

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

Seri Phongphit

Thai Institute for Rural Development, Bangkok.

Abbreviations

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

ON REINTERPRETING THE DHAMMA : TOWARDS AN ADEQUATE THAI SOCIAL ETHICS

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

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

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