

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.11325127

STAINS ON THE SOUL: METAPHORS OF SIN IN THE THAI HOLY BIBLE

Bhasrvarin Iamsa-ard^{1*} and Faskal Faranso²

¹School of Education, Walailak University, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand. Email:

bhasrvarin.i@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9563-0522>

²Linguistics Department, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Email: pascallove39@gmail.com,

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0037-3029>

Received: 02/07/2025

Accepted: 17/09/2025

Corresponding Author: Bhasrvarin Iamsa-Ard

(bhasrvarin.i@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

This article proposes a cognitive-linguistic approach to understanding the concept of sin in the Holy Bible through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory. Rather than treating sin as a strictly theological or moral category, it draws on the metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson to demonstrate how metaphor structures religious meaning. Focusing on the metaphors of sin in both the Old and New Testaments, the study identifies five core metaphors: [SIN IS DIRT], [SIN IS HUMAN], [SIN IS MASTER], [SIN IS OBJECT], and [SIN IS ANIMAL]. These metaphors function not merely as rhetorical flourishes, but as cognitive models that shape the believer's understanding of sin, morality, and redemption. The essay explores how each metaphor encodes a particular theological worldview, with [SIN IS DIRT] dominating biblical representations and linking closely with purification rituals and the doctrine of atonement. By analyzing how these metaphors function across biblical narratives, this article generates a deeper discussion about the ways in which metaphor informs religious experience, moral judgment, and the shaping of spiritual identity. It concludes that conceptual metaphor theory offers not only a tool for linguistic analysis, but a framework for engaging the cognitive architecture of Christian theology across cultures.

KEYWORDS: Sin, Holy Bible, Conceptual Metaphor, Thai Bible Translation, Christian Theology, Cognitive Linguistics, Religious Language, Metaphorical Framing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of sin holds a central position in Christian theology, despite the Holy Bible encompassing a wide range of content. According to Christian teachings, sin represents a departure from the glory of God (Anderson, 2009), a concept distinct from the Buddhist understanding of sin, which is associated with unwholesome actions or evil deeds. The biblical account of sin originates from the disobedience of Adam and Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, an act prohibited by God:

"You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die [1]." (Genesis 2: 16-17)

This act of disobedience, often referred to as "original sin," marks the inherent sinful nature of humanity an inclination toward sin that manifests from birth. According to Bunchuea (1986), all humans are inherently predisposed to sin by rejecting God's love and disobeying His commands, leading to further transgressions.

To address the problem of sin, Christianity has established various means of atonement, including the sacrificial offerings detailed in the Old Testament and the belief that Jesus Christ's death on the cross served as a redemptive act for humanity's sins (Anderson, 2009; Leepreecha, 2016). The language of the Bible is distinctive, employing conceptual metaphors to articulate complex theological ideas. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2008), conceptual metaphors are cognitive mechanisms where one idea is understood in terms of another, shaping how abstract concepts are perceived. For instance, the metaphor "SIN IS DIRT" conveys the notion of impurity, while "SIN IS A MASTER" represents the controlling power of sin over individuals. These metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions but reveal how religious beliefs shape cognitive frameworks.

Christianity was introduced to Thailand in 1662 by a Catholic priest (Phongudom, 1982). For Thai Christians, the Bible is regarded as a sacred text the word of God, or Yahweh (Friedman, 1997). The Bible comprises two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament (Phongphit, 1988). The Old Testament contains historical accounts, religious doctrines, and writings by prophets, while the New Testament consists of four Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John alongside Revelation, which describes the end of the world and the final judgment (Harris, 2010). The concept of sin is a fundamental doctrine interwoven throughout both testaments.

The translation of the Bible into Thai has undergone multiple revisions over the years. The Old and New Testaments, 2011 Standard Version, translated by the Thai Bible Society, is a comprehensive revision of the 1971 edition (Thailand Bible Society, 2011). This revised translation aimed to preserve the original meaning while ensuring accuracy and cultural relevance. The 2011 Standard Version is recognized as the most authoritative Thai translation, having been certified by the United Bible Societies (Phongphit, 1988). This translation plays a crucial role in shaping the understanding of Christian concepts among Thai readers, including the metaphorical representations of sin.

This study focuses on examining the conceptual metaphors of sin in the 2011 Standard Version of the Holy Bible in Thai, analyzing how these metaphors function within the Christian cognitive framework and contribute to the expression of theological ideas. By exploring the conceptual metaphors in both the Old and New Testaments, this research provides insights into the cognitive and cultural dimensions of sin as understood in the Thai Christian context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of sin has long been a central concern in religious discourse, though its interpretations vary significantly across traditions. In Christian theology, sin is typically understood as a moral failing or a separation from divine grace (Ilsink & Koldeweij, 2016). This notion is vividly represented in both textual and visual forms, particularly through the doctrine of the Seven Deadly Sins *gula* (gluttony), *acedia* (sloth), *luxuria* (lust), *superbia* (pride), *ira* (wrath), *invidia* (envy), and *avaricia* (greed) as exemplified in canonical works such as *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *The Four Last Things*, attributed to Hieronymus Bosch (Garrido & Schoote, 2001). While Christian interpretations emphasize sin as a condition that alienates individuals from God, Theravāda Buddhism conceptualizes sin (*pāpa*) through ethical causality, involving defilements (*kilesa*), actions (*karma*), and consequences (*vipāka*) (Phramaha Sam Aggadhammo, 2019). This fundamental contrast offers a valuable comparative framework for examining how metaphysical and moral ideas are constructed within different religious systems.

To provide a conceptual foundation for the present study, which explores metaphorical representations of sin in biblical texts, the existing literature may be categorized into three main groups:

- 1) studies addressing the concept of sin in religious or doctrinal contexts,
- 2) studies applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory to abstract and spiritual domains, and
- 3) Studies examining metaphor in multimodal or experiential contexts that, although not inherently religious, offer theoretical insights applicable to theological analysis.

The first group includes research that explores sin as a theological, symbolic, or cultural construct within Christianity. For example, IIsink and Koldeweij (2016) frame sin as the degeneration of divine glory, influencing theological interpretations and visual representations over centuries. In the Thai context, Pramaha Tawichai Adaro (2022) provides a comparative analysis of the roles of Satan in Catholicism and Māra in Buddhism, highlighting divergent conceptualizations of evil across traditions.

The second group consists of studies grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which posits that metaphors are fundamental to human cognition and the understanding of abstract phenomena. Metaphors such as [SIN IS A STAIN], [SIN IS A BURDEN], or [SIN IS A JOURNEY] exemplify how intangible religious concepts are made accessible through concrete and embodied experiences. Gibbs (1994) argues that metaphor not only reflects cognitive structures but also shapes communication and belief systems. Within the context of religious inquiry, Knepper (2019) advances this theoretical approach by applying the journey metaphor to reframe the philosophy of religion. He suggests that metaphors involving beginnings, obstacles, companions, and destinations offer a productive alternative to the traditionally theistic frameworks that have long dominated the field. This aligns with Halliday's (1994) metafunctional view of language, in which metaphors serve ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions, and with Goatly's (1998) categorization of metaphorical usage across genres.

The third group comprises studies that, while not overtly theological, illustrate the broader cognitive and communicative power of metaphor. Wei (2024), for instance, investigates multimodal metaphors in a Sino-British co-produced documentary, introducing a refined classification system that distinguishes between explicit and implicit metaphorical representations. Her study demonstrates how verbal and visual elements collaboratively construct meaning, especially in cases where metaphorical sources are implied rather than directly stated. Similarly, Gao and Wu (2024) explore metaphor use

in blogs authored by parents of children with cancer, identifying metaphors such as journey, war, game, and plant as means of expressing emotional complexity and resilience. Their findings underscore how metaphor can frame experiences of suffering and hope insights that resonate with theological explorations of sin, redemption, and moral struggle.

Collectively, these three strands of research affirm the centrality of metaphor in shaping the conceptualization of sin. They demonstrate that metaphors whether doctrinal, cognitive, or experiential function as essential tools for articulating spiritual realities and moral narratives. Building upon these foundations, the present study aims to examine metaphorical constructions of sin in the Bible through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, with the goal of illuminating the cognitive structures and theological implications embedded in sacred texts.

Moreover, the Thai perspective on sin in Christianity presents a particularly compelling area of inquiry, as it contrasts significantly with traditional Buddhist worldviews. The historical spread of Christianity in Thailand has given rise to localized conceptual metaphors that reflect not only cross-cultural adaptation but also the dynamic nature of religious thought. Investigating these metaphors provides an opportunity to explore how theological ideas are cognitively and culturally negotiated, thereby enriching our understanding of metaphor's role in constructing meaning across religious contexts. Understood in the Thai Christian context.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collection and analysis methods outlined as follows:

3.1. Data Collection

1. The researcher selected language forms related to sin exclusively in the form of metaphors, defined as unstructured comparisons. The source of information was the 2011 Standard Version of the Old and New Testaments, translated by the Thai Bible Association (see Appendix A). This dataset can be accessed via the publicly available platform at <https://www.bible.com/bible/111/JHN.1.NI.V>.
2. Words or phrases included in the study contained the term "sin" as a supporting unit, such as "sin" or "guilty sin."

- Each metaphorical expression was manually extracted and categorized into conceptual metaphor domains based on semantic similarity. Expressions with different lexical forms but identical metaphorical framings (e.g., dirt, stain, filth) were grouped under the same metaphor (e.g., [SIN IS DIRT]). Frequencies were calculated based on the number of metaphorical expressions appearing in the text, with each counted once per occurrence. A total of 127 expressions were analyzed.

3.2. Data Analysis

- The analysis of metaphors applied the conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (2008), based on the framework of cognitive linguistics.
- The analysis of the functions of conceptual metaphors utilized Goatly's (1998) framework on metaphor functions.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Conceptual Metaphors on Sin in the Holy Bible

The researcher identified a total of five conceptual metaphors related to sin. These metaphors are presented in descending order of frequency, as shown in Table I.

Table I: Categorization and Frequency of Sin-Related Conceptual Metaphors.

Ordinal Number	Conceptual metaphors	Frequency of appearance	Percentage
1	[SIN IS A DIRT]	47	37.01
2	[SIN IS HUMAN]	33	25.98
3	[SIN IS A MASTER]	21	16.54
4	[SIN IS AN OBJECT]	17	13.39
5	[SIN IS AN ANIMAL]	9	7.09
Total		127	100

The table above indicated that the most common conceptual metaphor for sin in the Bible was "Sin is Dirt" at 37.01%, followed by "Sin is Human" at 25.98%. The least common was "Sin is an Animal" at 7.09%. Each type of conceptual metaphor is detailed as follows.

4.1.1. [SIN IS DIRT]

The conceptual metaphor "Sin is Dirt" is represented linguistically in both noun and verb

forms, including terms such as defilement, stain, wash, and purify. This metaphor links concepts from the source domain, "dirt," defined as "a substance regarded as unclean or undesirable," to the target domain of "sin." **The following examples illustrate this mapping:**

- The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can remove your defilement of sin" (Exodus 32: 30)

The verb "remove" (/lóp/) is used in connection with "sin" or "defilement of sin," signifying "to eliminate something by wiping or erasing" (Royal Institute, 2013). This comparison highlights the idea of sin as dirt that can be erased or cleansed.

- Because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you from all your sins. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean. (Leviticus 16:30)

The verb "cleanse" (/chamrá/) is employed with "sin," denoting "to wash and make clean" (Royal Institute, 2013). This metaphor equates sin to dirt that can be washed away.

- Although you wash yourself with soap and use an abundance of cleansing powder, the stain of your guilty sin is still before me. (Jeremiah 2:22)

The noun "stain" (/ro:j puʔa:n/) refers to a "mark caused by something dirty, disgusting, or unwanted." This comparison represents sin as a stain that mars one's life.

These examples demonstrate the conceptual metaphor [SIN IS DIRT]. Sin is depicted as something that can be cleansed through sacrifices for atonement and by accepting the Lord as the supreme deity, with Jesus serving as the redeemer of humanity's sins. The mapping between the source domain, "dirt," and the target domain, "sin," is illustrated as Figure I.

Source domain		Target domain
[DIRT]	→	[SIN]
Stain, dirty mark	→	Moral Corruption
Cleaning	→	Purification
Removal	→	Atonement

Figure 1: Conceptual Mapping Diagram.
Source-Target Domain Mapping of [SIN IS DIRT].

4.1.2. [SIN IS A MAN]

The conceptual metaphor, "Sin is Human," is expressed in a variety of linguistic forms that depict the appearance and actions of a man. This metaphor connects the concept in the source domain, "man," to the target domain of "sin." The interpretation of the metaphor of man in relation to sin in the Holy Bible involves multiple aspects of human behavior

and characteristics, which are transferred to represent sin.

1. Sin as a hereditary legacy

A hereditary characteristic refers to a quality or condition that originates in previous generations and continues to be passed on to subsequent ones. In the context of sin, this metaphorical inheritance emphasizes the idea that sinful tendencies or the state of sinfulness are transferred from ancestors to their descendants, as demonstrated in the following examples:

- 4) And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your fathers and making Yahweh even angrier with Israel [5]. (Numbers 32: 14)

The term "brood" (/pan/) is associated with "sin" to convey the idea of inherited sinfulness. "Brood" signifies lineage or descent, emphasizing the notion that sin, like a genetic trait, is passed from one generation to the next due to the disobedience of the first human couple.

- 5) Truly, I was born in evil and I was a sinner from my mother's womb. (Psalms 51: 5)

The phrase "from my mother's womb" (/tãntè: jù: naj kan ma:nda:/) is used to illustrate sin as a hereditary condition. It conveys the idea that sinfulness is innate, passed down from generation to generation.

This metaphor reflects the concept that sin is an inherited trait, originating from Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). Their transgression resulted in all of humanity being considered sinful from birth, with the sinfulness passed on genetically to all future generations.

2. Sin as possessing both body and life

Sin is depicted as having both a body and life. In this context, the "body and life" of sin refers to the metaphorical personification of sin, portraying it as possessing physical attributes and vitality akin to those of a human being. This metaphor emphasizes that sin is not merely an abstract concept but something with form and vitality, as illustrated in the following verses:

- 6) For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin (Romans 6:6).

The term "body" (/tua:/) is used in association with "sin." According to the Royal Institute (2013), "body" refers to one's physical form or self, thereby attributing a tangible, human-like embodiment to the concept of sin.

- 7) Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life

and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. (Romans 7: 9)

The phrase "sprang to life" /klàp mi: chi:wít/ is applied metaphorically to sin. Here, "life" is used as the opposite of "death," implying that sin can return or reawaken. This comparison suggests that committing wrongdoing or generating sin is akin to giving life to something that was previously dormant or dead.

The conceptual metaphors identified reflect the belief that sin possesses both a body and the capacity for life. Sin is metaphorically portrayed as having a physical presence, similar to that of a human being, and residing within human beings. Within Christian doctrine, all people are considered sinners due to the inheritance of original sin from Adam and Eve. Although Jesus Christ is believed to have destroyed sin, the human body though purified still remains. This distinction illustrates that humanity and sin are separate entities. However, sin retains the potential to be reborn; when a person engages in immoral behavior, sin metaphorically "returns to life."

3. Human Behaviour

Human behavior encompasses actions and responses expressed through physical movement, cognition, and emotions in reaction to stimuli. In this context, the concept of sin is metaphorically represented through human behavior, as illustrated in the following examples.

- 8) But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. (Romans 7: 8)

The phrase "seizing the opportunity" /chuã:j ?okà:t/ is metaphorically associated with sin. The phrase means "to take advantage of the right moment to act" (Na Nakhon, 1970). This metaphor conceptualizes sin as an active force that exploits opportunities to influence human actions toward sinful behavior.

- 9) Your sins have diverted these things, and your sins have withheld good things from you. (Jeremiah 5:25)

The verbs "divert" (/hãnhẽ:/) and "withhold" (/kan/) describe human behaviors and are metaphorically applied to sin. According to the Royal Institute (2013), "divert" means "to lead away from the intended path", while "withhold" means "to obstruct entry, exit, or occurrence". These metaphors depict sin as an active agent that causes individuals to stray from righteousness or prevents them from engaging in virtuous actions.

The conceptual metaphors in these examples illustrate the idea that sin exhibits human-like behaviors, as seen in expressions such as “seizing the opportunity”, “divert”, and “withhold”. These metaphors suggest that sin actively waits for the right moment to influence individuals, either preventing them from doing good or leading them toward further wrongdoing. This conceptualization aligns with Christian theology, which asserts that all human beings possess inherent sinfulness, making sin a fundamental aspect of human nature that influences behavior regardless of external moral instruction, as illustrated in Figure II.

Source domain		Target domain
[HUMAN]	→	[SIN]
Genetic inheritance	→	Sin at birth
Human body and life	→	Existence of sin
Human behavior	→	Sinfulness

Figure 2: Conceptual Mapping Diagram.

Source: Target Domain Mapping of [SIN IS HUMAN].

4.1.3. SIN IS A MASTER

The conceptual metaphor “Sin is a master” is expressed in language forms and verbs such as slave, dominate, force, be under the law, and others. This metaphor draws a connection to the source domain concept of “master”, which refers to “a commander, leader, or ruler”, as illustrated in the following examples.

- 10) So that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5: 21)

In this passage, the word “reign” (/khl̩ːpɲam/) is applied to “sin”. Reign means “to have power over, to force” (Royal Institute, 2013), portraying sin as a master who can control, manipulate, or dominate humans.

- 11) But I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me subject to the law of sin at work within me. (Romans 7: 23)

The phrase “subject to the law” used with “sin” suggests that sin has greater power and enforces rules to constrain humans. The use of the word /təj/ or “under” further implies that human beings have less power or status than sin, making them subservient to it.

- 12) For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin [13]. (Romans 6: 6)

The word “slave” is used with “sin”. Slave refers to “a person who surrenders himself to servitude or

is redeemed by a master, someone who submits to the power of something” (Royal Institute, 2013). This metaphor suggests that sin is a master, capable of controlling or commanding humans.

The conceptual metaphors revealed through these examples reflect the notion that sin is a master. Sin possesses the power to influence human conduct, leading individuals toward immoral or unwholesome behavior. In essence, sin is inherent in human nature, shaping the actions and choices of individuals regardless of external moral guidance, as illustrated in Figure III.

Source domain		Target domain
[MASTER]	→	[SIN]
One with more power, slave master	→	Sin
Command, control, possess	→	To have a sin

Figure 3: Conceptual Mapping Diagram.

Source: Target Domain Mapping of [SIN IS MASTER].

4.1.4. SIN IS AN OBJECT

The conceptual metaphor “sin is an object” is instantiated through linguistic expressions that involve attributes and transitive verbs typically associated with concrete entities. This metaphorical mapping conceptualizes the abstract notion of sin as a tangible object, as demonstrated in the following scriptural verses.

- 13) Woe to the nation with thick sin, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken Yahweh; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. (Isaiah 1: 4)

The adjective “thick,” which denotes a physical characteristic, is used to modify “sin,” implying that sin possesses spatial properties. According to the Royal Institute Dictionary (2013), the Thai word /nă:/ is defined as “a very high point from the surface.” This use metaphorically suggests that sin has measurable volume or density, thereby reifying it as an object.

- 14) Then lie on your left side and put the sin of the people of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. (Ezekiel 4: 4)

In this verse, the verbs “put,” “upon,” and “bear” are employed in relation to “sin,” indicating that sin is construed as an entity that can be physically positioned and carried. The verb “bear” corresponds to the Thai word /bè:k/, meaning “to carry on the back or shoulder.” These verbs reinforce the metaphorical representation of sin as a burdensome object that can be transferred from one

entity to another.

15) He will turn again; he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7: 19)

The verb “cast” entails a physical act of forcefully throwing an object. In Thai, the equivalent verb /wia:n/ is defined as “to throw or hurl with force.” The application of this verb to “sin” illustrates its metaphorical objectification, suggesting that sin can be thrown away from human by Lord Yahweh.

Collectively, these examples reveal that the metaphor “sin is an object” is realized through linguistic structures that attribute physical properties and actions to sin. Sin is portrayed as having form, weight, and location qualities that enable it to be borne, placed, and cast away. This metaphorical framing highlights the oppressive nature of sin, while simultaneously emphasizing the potential for its removal or absolution through divine intervention, as depicted in Figure IV.

Source domain		Target domain
[Object]	→	[Sin]
Size of an object	→	The magnitude of the sin
Destruction of an object	→	Liberation from sin, freedom from sin

Figure 4: This Metaphorical Framing Highlights the Oppressive Nature of Sin, while simultaneously emphasizing the Potential for its Removal or absolution through divine Intervention, as depicted in Figure IV.

Source: Target Domain Mapping of [SIN IS AN OBJECT].

4.1.5. SIN IS AN ANIMAL

The conceptual metaphor “sin is an animal” is represented exclusively through verbs, specifically those that describe animal behaviors such as crouching, clawing, and biting. This metaphor draws on the source domain of “animal,” defined as a “living creature that is neither a plant nor a human being,” which is evident in the following verses.

16) If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to pounce you. (Genesis 4: 7)

The verbs “crouch” and “pounce” are used in association with “sin.” Crouch refers to the action of bending one's knees and lowering the body so that the lower arms are flat on the ground, similar to how animals position themselves (Royal Institute, 2013). Pounce, similarly, refers to a quick, sudden grab (Royal Institute, 2013). These verbs serve as a comparison, portraying sin as an animal ready to

attack crouching and pouncing are behaviors associated with predatory animals. This linguistic mapping transfers the meaning from the source domain of “crouching” and “pouncing” in the context of animal behavior to the target domain of “sin”.

The conceptual metaphor emphasizes that sin can be viewed as an animal, particularly a predatory one, that poses a threat to humans. Just as an animal can harm its prey, sin can influence individuals to act wrongly or impede their spiritual growth in accordance with religious principles, as depicted in Figure V.

Source domain		Target domain
[ANIMAL]	→	[SIN]
Behavior of animals, harming humans	→	Sin leads to disaster.

Figure 5: Target Domain Mapping of [SIN IS AN ANIMAL].

Source: Target Domain Mapping of [SIN IS AN ANIMAL].

4.2. Functions of Conceptual Metaphors for Sin in the Holy Bible

These five conceptual metaphors for sin in the Bible serve a higher level of communication, going beyond just the artifice of translation or writing. The researcher utilized Goatly's (1998) concept to study the functions of metaphors by considering them within the context of the Bible's genre. The Bible is a religious scripture intended primarily to record the Word of God, providing guidance for Christians to follow. **The research results are outlined below:**

4.2.1. A Function to Convey Ideas

The Bible is a spiritual record of Yahweh, mankind, sin, and Yahweh's plan to deliver humanity from the destruction of sin to eternal life. Sin plays a key role in the Bible, as salvation from sin is central to Christian faith. One reason is that there is no concept of rebirth. Conceptual metaphors are employed to simplify the complex concept of sin for better understanding. The functions of conveying ideas about sin are as follows:

1. Conceptual metaphors help to further understand the concept of sin through analogies.

Metaphors help explain abstract concepts within the human cognitive system by making them more tangible or relatable to human experience. Sin is an abstract, formless state that cannot be directly experienced with the five senses. The metaphors used create analogies by likening sin to dirt, humans, masters, objects, and animals concepts more accessible to human experience. This analogy model reflects ideas and experiences humans have

encountered before and serves Christianity's goal of liberation from sin to live in Yahweh's will and attain eternal life.

2. *Conceptual Metaphors Expand the Thai Language Corpus*

Christianity is a religion that originated in the Western world before it was introduced to Thailand. Although sin is a concept in Thai society and Buddhism, its characteristics differ significantly. In Buddhism, there is no purging or cleansing of sin, nor can sin be eliminated through worship of God, primarily because Buddhism is an atheistic religion. However, the Buddhist concept of living without creating sin and the nature of sin that leads humans to disaster shares similarities with the Buddhist concept of desire as reflected in the Dhamma verses in the Suttanta Pitaka.

"Our minds are freed from desires. May you see the wonderful virtues of the Dhamma like this." (Khuttaka Nikaya Viman-Petwathu Thera-Therikatha (Thai) 26/361/287) (84000 Phra Dhammakhan, 1997)

Conceptual metaphors contribute to the development of a corpus of Thai vocabulary, particularly exemplified by expressions such as "SIN IS DIRT," which reflect the Christian conceptual system. Such metaphors emerge when a target language lacks appropriate lexical items to convey certain notions, or when existing expressions are less effective than metaphorical alternatives. The formation of metaphor-based lexical items is guided by the linguistic principle of economy. Consequently, the Thai translation of the Bible tends to retain existing Thai vocabulary, even when the metaphorical domains differ. These expressions are employed to distinctly communicate religious concepts to Christian believers in Thailand.

3. *Conceptual metaphors for sin in Christian thinking*

Language forms not only transmit human thought systems but also shape them. In the context of Christian theology, the conceptual metaphors identified in this research reflect and reinforce core beliefs particularly the idea that Yahweh is the supreme God and the source of human salvation. These metaphors are therefore consistent with this fundamental belief and advocate for a life free from sin. Consequently, the metaphors reinforce the authority of religious institutions, positioning the Holy Bible as a normative framework for human conduct (Thamphantha, 1997). This phenomenon is closely linked to the process of socialization, wherein religious doctrines (Adiwatthanasi et al., 2000) are utilized to emphasize the ideology of living according to God's will, with the ultimate goal of returning to Him in the Kingdom of God and attaining eternal life (Phongphit,

1988).

4.2.2. *The Function in Composition*

Conceptual metaphors influence human memory, stimulate interest, and convey rich meaning using minimal language. However, they often require greater interpretive effort from the receiver compared to direct communication. In the context of sin, conceptual metaphors play a crucial role in structuring meaning, as outlined below:

1. *Conceptual Metaphors Enable Concise yet Powerful Communication*

Describing sin—an abstract and intangible concept through conceptual metaphors allows for a more concise composition while still conveying a broader and more complex idea than would be possible through lengthy explanations. This is because conceptual metaphors map meaning from source domains that are grounded in direct human experience, thereby making abstract concepts more accessible. As a result, all five types of conceptual metaphors examined in this study exemplify the principle of expressing profound meaning with minimal language, as illustrated in the following example.

"They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are dense with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires". (2 Timothy 3: 6)

The above example illustrates a material metaphor that conveys the severity of sin through the use of the word "dense." Although sin cannot be quantified in physical terms, the metaphorical use of "dense" enables the reader to grasp the intended meaning of the biblical message. This understanding is further reinforced by the textual context and the recipient's prior experiences. Thus, the use of such a metaphor serves as a broad linguistic device encompassing a wide range of connotations. It facilitates more direct and concise communication about the concept of sin.

"He is to slaughter the lamb in the sanctuary area where the offering to wipe away sins and the burnt offering are slaughtered. Like the sin offering, the offering to atone for sins belongs to the priest; it is most holy [19]". (Leviticus 14: 13)

This example illustrates how sin is addressed through the ritual sacrifice of a lamb as an oblation. Other biblical passages also mention sacrifices involving male goats and bulls. The use of terms such as "wipe away" and "atone" metaphorically represents liberation from sin or the redemption of transgressions. These conceptual metaphors effectively convey the notion of purifying sin a

concept that differs markedly from Buddhist perspectives. They also reflect the underlying beliefs and ritual practices of Christianity.

All metaphors for sin are consistent with the role of the Bible as a medium for communicating religious concepts. The Bible is regarded as the word of God and His divine plan for granting humanity eternal life (Phongphit, 1988). Christians believe it was written through divine inspiration. The Bible reveals Yahweh's glory and love for humankind, as evidenced by His sending of Jesus, His only begotten Son, to guide people away from behaviors that deviate from His will (Romans 3: 23). According to Christian belief, Jesus died on the cross to atone for the sins of all people (1 Peter 3: 18).

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this article is to analyze the conceptual metaphors for sin and their functions in the Holy Bible, with a focus on how these metaphors reflect the cognitive framework associated with sin in both the Old and New Testaments, based on the 2011 Standard Version. The study identifies five primary conceptual metaphors for sin: [SIN IS DIRT], [SIN IS HUMAN], [SIN IS A MASTER], [SIN IS AN OBJECT], and [SIN IS AN ANIMAL]. These metaphors function as cognitive tools to convey religious ideas, which can be categorized into two primary functions: conveying ideas and compositional structuring. The metaphors are more than just linguistic devices; they serve as mechanisms for shaping religious thought and moral understanding within the Christian faith.

The research findings revealed that the metaphor of sin as dirt appeared most frequently, followed by the metaphor of sin as a man. This finding is significant, as these metaphors are closely aligned with foundational Christian doctrines, particularly the concepts of original sin and atonement. Christianity teaches that all humans are inherently sinful due to the disobedience of humanity's earliest ancestors. This concept of inherited sin forms a central tenet of Christian belief. The metaphor of sin as dirt effectively conveys the idea of sin as something unclean, defiling the individual and separating them from the divine. It represents the inherent impurity that all humans carry as a result of the fall from grace.

In the Old Testament, the expiation of sin is portrayed through rituals involving offerings such as female animals, sheep, or goats. This is illustrated in Leviticus 5:5-6:

"When anyone becomes aware that they are

guilty in any of these matters, they must confess in what way they have sinned. As a penalty for the sin they have committed, they must bring to the Lord a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for them for their sin [20]". (Leviticus 5: 5-6)

Nonetheless, the New Testament introduces the birth of Jesus, which marks a shift in the method of expiating sin now through faith in God. This is evident in the practice of baptism for new believers, symbolizing the beginning of spiritual growth and liberation from sin. Christians believe that Jesus' crucifixion served as atonement for the sins of all humankind, as illustrated in the following words of God.

The use of animal sacrifices emphasizes the severity of sin and the need for atonement, reflecting a belief in the sacrificial system as a means of restoring the sinner to a state of purity and harmony with God. This expiation process aligns with the metaphor of sin as dirt, as it highlights the cleansing required to purify the individual from sin's defiling effects.

However, the New Testament introduces a profound shift in the method of expiating sin. The birth of Jesus Christ marks a pivotal moment in Christian theology, as it signifies the new means of redemption through faith in God. Jesus' crucifixion is central to this transformation, offering atonement for the sins of all humankind. As reflected in Romans 6: 6:

"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" [21]. (Romans 6: 6)

The metaphor of sin as a man is significant here, as it portrays sin as a force that holds humanity in bondage, a master over the individual. The crucifixion represents the ultimate act of liberation from this power. This shift from ritualistic sacrifices to the sacrificial death of Jesus signifies the fulfilment of God's plan for human salvation, providing believers with a pathway to redemption through faith.

The conceptual metaphors of sin in the Bible are deeply intertwined with the Christian worldview, which emphasizes the transformative power of salvation and the believer's purification through Christ. The dirt metaphor remains the most prominent, signifying the need for spiritual cleansing and renewal. Additionally, the metaphor of sin as a master speaks to the power that sin exerts over individuals, making the act of redemption not only a cleansing of sin but a release from its

dominion.

In examining other conceptual metaphors for sin, the researcher observed that each metaphor carries with it a sense of supernatural power or the potential for harm, regardless of the specific metaphor used. Whether depicted as dirt, a man, a master, an object, or an animal, sin is portrayed as a force with the capacity to corrupt, harm, or control humanity. This reflects the development of a religious worldview in which sin is seen as a dangerous entity, prompting individuals to distance themselves from it. Watchman's (2004) argument that sin leads to moral decline and requires rehabilitation is reflected in these metaphors, which underscore the negative consequences of sin and the need for intervention and salvation.

The findings of this study show both convergence and divergence with prior research. Metaphors related to struggle, transformation, and hierarchy align with Gao and Wu's (2024) analysis of metaphors used by parents of children with cancer to express emotional complexity. Similarly, Wei (2024) found that verbal and visual metaphors especially implicit ones serve to convey abstract ideas such as identity, power, and authority in documentary media. Knepper (2019) further highlighted the journey metaphor's potential to reframe philosophical and religious thinking. Despite differing contexts, these studies converge in showing that conceptual metaphors serve as abstract models for meaning-making across diverse domains, providing insight into how individuals interpret complex ideas and experiences.

However, the conceptual metaphors of sin in the Holy Bible reflect a distinctive cognitive and cultural framework shaped by Christian theological traditions. Unlike metaphors found in everyday media or secular texts, biblical metaphors are embedded within a religious worldview that emphasizes divine judgment, moral transgression, and redemption. While the Bible has been translated into many languages, including Thai, its conceptual system remains firmly rooted in Western thought. This cultural and theological context sets the Bible apart from secular texts and non-Christian religious traditions, offering a unique site for cross-cultural metaphor analysis.

While this study focuses on the Thai Standard Version of the Bible, future research may benefit from cross-cultural comparisons. For example, Tianying & Bogoyavlenskaya (2023) analyze

semantic transformation and cultural adaptation of metaphor across languages using a cognitive-linguistic framework. Hammoodi & Moindjie (2024) compare metaphor translations in multiple English versions of the Qur'an, highlighting shifts in imagery influenced by theological context. Wang (2025) explores strategies for translating cultural metaphors through cognitive metaphor theory. Together, these studies suggest that examining how metaphors for sin are rendered across different Bible versions (e.g., English NIV, Hebrew Masoretic) can reveal important cultural nuances and deepen our understanding of theological metaphor in translation.

Although the Thai version of the Bible serves as the primary source in this study, it is important to note that the translation closely follows the structure and meaning of the English Standard Version and other Western texts. As a result, the metaphorical system reflected in the Thai Bible is deeply rooted in Christian theological thought rather than adapted to local religious worldviews. This is particularly significant in the Thai context, where Buddhism predominates. Unlike Christianity, which views sin as a universal inherited condition requiring atonement, Buddhism typically frames moral transgressions as karmic consequences subject to self-correction through mindfulness and ethical living. The presence of metaphors such as "sin is dirt" and "sin is a master" in the Thai Bible reveals how linguistic and theological frameworks from Christian traditions have been retained even in translation, offering a rich area for future contrastive religious and linguistic analysis.

Language serves as a bridge between human experience, cultural values, and abstract thought. Through conceptual metaphors, speakers can translate complex, often intangible ideas into concrete expressions grounded in shared social and cognitive frameworks. These metaphors are not merely rhetorical devices but powerful tools that reveal how individuals interpret morality, identity, and the human condition. In this sense, examining the conceptual metaphors of sin in the Bible offers more than a linguistic analysis; it provides valuable insight into how religious language shapes, preserves, and transmits theological worldviews across cultures, offering a deeper understanding of the moral and spiritual dimensions of human existence.

Acknowledgment: The authors would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to Associate Professor Dr. Thanwaphon Sereechai-kul of Kasetsart University, the late scholar who inspired the study of conceptual

metaphor and generously provided valuable guidance.

REFERENCES

- Adiwatthanasi, J., Sudsawat, S. and Rerkrujiphimon, C. (2000) Sociology. Bangkok, Kasetsart University.
- Agbede, G. T. and Mheta, G. (2022) Metaphors of culpability and commendation in selected political campaign speeches of Buhari. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1-10.
- Anderson, G. A. (2009) *Sin: A history*. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Bunchuea, K. (1986) *Principles of belief of Catholic Christians (First part of Christianity)*. Bangkok, Thai Wattanapanich Printing House.
- Croft, W. and Cruse, D. A. (2004) *Cognitive linguistics*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Friedman, R. (1997) *Who wrote the Bible?*. San Francisco, HarperOne.
- Gao, R. and Wu, Y. (2024) Understanding the use of metaphors by parents of children with cancer in blogs: a qualitative analysis. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, Vol. 11, No. 794, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03284-y>
- Garrido, C. and Schoote, R. V. (2001) *Bosch at the Museo del Prado: A technical study*. Madrid, Aldeasa.
- Gibbs, R. W. (1994) *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Goatly, A. (1998) *The language of metaphors*. London, Routledge.
- Grice, H. P. (1975) Logic and conversation. In: Cole, P. and Morgan, J. (eds) *Syntax and semantics*. New York, Academic Press, pp. 41-58.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994) *An introduction to functional grammar*. London, Arnold.
- Harris, S. (2010) *Understanding the Bible*. New York, McGraw-Hill.
- Hashim Hammoodi, A. & Moindjie, M. A. M. (2024) Translation of Metaphor in the Qur'an: A Comparative Study of Three Selected Translations. *H ikma International Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 3745-3760.
- Ilsink, M. and Koldeweij, J. (2016) *Hieronymus Bosch: Painter and draughtsman – catalogue raisonné*. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Jang, U. L. (2002) *Is Jesus really the son of God?*. Bangkok, Thailand Gospel Library.
- Knepper, T. (2019) Using the 'journey metaphor' to restructure philosophy of religion. *Palgrave Communications*, Vol. 5, No. 43, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0252-7>
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (2008) *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Leepreecha, P. (2016) *Civilization across borders: The spread of Hmong Protestant religion in Southeast Asia*. Chiang Mai, Thailand, Chiang Mai University.
- Na Nakhon, P. (1970) *Student dictionary*. Bangkok, Thai Watthana Panich.
- Onuoha, C. E. and Uchechukwu, C. (2022) The metaphorical expression of time in Igbo. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1-18. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/23311983.2022.2131067>
- Phanphothong, N. (1999) The function of metaphors from the perspective of Thai speakers. *Thai Language and Literature*, Vol. 16, 249-268.
- Phongphit, S. (1988) *Christianity*. Bangkok, Thammasat University Press.
- Phongudom, M. (1982) *Protestants in Rattanakosin or Christians and the life of the Thai nation*. Bangkok, Thai Khadi Research Institute.
- Phra Dhamma Pitaka (Prayut Payutto) (2004) *The Buddhist Dictionary: The Glossary Version*. Available at: https://84000.org/tipitaka/dic/index_dd.php (Accessed: 2 February 2025).
- Phramaha Sam Aggadhammo (Sang Wong) (2019) An analytical study of ontological concept of evil (pāpa) in Theravāda Buddhist philosophy. *Journal of MCU Nakhondhat*, Vol. 6, No. 6, 3074-3091.
- Pramaha Tawichai Adaro (2022) A comparative study of the reflectional being of the mara in Theravada Buddhism and Satan in Roman Catholic Christianity. *Journal of Institute of Trainer Monk Development*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 118-129.
- Purevdor, E. (2022) Comparative analysis of the concept of "child" in Mongolian and Korean expressions. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1-15.
- Royal Institute (2013) *Royal Institute Dictionary 2011*. Available at: <http://www.royin.go.th/dictionary/> (Accessed: 14 February 2025).
- Saralamba, C. (2005) Metaphor in cognitive theory. *Journal of Liberal Arts*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1-16.
- Sripoom, K. (2022) Conceptual metaphor for God and their functions in the Bible: The Old Testament. *Journal of Liberal Arts Maejo University*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 127-146.

- Thailand Bible Society (2011) The Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, Standard Edition 2011. Available at: <https://www.bible.com/th/bible/174/GEN.1.thsv11> (Accessed: 14 February 2025).
- Thamphantha, S. (1997) *Man & society*. Bangkok, D.D. Bookstore.
- Tianying, L. & Bogoyavlenskaya, Y. V. (2023) Semantic Transformation and Cultural Adaptation of Metaphor and Multimodal Metaphor in Multilingual Communication from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 161–189.
- Udomphan, C. (2014) Metaphors of illnesses and their functions in *Khanthaviphangkinee Khamkap Pharmacopoeia*, Southern Thai edition. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 51–72.
- Wachiraniwet, P. (2001) A comparative study of the teachings and views on the “devil” as appeared in the Buddhist Tripitaka and the Christian Bible. Master’s thesis, Mahidol University, Bangkok.
- Wang, L. (2025) Translation of Cultural Metaphors from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 111–127.
- Watchman, N. (2004) *Normal Christian life*. Bangkok, Gospel Library of Thailand.
- Wei, X. (2024) Multimodal metaphors in a Sino-British co-produced documentary. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, Vol. 11, No. 286, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02739-6>
- Wongthai, N. (2012) Conceptual metaphors of death in Thai. *Journal of Language and Culture*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 43–64.
- YouVersion (n.d.) The Bible. Available at: <https://www.bible.com/bible/111/JHN.1.NIV> (Accessed: 22 February 2025).