



Syncretism

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On Saturday, Dow and I were working to translate Bible study materials from English to Thai. We hit the word “syncretism” and had to work hard to find and to understand the meaning. The best we came up with was, “A bird with two heads.” (From *L sun*, “with” and *kres*, “group, party”, thus “merging two parties”.)

If a new believer has clearly understood the gospel, and is free to remain in his/her old religious context, and attends all the religious activities, and appears to be involved in all the traditions and practices of that religion, isn't there a great danger that he or she will slip into syncretism, resulting in the worship of two or more gods? The answer is yes.

This is true of every context. A Western believer in Christ is in danger of loving God and also money (Matt. 6:24). Or, as was present in Judaism and is maybe present in the Church today, there was the syncretistic behavior of, “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’” (Mark 7:8-10).

Here in Thailand, one of the greatest detriments of Christianity is the negative effect it has on the extended family who are Buddhists. So I have chosen to continue to live within Buddhism even though I am a loving, devoted follower of Christ.

Am I in danger of syncretism? Yes. Wednesday, before seeing Dow, I was with friends at a temple. I went into the temple and engaged in an activity called “tamboon.” Translated, it means to make merit. You carry two joss sticks and a lotus flower and verbalize your desires. It might be thought of as a form of prayer,

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though you are not praying to someone, hoping to change or improve your karma, good luck. I entered the area of tamboon with the joss sticks and flower and asked the God of heaven to bless my family and specifically to help my sister-in-law financially. She is struggling to keep her daughter in school. Because the economy is bad, her sales are down.

Friday was Macha Bucha day, a very important Buddhist holy day. I was walking a long distance to the market to buy some food. It was very hot. As I walked, many cars passed me by. The people who own these cars are not wealthy, they are just regular middle class

Thai people. I asked myself, “Why don't we have a car?” Then I thought, “When I get to the market I will do tamboon at the Chinese temple there. It is a very highly regarded temple and tamboon there would be very good.” Then I heard a clear voice in my heart say, “You do not need to go anywhere or do anything, your father in

Heaven will take care of all your needs.” This made me very excited for a moment. But then I thought that it might just be wishful thinking. Maybe I did not really hear God speak. So I went to the market and went to the very entrance of the temple, and I heard the voice again. I chose to believe God and did not seek the “good luck” of tamboon.

After talking with Dow I recognized that both these events were very similar on the outside but very different on the inside. On the outside they both look to the observer's eye as possibly syncretistic. But on the inside, where it matters, only the second event was syncretistic. I trusted something other than God my Father for my well-being.

On Saturday evening, my sister-in-law called and told me that a man had entered her shop, bought all of the product in the shop and also bought all the inventory in her warehouse. She was very excited that God heard and answered my prayers. f

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