

## ABSTRACT

This study aims at addressing the problem of how three Old Testament wisdom texts (Proverbs 11:18-31, Psalm 73, and Ecclesiastes 9:1-12) can be interpreted in light of, and as a response to Thai Buddhist interpretations. The empirical source material, which consists of Thai Buddhist interpretations of the three texts, is established through a qualitative oriented research, where a limited number of informants address the texts in in-depth interviews. The interviewees represent both genders, an age-range of 20-55, a variety of professions, and are recruited among lay Buddhists, Buddhist academics, monks and nuns.

The problem is answered in two steps. The first is a presentation and analysis of the Thai Buddhists' interpretations of the three texts under study. The second step, which builds on the results from this analysis, comprises of a critical discussion of how the texts, from within their textual contexts, can be interpreted in light of, and as a response to the Thai Buddhist understandings of the texts and their themes. Hence, the study combines methods found within both humanistic and social sciences' research traditions, namely qualitative methods, text analytical methods and documentary analysis.

The analysis shows that the teaching of *kamma* is a central framework of the Thai Buddhist understandings of the texts. Hence an interpretation of the texts in light of, and as a response to Thai Buddhist interpretations must first and foremost relate to the *kamma* framework. But, the investigation also reveals that other resources are used by the Thai Buddhists. These include belief in spirits and fate, personal experiences, cultural values, and their knowledge and understanding of Christian teaching. Therefore, notice must be taken of these alternative or complementary frameworks of understanding, as well as the interviewees' cultural values and their pre-understanding of Christian doctrines related to the themes of the texts. Finally, the analysis of the interviews shows that an interpretation which aims at taking the issues of the Thai interpreters seriously also must consider how the texts can be applied to practical life.

Further, through the discussion of the problem, the study explores whether an approach where texts are interpreted in light of, and as a response to actual Thai Buddhists' interpretations of the same texts may contribute to the overarching problem of how biblical texts can be interpreted in a way which both communicates with Thai Buddhists and opens up for further dialogue about biblical issues and themes.

The analysis of the Thai Buddhists' interpretations shows that one gains insight into (1), what themes and issues in the text which they find most relevant to discuss, given their background and interests; (2), how they understand the texts to present and discuss the themes and issues under discussion; (3), what they view as main convergences and differences between themes in the texts and their own understanding of them; (4), some of their basic pre-understanding with regard to Christianity and the relation between Buddhism and Christianity.

Thus, by inviting Thai Buddhists to read and interpret biblical texts, one has a better chance of avoiding the danger of ignoring such issues and concerns as are important to address in a Buddhist context, than if the interpreter himself or herself sets the agenda for the conversation about the texts. In addition, this approach opens up for a real engagement with the texts and their issues on behalf of Buddhist readers, as their point of view is given a central part in the course of the conversation with the Christian partner in dialogue.

The thesis shows that the method explored, is a fruitful approach both to Bible interpretation and interreligious dialogue in a Thai context. It demonstrates its usefulness as an approach in academic research for gaining empirical knowledge of Thai Buddhist understandings of Christian normative texts, as well as a step in practical Christian-Buddhist dialogue, aimed at establishing Thai Buddhist interpretations of the normative texts of the Other. As such the method is likely to be useful for studying other Christian texts in the same way, both within the Old and the New Testaments, but may also be employed when Christians study normative Buddhist texts, or in the encounter between Christians and people of other living faiths.