for God is 'chau'. This is the word used for 'lord' both in the sense of the old aristocratic lords of feudal Thailand, and of the spirit lords who come to help people through their spirit medium.⁵² The same word 'lord' is used of the spirit of an area of land who inhabits a spirit house.

The two parts of the word for God, 'phra-chau' are used together in the title for the king who is the 'head lord of the land', and in the word for the Buddha. So, for the Christians, God is a holy, powerful, benevolent Lord. He is the ideal patron spirit and king. His power is unlimited, and his love and benevolence is very great to those who respect and obey him.

One contrast between the Thai Christians and Thai Buddhists is that there appears to be comparatively little use of magic or rituals among Thai Christians. Occasionally, the researcher heard references to acts such as the placing of Bibles under the pillows of the sick, but this did not seem to be common. Many Christians wore crosses around their necks, and some were willing to compare these with Buddhist amulets. Yet, in conversation about them, Christians emphasized that these amulets only symbolized the personal power of God who was the one who would protect them. They did not believe that the symbols had power in themselves. For the Christians, as

distinct from many Buddhists, power was seen to reside in an anthropomorphic and personal agent, virtually to the exclusion of magically conceived objects or techniques.

The belief in God as a powerful spiritual patron reflects the same cosmological structure expressed in Thai animism. Power is the basic theme of the cosmos, and everything that happens is dependent on the inter-play of agents of power. The future is unpredictable for human beings, for it depends on the whims of supernatural agents. The cosmos is not morally structured, for neither the Christian God nor the spirits are bound to give blessings only in return for good deeds. Christians do not expect that God will only answer the prayers of those who are good, any more than the Buddhists/animists believe that the spirits will only help those who have done good.

While there are some aspects of this understanding of God shared by the missionaries, there are also significant differences. God's power has been seen by them as something rational, predictable and stable. It is revealed, for them, in the laws of science, rather than in the unexpected. For example, they saw it demonstrated in their medical practices, but the effectiveness of their medicine depended upon scientific understanding, rather than on the personal whim of a supernatural agent.

From the practices of Thai Christians, the common themes in sermons, from interviews, discussions, and responses to questionnaires, it was evident that the central themes of Thai Christianity were not those of the missionaries, but those of Thai culture. The idea of salvation from sin, the theme of most of the proclamations of the missionaries has not become central in Thai conceptions. Rather, the major themes are those which correspond to the major themes in the Thai culture. There is the karmatic idea that religion teaches one how to do good, and those who obey its teachings will receive the benefits of doing so. The second theme corresponds to that of Thai animism and the system of patronage, in which God is the great, powerful, and beneficent spirit patron who is willing to help those and give benefits to those who seek his assistance.

CONCLUSIONS

It does seem that there is evidence in the similarity of the major cosmological themes in Thai Buddhism and animism on the one hand, and in Thai Christianity on the other, to support the hypothesis of Mary Douglas that the structure of cosmology is determined by social structure rather than by religion. Two religions, very different in their background, history, and social contextual origins, have taken on similar forms within the one social structural context.

The evidence is strengthened a little by the fact that the major emphasis of

the missionaries who brought Christianity to Thailand has not become a major theme in Thai Christianity. While the concept of salvation would not be denied by Thai Christians, it has not generally been understood, or assimilated into the ways in which their religious life functions.

There are other ways in which these results could be explained or interpreted. On the level of cognition, one would expect people to understand ideas which they could fit into prior conceptual frameworks. Thus, the concept of God would be understood in terms of the general patterns for understanding supernatural beings, their power and their beneficence.⁵³ What could not be understood in terms of those prior frameworks would tend to be ignored.

The evidence here, however, points a little beyond mere assimilation to what could be understood. The major themes in the Thai expressions of Christianity have not been simply selected from the variety of themes presented by the missionaries. Rather, there has been a transformation of what missionaries have taught that does not directly reflect what the missionaries originally said. This has occurred despite the attempts by the missionaries to develop a specialized Thai Christian terminology for Christian concepts, and despite all the pressures to form a Christian sub-culture.

In addition, it is significant that the major themes in Thai Christianity are not just themes within Thai culture, but are the major cosmological themes of Thai culture. And Christianity has not taken up just one of the major themes, but both of them have found their parallels in Thai Christianity. The ways in which religion is understood, and in which it functions in the lives of the people is very similar for Thai Buddhists and Thai Christians.

The theories of Douglas suggest one possible line of explanation. If the social structures must be made reasonable by the appeal to the structure of the cosmos, then the form of the social structure will determine the form of the cosmos. The child will absorb a certain picture of the cosmos as he or she experiences social control and learns a justification for that control. These forms transcend terminology and the particular contents of religious ideas, because they reflect types of social structures and patterns of social control.

Both Buddhism and Christianity exist within the Thai culture and in a context of similar social structures and patterns of control. Both Christian and Buddhist children learn, from an early age, to respect those who are higher than they in the cosmic hierarchy. They learn that everyone has a position within that hierarchy as they learn to speak Thai and use the words which indicate position correctly. The importance of position is further emphasized through the school system. Children are also taught some justification for this hierarchy. For the Buddhists, it is explained in terms of some people having more merit than others. For the Christians, it is

explained in terms of some people being better people than others. The children are further encouraged to be good by being told that they will be rewarded if they are obedient.

Children will also learn as they get older that if they want to get on in the world, they must cultivate good relations with those in power. Children of Buddhist parents learn that one of the resources in life is to appeal to the spirits for help in certain situations. In similar situations, Thai Christian children are taught to pray to God for help. Some of the unexpected events in life are explained to the Buddhist children in terms of the arbitrary powers of the spirits, or, to the Christians in terms of unquestionable actions of God. In this way, similar social structures and ways of dealing with the world give rise to similar forms of cosmology, with contents varying according to the particular religion. Thus, Christianity in Thailand comes to perform similar functions within Thai culture to those performed by Buddhism and animism, and takes on corresponding forms.

Themes in both Christianity and Buddhism which do not fit the demands of the social and cosmological structure have not been taken up. The Buddhist concept of nirvana has very little significance for most Thai Buddhists just as the concept of salvation from sin has little significance for most Thai Christians.

The two cosmological forms in Thai culture do seem to reflect two aspects of Thai social structure. The karmatic theme reflects the emphasis on position and hierarchy in Thai society. The 'power' theme reflects the individualistic search for power through attachment to patrons and the unpredictability of the help of those agents. How one can explain the apparent contradictions between the two aspects of Thai society and cosmology is not at all clear. It is not fully clear if some social groups tend to use one schema more than others, and if so, which groups. It is not clear when one individual uses one schema to explain events, and when that individual will use the other, or the extent to which both may be combined in some way. The continuing debate among anthropologists and sociologists suggests that they have not reached satisfactory conclusions. In the light of this debate it is interesting to note that both of these aspects of Thai cosmology appear again, with similar contradictions, within Thai expressions of Christianity. This finding adds support to the contention that both aspects are important through most levels and parts of Thai society. The duality of cosmological forms does pose possible problems for the theories of Douglas and may require some amendment to those theories in that social structure may not be as unitary as her theories suggest.

The primary application that Douglas has for her theories in *Natural Symbols* to the conflict between priests and Irish Catholic lay-people in London is equally relevant to the Thai situation. The missionaries and the

Thai Christians have not fully understood each other. The theories of Douglas suggest some causes for the problems in communication. Theological educators will need to pay more attention to the social structures out of which their students come.

NOTES

- 1 Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, London: Penguin, 2nd edition, 1973, p. 80.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 140–144.
- 3 Suntaree Komin and Snit Smuckarn, *Thai Values and Value Systems, A Survey Instrument*, Bangkok: Nida, 1979, [In Thai], p. 303 ff.
- 4 L.M. Hanks, "Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order", in Clark, D. Neher, editor, *Modern Thai Politics*, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1976; reprinted from the *American Anthropologist*, 64:6, 1962, pp. 107–108.
- 5 Sunthorn Na-Rangsi, *The Buddhist Concepts of Karma and Rebirth*, Bangkok: Mahamakut Press, 1976, p. 51.
- 6 K. Kingshill, *Ku Daeng, The Red Tomb: A Village Study in Northern Thailand, A.D. 1954–1974*, 3rd edition, Bangkok: Suriyaban, 1976, pp. 12–13.
- 7 See, for example, the sermon 'On Evil', recorded by Kingshill, pp. 341–345.
- 8 Discussed in L.M. Hanks.
- 9 Charoenkiat Thanasukthaworn, 'Religion and the Thai Political System', *Social Science Review* (1977) pp. 135–136.
- 10 H.J. Rubin and L.S. Rubin, 'The Function of Liminal Events in the Succession to a Position of Power: the Transfer of the District Officer in Thailand', *American Ethnology*, 2:2, May 1975, gives a good example of this.
- 11 Suntaree Komin and Snit Smuckarn, p. 249.
- 12 For a discussion of the means of making merit among Thai villagers, see B.J. Terwiel, *Monks and Magic: An Analysis of Religious Ceremonies in Central Thailand*, Bangkok: Craftsman Press, 1975, pp. 240–244.
- 13 A number of anthropologists have reported such beliefs among Thai villagers, including, K. Kingshill, p. 233.
- 14 Terwiel summarizes the role of merit in the thinking of the Thai farmer on p. 273.
- 15 Douglas, p. 103.
- 16 Reported also by Kingshill, p. 154.
- 17 Douglas, p. 83.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 86–87.
- 19 Joseph R. Cooke, a linguist, has listed twenty-seven words used in the Thai language as first person pronouns. See Joseph R. Cooke, *Pronominal Reference in Thai, Burmese and Vietnamese*, Berkeley, University of California. Publications in Linguistics 52. 1968, pp. 11–15.
- 20 See S.H. Potter, *Family Life in a Northern Thai Village*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. 39. That these expectations still exist was confirmed in my own interviews.
- 21 See, for example, the comments of the anthropologist, Jack M. Potter, *Thai Peasant Social Structure*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976, p. 30.
- 22 See, for example, John P. Ferguson and Christina B. Johannsen, 'Modern Buddhist Murals in Northern Thailand: A Study of Religious Symbols and Meaning', *American Ethnology*, 3:4, November 1976.

- 23 Dhanit Yupho, *The Preliminary Course of Training in Thai Theatrical Art*, Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, Thailand, 1971.
- 24 Douglas, pp. 98–100.
- 25 Saad Chaiwan, *The Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand*, Bangkok: Suriyaban, 1975, pp. 6–7.
- 26 See, for example, the debate in Hans-Dieter Evers, editor, *Loosely Structured Social Systems: Thailand in Comparative Perspective*, Yale, Yale University Press, 1969.
- 27 Suntaree Komin and Snit Smuckarn, pp. 98–99.
- 28 See discussion in Steven I. Piker, *An Examination of Character and Socialization in a Thai Peasant Community*, Ph.D., University of Washington, 1964, pp. 48–50.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 30 S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror, World Renouncer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 488.
- 31 Niels Mulder, *Everyday Life in Thailand: An Interpretation*, Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1979, p. 13.
- 32 S.K.M. Calavan, *Aristocrats and Commoners in Rural Northern Thailand*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Illinois, 1974 discusses the traditional 'feudal' patterns, and how the patterns have been extended and adapted to employee/employer relationships in rural city life.
- 33 The classic description of the Thai patronage system is that of L.M. Hanks, 'The Thai Social Order', in G.W. Skinner and A.T. Kirsch, editors, *Change and Persistence in Thai Society*, Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- 34 H.P. Phillips, *Thai Peasant Personality: The Patterning of Interpersonal Behaviour in the Village of Bang Chan*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970, p. 29.
- 35 S. Piker, 'The Relationship of Belief Systems to Behaviour in Rural Thai Society', *Asian Survey*, 8:5, 1968, p. 388.
- 36 See the description of a spirit ceremony in a village in northern Thailand, in Kingshill, pp. 237–8.
- 37 For example, Terwiel argues that Buddhism exists in rural Thailand in so far as it has been assimilated to animistic patterns of belief and practice. B.J. Terweil, 'A Model for the Study of Thai Buddhism', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 35:3, 1976, p. 395.
- 38 C.C. Zimmerman and Mrs. Geo. B. McFarland, 'Report on Siam, 1932', photocopy of manuscript in Maen Research Papers, Payap College Archives, Chiang Mai.
- 39 Since the second Vatican council, the official Catholic doctrine, as it has been taught in northern Thailand, is that some level of salvation is possible in other religions. The practices and liturgy of the church now reflect that tolerance to some extent.
- 40 Missionary attitudes, past and present, were researched through interviews, questionnaires, a review of their literature of the missionaries, and a study of the history of the missionary enterprise.
- 41 See Douglas, p. 169.
- 42 Details of emphases in the missionaries' proclamation are described in Philip J. Hughes, *Proclamation and Response: A Study of the History of the Christian Faith in Northern Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Manuscript Division, Payap College, 1982.
- 43 See, for example, Saad Chaiwan, p. 6.

- 44 See, for example, Lillian J. Curtis, *The Laos of North Siam*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1903, pp. 186–188; R. Gillies, 'The Laos Evangelist', *Laos News*, 4:1, January 1907, pp. 26–28; John H. Freeman, *An Oriental Land of the Free*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1910, p. 37.
- 45 Praphan Chantraboon, *St. Paul's Teaching on Salvation in the Epistle to the Romans*, thesis for B. Theol, Thailand Theological Seminary, Chiang Mai, Thailand, October 1965, p. 14.
- 46 L.J. Curtis, p. 300.
- 47 James W. McKean, 'Medical Notes—Chiengmai', *Laos News*, 11:4, October 1914, pp. 116–119.
- 48 Freeman, pp. 51–52.
- 49 W. Clifton Dodd, *The Thai Race*, compiled and edited by his wife, Iowa: Torch Press, 1923, p. 335.
- 50 Norman Jacobs, *Modernization Without Development: Thailand as an Asian Case Study*, New York: Praeger, 1971, pp. 27–29.
- 51 See M.A. Wright, 'Some Observations on Thai Animism', *Practical Anthropology*, 15:1, 1966. For an early comment on the missionaries' choice of the word for God, see John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; first edition, 1857, p. 338.
- 52 The use of 'chau' in connection with the spirit cults is discussed by Gehan Wijewardene, *Monks, Mediums, Cities and Sema: Religious Behaviour in Northern Thailand*, manuscript, chapter 4.
- 53 This has been argued at length in Philip J. Hughes, 'The Incarnation and Communication in Thailand', *The South East Asia Journal of Theology*, 23:2, 1982, pp. 174–181.

PHILIP HUGHES was born in Britain, but has spent most of his life in Australia. He has postgraduate degrees in arts (philosophy) and education from Melbourne University, and in theology from the Melbourne College of Divinity. Doctoral work, begun in the Religious Studies Department, Lancaster University, was completed under the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology following three years research in Thailand. He is now a minister of religion at Wangaratta, a country town in Australia.

2, Baker Street, Wangaratta, Victoria 3677, Australia