

The challenge to the church in Burma in the field of theological construction lies in three crucial directions and each is a huge field in itself: the communication of the message (kerygma), the expression of the church's service (diakonia), and the reorganization of its fellowship (koinonia). All require sustained and prayerful efforts as well as spirit-filled insights. Can the church successfully undertake these? The promise of the Lord of the church remains:

"My grace is sufficient for thee, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

### NOTES

1. Adoniram Judson's journal entry of June 6, 1819.
2. *Ibid.*
3. An English translation was given as an appendix to Volume II of Francis Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson, D.D.* (New York: Sheldon, 1866).
4. English translations of both are reproduced in F. Wayland's study of Judson.
5. Adoniram Judson's journal entries of February 20 and 24, 1820.
6. For examples, "Toward an Understanding" (in Burmese), and a brief summary of the commission's activities in Dr. Pe Maung Tin, "The Study of Buddhism in Burma" *South East Asia Journal of Theology* I, 3 (1960) 60-62.

## IV: THAILAND

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### Points of Theological Friction

The particular historical and religious background of Thailand necessitates a study of the encounter between Thailand's interpretation of history and Israel's theology of history. This primary encounter between Thailand and Israel "the troubler" (1 Kings 18:17), prepares Thailand for the decisive encounter between Thailand and Christ, "the stumbling block."

#### THE LORD'S CONTROVERSY

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder. Therefore the land mourns and all who dwell in it languish. (Hos. 4:1-3)

Israel is accused. The indictment of the Lord is forcefully presented. This is the Lord's court controversy with Israel, "the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7). He who initiated the Covenant relationship with Israel and remained faithful to it, now—on the basis of that very Covenant relationship—embarks on a controversy.<sup>1</sup> The controversy is of a particular kind. It is a revelational, or perhaps we should say, an "antionocratic" controversy.<sup>2</sup> The Prosecutor, in his person and word, rejects man's stubborn efforts (Deut. 9:6) to confine him in an ontocratic cage framed by man's own understanding of the cosmos and of his existence. From the "incomparably high" *beyond*, the Lord stages an assault upon man's ontocratic complacency with his piercing "Therefore."<sup>3</sup>

The Covenant is historical. So is the controversy. The Lord's antionocratic controversy vibrates in the heart of salvation history, and from there the waves of its vibration reach out to the broad

horizon of mission history, which is a charismatic history within the great and confused world history.

The Asian world has been invaded by the antiontocratic controversy of the Lord. Whenever and wherever it is caught and entangled in the controversy it is not free to evade an experience of radical discontinuity from its own traditional valuations, and thus the controversy has become the new leaven for revolutionary social change in Asia. M. M. Thomas writes: "The Asian revolution cannot be understood apart from the impact of the West on Asia. Therefore interpreting the Asian revolution means interpreting also the Western impact on Asia."<sup>4</sup>

#### THE ASIAN REVOLUTION

I understand this to mean that behind the Asian revolution lies the Western revolution, and behind the Western revolution lies the Lord's controversy staged in the life of Israel.

In what ways has this controversy inaugurated by the Lord reached Southeast Asia? Unless the extremely rare visitors from the Christian West had more of an impact than we are aware of, it would seem that the Lord's controversy had not arrived before 1511 when the Portuguese Alphonso d'Albuquerque, conqueror of Goa, arrived at Malacca from Cochin with a fleet of eighteen vessels. Albuquerque's conquest of Malacca, on August 10, 1511, came only thirteen years after the arrival of Vasco da Gama at Calicut in the Portuguese flagship *San Gabriel*, and when Francis Xavier was five years old. The fleet of Albuquerque was propelled by the power of greed for the wealth of spices and carried the cross of Christ and cannon as did the *San Gabriel*. The breath and contents of the Lord's controversy came contained in the ugly vessels of colonial rapacity! Through the period of immense suffering under the militarily superior colonial West, the East was brought closer to the revolutionary controversy which the Lord had initiated. God's providence and human confusion! Theologically speaking, this is perhaps the most crucial event to touch the depth of Asian existence and history, introducing the ferment of disturbing theological discontinuity into the continuous ontocratic culture of the East. God's saving presence ("the right hand of God") worked upon Asia through the violent storm of man's exploitation of his neighbors ("the left hand of God")! Was the colonial penetration

into Southeast Asia the "Nebuchadnezzar" whom the Lord hired to bring his controversy into Asia?<sup>5</sup> One must not, however, overlook the sacrifices made by both the Catholic and Protestant missionaries during this period. Whenever Christ was preached, the Lord's controversy challenged spiritual self-satisfaction and social slothfulness of the Southeast Asian nations with unavoidable persistence.

Thailand is a land of Theravada Buddhism. The Thailand Official Yearbook lists five religions (Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism) and four doctrines (Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, and Animism). Of the population, 93.4 percent profess Theravada Buddhism, 3.9 percent Islam, and 0.5 percent Christianity. Religious freedom, however, has been fully recognized by every constitution since the 1932 revolution.

Portuguese Dominican priests first brought Christianity to Thailand in the sixteenth century. This history of the Catholic mission in Thailand is a combination of stormy persecution and relatively precarious peace, at least in its earlier stages. By 1949 there were 52,557 baptized Catholics in the kingdom. One of the earliest Protestant missionaries to Thailand was Karl Gützlaff (1828-31), but the missionary who represented the presence of Christian witness with far wider influence and penetration after the brief stay of Gützlaff was Dr. Dan Beach Bradley (1835-93). In North Thailand, the amazing figure of Dr. Daniel McGilvary, an American Presbyterian missionary, dominated the scene (1867-1911). His imprint of energetic evangelism over half a century is still vividly felt throughout the north. Since 1840, the main force of the Protestant mission has been sent by the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Today the Church of Christ in Thailand is a body of 24,000 Christians.

The Thai people are relative latecomers to the Indo-Chinese peninsula. Long before Thailand, as we know it today, was formed, the region came under the cultural influence of India. Indian influence was already waning when, in the thirteenth century, the Mongol invasions in Asia made it possible for the Thai, who were entering the peninsula in ever-increasing numbers, to become powerful and to develop a national identity.

Coming from China into an area which was already rich in Indianized cultures, the Thai borrowed freely from their neighbors as

they developed their own distinctive culture. Before coming into a position of power, the Thai were under the domination of the Khmers and living among the Mons. These two peoples were a fertile source of influence for the assimilating Thai. Through them the Thai inherited the cultural values of far-off India. The Mons and their Burmese neighbors passed on to the Thai Sinhalese Buddhism, which was to become the spiritual pillar of the Thai nation. The once-powerful maritime state of Srivijaya was already in decline in the thirteenth century, and the Thai shared responsibility with Majapahit for the dismemberment of its empire. Certainly, Thailand tasted the influence of its civilization.

But the influence of India and Ceylon on Thailand was not entirely secondhand. In the fourteenth century a prince of the Thai made a pilgrimage to Ceylon and India in search of relics. This prince was the grandson of the Thai chief who freed the Thai of Sukothai from Khmer domination by driving out the Khmer underlord and making his friend, Bang Klang Thao, the first Thai king of Sukothai. This king, who took the name Indraditya when he assumed his reign, was the father of Rama Khamhaeng, who brought Sukothai to its glory. The prince's pilgrimage to Ceylon and India took place during the reign of Rama Khamhaeng's devout son, Loe Thai, and on his return Loe Thai conferred upon him the title of Mahathera Sri Sradhara-jachulamuni Sri Ratanalankadipa Mahasami. Thus the cultural history of Thailand is a rich process of encounters and assimilation.

#### THE EUROPEAN IMPACT

The critical phase of Thailand's encounter with European powers took place during the reigns of the three Chakkri kings: Rama IV, (Mongkut, 1851-1868), Rama V, (Chulalongkorn, 1868-1910), and Rama VI, (Wachirawut, 1910-1925). Throughout the stormy Vasco da Gama era, Thailand had had to go through a series of difficult negotiations and make unwilling concessions; nevertheless it had achieved the singular distinction of maintaining its independence,<sup>6</sup> and it is the only country in Southeast Asia not colonized by the West. However, between 1851 and 1925 numerous contacts with the West, both desirable and undesirable, superficial and substantial, facilitated the advent of Western scientific ethos, political philosophy, and the "religion of Christianity" into an awakening Thailand. The

impact of these Western influences upon Thailand's traditional continuity-culture set the country on the rapid course of modernization even though, by maintaining its political independence, it "missed" a heavy dose of the "unintended gifts of Western colonialism." It is a significant historic fact that the 1932 revolution from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy was masterminded by Nai Pridi, a doctor of law from the University of Paris, and under his initiative Thailand acquired its first constitution (June 27, 1932).<sup>7</sup>

#### THE TWO THAILANDS

Thailand had managed to run her own destiny at some distance from the full force of the violent storm stirred up by Vasco da Gama. Thus one finds a "milder" mode of transition from the traditional to the revolutionary. The two mighty pillars of classic Thailand, the monarchy and Theravada Buddhism, continue to command profound respect from her people. At the same time, however, the process of modernization inspired and propelled by the "unintended gifts of Western colonialism" is actively at work. The crucial point in this connection is that this conflict between the two foci of historical forces is growing more turbulent under the shadow of the irritating presence of the autocratic controversy of the Lord. When "thus saith the Lord" came to Thailand, it was automatically given the status of a guest who is supposed to be sitting on a given seat in a house dominated by the sound of the "drum of immortality" beaten by the Enlightened One. The drum, however, has not been able to drown out the Lord's controversy. The Lord's controversy persists, therefore our missionary controversy continues. Theologically speaking, Thailand is caught in the cacophony of the two resounding messages. A theological understanding of this momentarily significant cacophony is urgently needed in order to guide the church from its crippling minority complex to the prophetic privilege of being the minority in this land.

A closer examination of the spiritual and historical forces at work suggests that there are two Thailand within one Thailand. It is an undeniable fact that the impact of the West on Thailand has created a new Thailand. Thailand One is a Thailand of traditional values, while Thailand Two is Thailand on the way to modernization as it constantly preaches its gospel of modernization ideals.<sup>8</sup> The Lord's

controversy is reaching Thailand One through Thailand Two, but it must be pointed out that Thailand Two is not necessarily aware of its far-reaching mission, since it is too absorbed in the process of modernization to ponder the historical process which brought it into being. On the other hand, Thailand One, the upholder of the patient eschatology, is beginning to be aware of the invasion of Israel into Thai spirituality and religiosity, and it is interested in the message of Israel even though it feels ill at ease with this strange visitor.

#### ENTER: A THEOLOGY OF HISTORY

Israel is at once a stumbling block and a fascination to Thailand One.<sup>9</sup> Why? On two accounts. First, Israel has an entirely different appreciation and interpretation of history, and this attracts the healthy curiosity of Thailand One. Second, Israel's theology of history is an intensified theology of history indeed; yet when it is compared with the theology of history which revolves around the fulfilment point of Jesus Christ, it may be called a preintensified theology of history. In this preintensified theology of history, without the name of Jesus Christ, Thailand One finds herself more relaxed and ready to participate in discussions of grave religious importance. One of the reasons why theological history in Thailand shows a state of undernourishment is that the significance of this preintensified zone was missiologically ignored and judged to be profitless. But when one tries to conceive a theology of mission in the context of the dynamic convergence of Thailand One and Thailand Two, it becomes obvious that theology in the preintensified zone leads us into the exciting ground of preparation for the Gospel. A study of Israel's relation to Thailand is a necessary step to the discussion on Christ and Thailand.<sup>10</sup>

#### HISTORY AS GOD'S EXPERIENCE

What is the decisive feature of Israel's theology of history? Israel experienced history profoundly and inimitably. The profundity and originality are, however, not due to Israel's own mental or spiritual faculty of perception and penetration into the structure and meaning of history, but derive from the profundity and originality of God's unique presence and work in the historical life of Israel. Israel was not able to speak of history without speaking of God, nor of God without

speaking of history. At the critical moment of the birth of the people of Israel in the event of Exodus, Israel confessed her faith in God's presence in history as follows:

The Lord said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I have sympathy for, I am effected by, their sufferings." (Exod. 3:7)<sup>11</sup>

God was affected by the harsh life that Israel was subjected to under the cruel yoke of Egypt. "What concerns the prophet," writes Rabbi Heschel, "is the human event as a divine experience. History to us is the record of human experience; to the prophet it is a record of God's experience."<sup>12</sup> History is the arena where God's "ultimate concern" is worked out in the entanglement with human destiny. God, who sends despair upon his people because of their stubbornness and disobedience, is the very one who most responsibly and acutely "experiences" the pain of history for his people and all humanity (Jer. 18:5-11; 31:2-3; Isa. 43:4-7; 49:15; 54:7-10). History, boldly confessed to be God's experience, is neither absurd nor blind. History is neither orphaned nor divorced from God. History, as participated in by Israel, runs on an agitated path. The possibilities of neutrality, tranquility, and apathy are denied to history, since the Lord is the creator of the events which bring about the "shaking of the foundations" of history. The mission of Israel to the world is to transmit this striking theology of history to the nations through her own historical existence.

#### *Friction Between Thailand and Israel*

In this section we shall seek to describe the current encounter of Thailand One with Israel and the theological repercussions of this encounter for Thailand Two. The gradual invasion of Israel's "history as God's experience" into Thailand One through the medium of Thailand Two awakened Thailand One to a renewed self-understanding and a zeal for its mission.

How to determine precisely the nature of Thailand One? Gunnar Myrdal writes of Southeast Asia:

Although a few intellectuals are, or feel that they are, completely Westernized and secularized, most observe the prescribed rites of their inherited religion and are cognizant of the broad lines of its theology. They have a

Thai apatheia-anthropology. The natural is apathetic.<sup>16</sup> The history-anthropology—an understanding of man which seeks to understand human existence in terms of man's deep involvement in history—cannot espouse, without causing much domestic turbulence, the apatheia-anthropology and form a new family life, and vice versa. Yet an irritating historical fact is that for the last two-hundred years the history-anthropology has lived in proximity to the apatheia-anthropology (always within her sight!) and occasionally succeeded in carrying on an uneasy and perplexing courtship. The perplexity of this situation is caused by what is happening in the present-day Thai understanding of man. Its apatheia-anthropology is no longer enjoying its traditional tranquility. The courting of history-anthropology is forcing apatheia-anthropology to reexamine the separation of the natural from the historical and personal.

History-anthropology is derived from Israel's theology of history. Israel lives in the continuous surprise of discovering God who accompanies Israel on its journey through history and who makes history purposeful for it. Israel's experience was, mysteriously, God's experience in history. Because God is present in history, history cannot become apatheia-history.

For a long time I have held my peace,  
I have kept still and restrained myself;  
now I will cry out like a woman in travail,  
I will gasp and pant. (Isa. 42:14. Also see  
Isa. 1:2-3; Jer. 4:1)

The opposite of apatheia-history is obviously patheia-history. Israel's patheia-history is, however, *sui generis*. It does not come under the general category of pathos. It draws its lifeblood from the theological category of pathos, the pathos of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>17</sup> To reject God's patheia-history is to alienate oneself from the grace of God historically surrounding us. Rabbi Heschel says that "sin is repudiation of history."<sup>18</sup>

Thrown into God's patheia-history, Israel began to speak the language of *this* history. The historical pathos of God invokes the historical pathos of his people.

Answer me, O Lord, for thy steadfast love is good;  
according to thy abundant mercy, turn to me.

Hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in  
distress, make haste to answer me. (Ps. 69:16-17)

This prayer is meaningful only in the context of God's patheia-history. The psalmist wants God to turn to him in a concrete historical way, since he is historically in distress. An extraordinary existential interest in history began with Israel.

Theological friction exists between apatheia-anthropology and patheia-anthropology, and between apatheia-history and patheia-history. We must now try to place the modernizing Thailand Two within the framework of this theological friction caused at the intersection of Thailand and Israel.

Theologically speaking, Thailand One is making a significant contribution by magnifying the "point of friction" and thus providing a proper theological framework in which the issue of modernization should be discussed. In this sense, Thailand One is inadvertently prophetic. Thailand Two, by showing an interest in the shaping of history inspired by the "teleology" of the modernization ideals, is also inadvertently acting theologically. Modernization implies more than change and development. It involves transformation—"the transformation of all systems by which man organizes his society, that is, his political, social, economic, intellectual, religious, and psychological systems."<sup>19</sup>

Both Thailand One and Two, are irreversibly entangled in the great "Asian drama" of modernization. The people of Thailand are caught up in the conflicts "between their high-pitched aspirations and the bitter experience of a harsh reality; between the desire for change and improvement, and mental reservations and inhibitions about accepting the consequences and paying the price." Living in these conflicts they are now beginning to be convinced that history "is not taken to be predetermined, but within the power of man to shape."<sup>20</sup> This new interpretation and awareness of history is, indeed, a "shaking of the foundations" of life in Thailand.

History is "within the power of man to shape." Christian theologians may hasten to condemn this as an unpardonable sin of human *superbia*, but when this *superbia* is studied in the context of history and culture in Thailand, one is led to appreciate the positive—not negative—theological implications contained in it. It indicates the emergence of an involved interest in history. Moderniza-

tion, with its massive historical forces, is achieving a critical shake-up of the ontocratic Thailand, an accomplishment at which all other historical agents (the condemning theologians included!) have heretofore failed. Thus in the light of Thai culture and history, "history is within the power of man to shape"—the modernization interpretation of history—is a significant positive *theological* statement which stands at the creative borderline between apatheia-history and patheia-history, and between secular history and sacred history. Isn't it amazing that God uses superbia as the meeting point between modernization ideals and God's pathos at work in Thai history?

B. THAI ANTINOMADIC "DECAY-ONTOLOGY": THE CONTROVERSY OF POSSIBILITY WITH INEVITABILITY (SECULARIZATION)

The solitary reflection of the young Gautama revolves around the theme of the inevitability of the "decay of life." Thailand's indigenous ontology is fastened to the concept of decay. One cannot and must not contemplate "being" without at the same time pondering "decay." Thus when ontology and decay are closely interrelated, the Thai concept of inevitability appears. Wherever there is "being," decay will automatically and inevitably set in, and this blurs any Thai discussion on the "nature and destiny of man." It robs history of the dimension of drama and this impoverished history becomes simply "decay-history." If ontology is decay-ontology, then salvation must be freedom from "being" and emancipation from history.<sup>21</sup>

The nomadic mode of existence portrayed in the Bible, however, indicates—through its pregnant theological implications—the direction of emancipation into "being" and into history. The nomad wanders in history. He battles against the power of destruction rather than that of decay, since in his wandering he experiences history as a chain of unpredictable events rather than an automatic process of decay. Even in the face of the risks and precariousness which pervade life, he finds renewal of soul (Isa. 40:28–31). The secret of the biblical nomadic life lies with God. God is nomadic! The nomad wanders in history since God wanders with him in history. In the words of the hymnist: "God of the coming years, through paths unknown we follow Thee!"

The ideas of decay-ontology and "paths unknown" are mutually incompatible. There are no paths unknown for the decay-ontology; the paths have been "automatically" determined and fixed. In con-

trast, the Abrahamic code of existence demonstrated, in journeying the unknown paths, the unique concept of "possibility" over against "inevitability." Possibility, according to Israel's theology of history, is basically a nomadic concept. Only those who wander are privileged to experience "possibility in the desert": "Your clothing did not wear out upon you, and your foot did not swell, these forty years." (Deut. 8:4)

On this specifically biblical level, "possibility" encounters "inevitability." Theologically speaking, the opposite of the decay-ontology is the nomadic-ontology. Israel's nomadic-ontology, the theology of possibility, is at present in a relationship of creative friction with Thailand's decay-ontology, the ontology of inevitability.

We must now try to place the secularizing of Thailand within the framework of the theological friction caused at the intersection of Thailand and Israel.

It has become an accepted interpretation that the concept of secularization originated in the theology of Israel, which was able to draw a sharp line of distinction between the Creator and the creature. God alone is holy. All else can be used for man's benefit—that is, all else can be secularized. Israel's *solī deō gloria* distinction between the creator and the creature emancipated her from the profusion of false "holies" and she was chosen to give the rest of the world the first theologically structured thrust of secularization.

Obviously, the theological concept of secularization has not operated in history in its purity. *Homo aeger* degraded theologically structured secularization into secularism. Secularism ignores the demarcation line between the creator and the creature and elevates the latter to the level of the "holy." Thus it structurally conforms to the *greedy* sacralization of all. "A god is that to which we look for all good and where we resort for help in every time of need."<sup>22</sup>

This observation by Luther provides a relevant theological framework from within which we can examine the idolatrous spirit of secularism.

It is obvious that the "world of inevitability" hinders Israel's theological principle of secularization from exerting its influence. Secularization implies emancipation, while inevitability implies imprisonment. Emancipation here means: Man is now free to use for his benefit all that is within the strictly defined context of *solī deo gloria*.

Sound secularization is built on "courage to use"! The source of this courage is in a theology of "the Holy."

Secularism, on the other hand, is vocal, particularly in the busy urban life of Thailand. The conscience of Thailand One deplors the prevailing secularist *lebensgefühl*, saying that her people are forsaking the *Dhamma* of the Enlightened One. It seems, however, as though secularism—a greedy sacralization of all—is injecting the idea of "courage to use" into Thailand. Thailand One resists the injection; Thailand Two thrives on it, although in her quieter moments she monologues that the *Dhamma* of decay-ontology rules all.

A theologically significant point here is that in Thailand's cultural and spiritual context, secularism cannot be accused of being idolatrous. If secularism is something to which the people of Thailand look "for help in every time of need," it is their god. But this "god" is a smoke-word without substance for the Thai people, since they do not see this "god" under the judgement of God. To bring "god" to the judgment of God is precisely the part of the theological operation which is so immensely difficult to execute. The culture lacks the concept of *God against "god."* Secularism, therefore, is here innocently practiced, while in Christendom, which has been nourished by the awareness of God against "god," it has been accompanied by uneasiness, arguments, and perhaps guilt feelings. It shows only an imperialistic *superbia* if one hastily launches criticism of idolatry in this region of the world, particularly in "Buddha-dom."

Innocent secularism is militating against the rule of inevitability. Thus it is preparing Thailand to see Israel's theological principle of secularization. The real *possibility to use all* comes from God who is against "god." Innocent secularism through its iconoclasm of inevitability preaches an introductory message toward the faith of possibility in God.

C. THAI MONASTIC "ULTIMATE CONCERN": THE CONTROVERSY  
OF DEUS ABSCONDITUS WITH RELIGIOUS DRIVE  
(RESURGENCE OF THE ANCIENT FAITH)

Tradition has it that this conversation took place between the young prince and the one who "has gone forth." The recluse answers Gautama:

"I, my lord, am one who has gone forth."

"What, master, does that mean?"

"It means, my lord, being thorough in the religious life, thorough in the peaceful life, thorough in good actions, thorough in meritorious conduct, thorough in harmlessness, thorough in kindness to all creatures."

Then the lord Gautama bade his charioteer, saying: . . . I will even here cut off my hair, and don the yellow robe, and go forth from the house into the homeless state."<sup>23</sup>

The apatheia-anthropology and the decay-anthropology constitute the primary truth about man's existence in the psychology and spirituality of Thailand One. This primary truth evolves itself into the soteriological truth which teaches how to *escape* "apathetically" from the universal confinement of the apatheia-anthropology and from decay-anthropology by becoming "decayless." The escape—that is, the momentous transition from the *dukkha*—is outlined in transhistorical or ahistorical language.<sup>24</sup>

There is, O disciples, an unborn, not become, not compounded, not constructed. If there were not this unborn, not become, not compounded, not constructed, no escape could be seen from here from that which is born, become, compounded, constructed. But since there is an unborn, not become, not compounded, not constructed, so an escape is possible from what is born, become, compounded, constructed.<sup>25</sup>

Here is expressed, without any hint of argumentative heat, a strange marriage between "inevitability and possibility" performed within the mind of Thailand One. To put this sublime rational understanding of "being," apathetically conceived, into practice must be man's ultimate concern, his religious drive. Thailand One is thus apathetically (ahistorically) teleological!<sup>26</sup> Step outside the *dukkha* of this existence! But do not take this assignment with historical zeal. Instead, use ahistorically controlled metaphysical zeal. Then one approaches "a state of everlasting radiant smiles with nobody smiling."<sup>27</sup> This is the nature and structure of Thailand One's ultimate concern.

Israel presents a clear theology of ultimate concern. Its charter is expressed in the well-known *Shema*:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4).<sup>28</sup>



Yet this ultimate concern is dependent upon God's initial ultimate concern. In the famous "eagles' wings" passage (Exod. 19:4-5), the eagles' wings (representing the saving ultimate concern of God) precede "obey my voice and keep my covenant" (Israel's ultimate concern).<sup>29</sup> Verse 5 is dependent upon the foregoing verse. This order runs throughout the historical confession of faith in Israel. The transition from verse 4 to verse 5 here does not correspond with the progression from "born" to "unborn," "become" to "not become." The decisive reason for this lack of correspondence is found in the secret of Israel's existence itself. She was caught by God's ultimate concern for her salvation and for the nations as unfolded in history.

The Lord of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains trample him under foot." . . . This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? (Isa. 14:24-27)

This historical God who executes his purpose on "Assyria" is a *deus absconditus* in the sense that he cannot lightly be made our object of ultimate concern. Only the "eagles' wings" bring us to the possibility at all of having our ultimate concern in God. And God works his work "strangely" (Isa. 28:21). He remains "hidden" to those who venture to domesticate him. *Deus absconditus* is a God who is free and who rejects becoming an object of man's speculation.<sup>30</sup> Thus God in history is not an apparent, self-evident God, but a stumbling block to man in history.

Thailand One readily understands the concept of ultimate concern. It has cherished in its heart the thought of ultimate concern toward "unborn, not become, not compounded, not constructed." It is engaged in a creative friction relationship with Israel's theology of the historically staged ultimate concern of God which evoked, in turn, Israel's ultimate concern. Here the encounter is between monastic ultimate concern and theonomously structured ultimate concern.

We must now try to place the resurgence of the ancient Theravada Buddhist faith within the framework of this theological friction caused at the intersection of Thailand and Israel.

The resurgence of the ancient faith hosted by Thailand One is, as

we have noted, to a considerable degree due to the stimuli that the frequent visitor, Israel, exerted on the country's spirituality. One of the stimuli is now theologically defined as theonomously structured ultimate concern. The encounter of these two ultimate concerns opens an enormous area of serious theological implication and discussion. This area may, in general, be called "the theology of religions."

Thailand One's ultimate concern represents a sublime religious value, and it is both inspiring and impressive to see this religious ultimate concern alive—consciously or unconsciously—in the soul of this great nation. One would intuitively rebel against any condemnatory or depreciative judgment upon Thailand's ultimate concern if one appreciates its special historical context. The issue is far greater than a few words of condemnation; it is theological. Theological appreciation consists in seeing all in God's grace and judgment. "Viewed with the eyes of sacred history, secular history is itself always a sacred history," writes H. R. Schlette.<sup>31</sup> I accept this with the following interpretation: "with the eyes of sacred history" means the *repentant* eyes of sacred history, since human disobedience *within* sacred history has repeatedly frustrated God's gracious design (Deut. 9:6-7). From this involved and repentant perspective, both sacred and secular histories belong to the history which needs "repentance," and both are under the judgment of God. Sacred history is in no sense superior to secular history. The sacredness of sacred history derives only from the sacred determination of God to be present in it in a special way.

This takes us to the grave realization that our theonomously structured ultimate concern is, in history, as distorted as the monastic ultimate concern.<sup>32</sup> We have no grounds for boasting of our "sacredness," since we *fail* to live in the theonomously founded ultimate concern. We stand under both the grace and judgment of God (Amos 1 and 2). This grace and judgment of God, which embraces both ultimate concerns, is the real point of contact between them.

Theonomously structured ultimate concern is not by itself an immediate stumbling block to the people of monastic ultimate concern. The failure of sacred history to live in the theonomously structured ultimate concern is the stumbling block to the people of Thailand, particularly to the people of Thailand One. Thailand One demonstrates more intensive dedication to its ultimate concern than the commitment of the Christian community to its ultimate concern.



In reality, then, the theonomously structured ultimate concern presents itself to the eyes of both Thailand One and Two as feeble and poorer than their own ultimate concern, which may be named, theologically speaking, an autonomously structured ultimate concern.

The resurgence of this great ancient faith must be studied in the context of the "theology of repentance" and the grace that heals our disobedience in our failure to live out of theonomously structured ultimate concern.

### Conclusion

"Good Soil" is being prepared. The invasion of Israel's theology of history into the Thai interpretation of history has presented us with a set of pregnant theological friction points. These friction points have not been brought about by the stimulation of the Chinese and Burmese views of history in Thailand. Such influence can be described simply as "interontocratic" traffic, since they do not contain the cutting edge of the Lord's controversy. Theological friction caused by Israel is, perhaps, the most significant event that has happened to the spiritual life of Thailand since its adoption of Theravada Buddhism centuries ago. It is not Ahab, but Elijah, who troubles Thailand.

Israel is, by providing the meeting place called "the preintensified zone of the theology of history," preparing Thailand for the coming of the true Israelite, Jesus Christ, the focal point of the intensified theology of history. In this specifically theological sense, the friction points are called "creative." They are creative because they will cultivate the soil of Thai spirituality for the realization of the "new creation" in Jesus Christ, the "intensified" Lord of history.

The first question our Lord posed to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi was: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" To this question, Thailand today is likely to answer, "Jesus Christ is a god of the Americans." The Thai people are already vaguely aware of the profound theological connection between the friction points and Jesus Christ. In some ways these two are related and they are disturbing the Thai people. In this fertile ground of theological friction (a friction relationship is an efficient form of communication!), Jesus Christ, as the intensification of the preintensified view of history, must be presented. Jesus Christ is not *automatically* the stumbling block. The

reasons why he is the stumbling block to the Jews, to the Greeks, and to the Thai differ considerably. Thailand has her own historical and theological reasons to stumble over him. The friction points caused by Israel are "good soil" (Matt. 13:8) upon which the message of the intensified theology of history, the stumbling block, can be sown. The "good soil" is now being prepared at the converging point of the great historical forces which accompanied a series of radical unprecedented experiences for Thailand. The tension-filled coexistence between the "traditional" and the "revolutional" within Thailand, the great massive waves of modernization, secularization, and the resurgence of the great ancient faith are all *purposed* by the Lord of history in his "strange work" of producing the "good soil" in Thailand.

He purposed long ago in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything exists in Heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in him. (Eph. 1:10)<sup>33</sup>

### NOTES

1. The Hebrew word *rib*, here translated as "controversy," connotes "strife," "contention," "indictment." It is one of the crucial words (usually in verb form) which expresses the Lord's *pathos* for the salvation of his people and the world. See Isa. 27:8; 45:9; 49:25; 50:8; 57:16; Jer. 2:9; 25:31; Hos. 4:4; 12:2; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 2:10.

2. "Ontocratic" (see *Christianity in World History* by Arend Th. Van Leeuwen, pp. 158-73) means a worldview in which man seeks the meaning of his life in terms of a primordial sense of the cosmic totality—suggested for instance, by cosmic mountain, cosmic tree, phallic symbolism, primordial navel, or cosmic emperor who rules the cosmos from the center of the cosmos (such as China)—which determines the cultural, religious, and political patterns of human life. The God of Israel challenges such beliefs.

3. In the literal form of the word used by the eighth-century prophets, "Therefore" leads from the diatribe to "Thus hath the Lord spoken." Cf. Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (London: SCM Press, 1968), pp. 19, 65.

4. M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution* (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 9.

5. In Hendrik Kraemer, *World Cultures and World Religions* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960), the author speaks of "unintended gifts of Western 'colonialism.'" He goes on to say, "It is a rather striking peculiarity of Western colonialism that, although there are many flagrant episodes of 'naked imperialism,' it has had in various directions a stimulating influence on the East, to a quite amazing degree" (p. 67).

6. In 1888, Thailand was forced to yield to France the territory of Sip Song Chu Thai in northern Laos; and in 1893, all territory east of the Mekong. In 1904 and 1907, two Cambodian provinces were transferred to French rule, and in 1909, Britain succeeded in obtaining four of Thailand's Malay provinces. See David A. Wilson, *Politics in Thailand* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 7 f.

7. Pridi's People's party at the time of its seizure of power issued a six-point program which reflected the fruits of his study in France. The items in the six-point program belong to the "unintended gifts of Western colonialism," and through them the more emphatic invasion of the *incognito* controversy of the Lord into Thailand was facilitated. The six points set forth were by no means completely foreign to the people of Thailand before 1932; but here they found articulate and "controversial" formulation in the five politics of Thailand. The six points are: (1) freedom and equality of the people in politics, law, court, and business; (2) internal peace and order; (3) economic well-being and work for all by means of economic planning; (4) equality of privileges; (5) freedom and liberty not conflicting with the foregoing; and (6) education for all. Cf. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

8. In this connection it is important to know that the king is the head of the secular political power as well as of the religious hierarchy. In his person Thailand One and Thailand Two are united. This is a critical factor when one discusses the implications of rapid modernization on traditional life in Thailand.

9. The lecture "Christianity and Buddhism," delivered by one of the most distinguished and controversial monks in Thailand, the Venerable Bhikkhu Buddhadasa Indapanno, in January 1967, illustrates the attraction which Thailand One feels towards the thought-land of Israel.

10. I wonder if Thailand has been, in truth, responding to the Christian message itself or rather to that of Israel contained in the Christian message? Dr. Hendrik Kraemer says that today we are not in the situation of "meeting" or "encounter" in the serious sense, but only under the "foreshadowings of a still-approaching meeting, interpenetration and *Auseinandersetzung* of cultural attitudes and orientations contained in these civilizations, and of inevitable mutual religious influence and stimulus" (Kraemer, *op. cit.*, p. 14). These "foreshadowings" are noticed in the groundfloor encounter between Thailand and Israel. In this connection I refer readers to the two great books which are by a strange providence written by this famous teacher and his brilliant student—Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (New York: Harper, 1938) and Arend Th. van Leeuwen's *Christianity in World History* (London: Edinburgh House, 1964 and New York: Scribner's, 1966). My uneasiness with the former, which gave a good shaking to the foundations of the Christian world in 1937, is that it assumes so thoroughly and so passionately the position of the *kerygmatic* biblical realism—the position of the intensified theology of history—that it tends to overlook the groundfloor encounter between the great ancient faiths and Israel, the "preintensified theology of history." The book does not have an initial part entitled "The Message of Israel in a Non-Christian World" which, it seems to me, forms one of the most important foci of theological discussion in Asia. Some twenty-six years after Tambaram, Dr. van Leeuwen named his study *Christianity in World History*, which could just as well be titled *Israel in World History*, since theological motifs of Israel play the decisive role throughout the book. In fact the New Testament motifs are over-

shadowed by the Old Testament theological insights. These two great books in their respective ways stimulated my schema of making Israel the first crucial point of reference when trying to determine Thailand's theological whereabouts.

11. Translation by Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 57.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

13. Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, vol. I (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1968), pp. 74–75.

14. Quotations from the tradition are taken from Mircea Eliade, *From Primitives to Zen* (London: Collins, 1967), pp. 471–75.

15. "A blessed resurrection is proclaimed to us—meantime we are surrounded by decay. We are called righteous—and yet sin lives in us. . . . It is in this *contradiction* that hope must prove its power." (Italics added.) Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 18. Thai realism, which operates empirically on the straight deduction from the law of nature, does not speak of a tension-filled "contradiction."

16. See my "wrath of God vs. Thai Theologia Glorae," *South East Asia Journal of Theology*, V, 1 (July 1963), 21.

17. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

19. Manfred Halpern quoted in W. E. Moore and R. M. Cook, eds., *Readings on Social Change* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 182.

20. Myrdal, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–35. It would be a challenging study to relate theologically, one by one, what Myrdal lists as the "modernization ideals," to the concept of history in Thailand. Cf. Myrdal, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–69.

21. A paragraph from the closing address to the eighth World Fellowship of Buddhists, delivered by the president of the Fellowship in November 1966, carries particular significance in this connection: "Perhaps the most significant achievement of all is the clarification of our basic policy by adding a new clause, which was unanimously approved by this Conference, to our Constitution, that the World Fellowship of Buddhists shall refrain from involving itself directly or indirectly in any political activity. From now on, no act is more contrary to the spirit of our Constitution than the exploitation of Buddhism for political ends. The World Fellowship of Buddhists, in all its activities, now stands squarely behind the principle of nonpolitical activity." *The World Fellowship of Buddhists, News Bulletin* III, 6 (November/December 1966), 55.

22. Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism: Exposition of the Ten Commandments—The First Commandment," in Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, eds., *Christian Ethics* (New York: Ronald Press, 1955), p. 245.

23. Eliade, *op. cit.*, pp. 471–75.

24. *Dukkha* is usually rendered as "suffering," but this translation is inappropriate. *Du* means "difficult" and *kha* "to endure." As a feeling, therefore, *dukkha* means that which is difficult to endure. Further, *dukkha* may be used in the sense of contemptible (*du*) emptiness (*kha*). The world rests on suffering; the world, therefore, is contemptible. When *dukkha* (a contemptible decay existence) is mentioned, the desire to reach the *dukkhaless* or *transdukkha* state of man is implied.

25. Udana VIII, 1-3, quoted in Winston L. King, *A Thousand Lives Away* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 30.

26. The mentality of Thailand One is ordinarily described as ateleological cyclicism. This is a misconception rising from the forcing of Western categories onto the basically different cultural thought-patterns and emotions of the East. The cardinal message of Thailand One is to inspire her people to journey "from the dukkha to the dukkhaless state," said the abbot of the Buddhist Meditation Center in Chiangmai, in one of my interviews with him. Those who aspire to obtain final release from dukkha (that is, to reach Nirvana) progress teleologically on the four states of spirally ascending steps: the *Sotapanna* (Stream-Winner), the *Sakadagami* (Once-Returner), the *Anagami* (Never-Returner), and the *Arabanti* (Worthy One). Yet this teleology cannot be said to be historically structured, since the sense of history in which it operates is highly metaphysical and enormously patient. "Suppose, O Monks, there was a huge rock of one solid mass, one mile long, one mile wide, one mile high, without split or flaw. And at the end of every hundred years a man should come and rub against it once with a silken cloth. Then that huge rock would wear off and disappear quicker than a world-period, i.e., *kappa*." *Samyutta-Nikaya* (Samyutta XV, Sutta V, quoted in King, *op. cit.*, p. 93). This remarkably patient view has implications for "salvation history" when one comes to know that the way to the dukkhaless state was first preached by the first Buddha Vipassi ninety-one kappas ago! From Moses to the present day would be a period equal to just thirty rubbings.

27. Buddhadasa Indapanno, *Towards Buddha-Dhamma*, p. 48.

28. Cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 14.

29. "Certainly God is more than 'a name for that which concerns man ultimately.' Only saints are ultimately concerned with God. What concerns most of us ultimately is our ego. The biblical consciousness begins not with man's, but with *God's concern*. The supreme fact in the eyes of the prophets is the presence of God's concern for man and the absence of man's concern for God." Abraham J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), pp. 127f. In my judgment, this Jewish criticism of Tillich, stated in this concise way, pinpoints the location of the central theological issue associated with the name of Tillich.

30. Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theologia crucis* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1954), p. 21. Loewenich makes it clear that according to Luther there is a decisive incompatibility between *deus absconditus* and all religious speculation.

31. Heinz R. Schlette, *Towards a Theology of Religions* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966), p. 71.

32. Denigrated "ultimate concern" is graphically brought home in the indulgence controversy: "Those who assert that a soul straightway flies out [of purgatory] as a coin tinkles in the collection-box, are preaching an invention of man. It is sure that when a coin tinkles, greed and avarice are increased; but the intercession of the church is in the will of God alone." Martin Luther, "Ninety-Five Theses," articles 27 and 28.

33. Translation from J.B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

## V: INDONESIA

T. B. SIMATUPANG

### Dynamics for Creative Maturity

This essay, both in its preparation and in its substance, is in many ways characteristic of the present state of theology in Indonesia.

To start with, the essay is written by a layman, a former professional military man, who never studied theology in a seminary. It was written in cooperation with a small group of theologians in Jakarta who, after finishing their basic theological education in Indonesia, went on to acquire doctorates in theology at universities in the United States, the Netherlands, or Germany. They are at present engaged in teaching theology, in writing the textbooks needed for theological education, in the administrative and theological aspects of the work of the Council of Churches in Indonesia, in translating the Bible, and in the ecumenical outreach of the churches. In addition, some have political and journalistic responsibilities. Coresponsibility of ordained and unordained members of the churches, as reflected in the preparation of this essay, is a normal feature in the life of most of the churches in Indonesia.

This brings me to some preliminary remarks about the substance of this essay. Theology is understood in this essay as the self-conscious reflective response to God's continuing action in Christ in the midst of the concrete situation of the church's life, of man, and of society. Due to the rapid pace of change in our society and the very small number of persons who have been able to respond to these changes with systematic theological reflection, most of the responses can only be traced in the actions and statements of individual Christians and churches and, since 1950, in the work of the Council of Churches in Indonesia.

In the preparation of this essay I am particularly indebted to Dr. Liem Khiem Yang and Dr. Frank L. Cooley.