

A Brief History of the CATHOLIC CHURCH in Nagaland

DR. DAVID SYIEMLEIH

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NAGALAND is the first attempt to trace out the story of the Catholic Church in Nagaland from its beginnings about thirty years ago up to the present time. Though it is subject to the unavoidable limitations of trying to reconstruct contemporary history, it is a scholarly and praiseworthy attempt. It is the first work of its kind and future scholars will always have recourse to this solid and scholarly historical foundation. Those interested in Church History and Northeast India will find this book informative and inspiring.

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DR. DAVID SYIEMLIH

With an Introduction
by Sebastian Karotemprel, SDB

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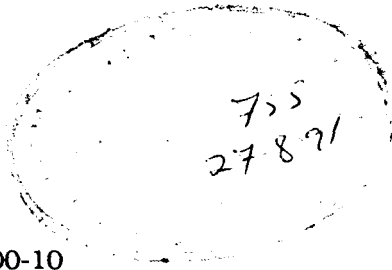
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Introduction

In 1982 I conducted a Seminar on Evangelization for the diocese of Kohima which was attended by the Bishop, the Priests, the Religious and the Laity of Nagaland. The idea of preparing a booklet on each tribe among whom evangelization work was in progress along with a brief history of the origins of the Catholic Church among them was discussed at the seminar and was accepted by all.

Accordingly a number of priests working in various tribal communities began to make a study as suggested above. This was partly done during the course of the next two years. But, some of the studies contained much sociological and anthropological information but very little on the history of the beginning of the Church. Besides, the contributions received were also of unequal literary and methodological levels.

Despite these limitations, the material gathered was very useful. It was at this stage, that I approached Dr. David Syiemlieh, Reader in History in the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, with the idea of writing a history of the Catholic Church in Nagaland. The suggestion was welcomed and the work started.

In December 1986 Dr. Syiemlieh made a visit to most of the mission centres of Nagaland and was able to observe closely the Church's activities in Nagaland. Several interviews were held with priests, lay Catholics, Catechists and the Religious. The visit also offered an opportunity to gather photographs, chronicles, letters and other source material connected with the history of the Church in Nagaland.

A second visit was made in 1987 to complete the work of gathering material and cover centres not seen during the first visit.

The contributions made earlier by priests working among the tribes of Nagaland and the material gathered by Dr. Syiemlieh form the basis of the book on the history of the Catholic Church in Nagaland.

The study has a limited scope. To begin with it is contemporary history and hence it cannot be critical enough for the simple fact that personalities involved in the story are still alive.

Secondly, not all mission centres have taken care to maintain regular chronicles of events and even when maintained, they contain only a string of events, sometimes even secondary, and not a critical, contextual and evaluatory record of events, problems and personalities.

Thirdly, archival material that might be in Rome or elsewhere, and the correspondence of missionaries with their regional and international headquarters, obviously are not made available to researchers.

Despite these unavoidable limitations, this study is a great beginning. Certainly future historians will make further studies and complement and supplement this work. I may also express the hope that all missionaries and Religious communities will be greatly inspired by this story and also begin to keep meticulous and substantive record and chronicles of events, problems, personalities, their religious, cultural and social backgrounds and thus provide original source

material for the history of the Church. It will also highlight their individual and collective contribution to the growth of the Church, the impact of the Gospel upon the given society and the consequent spiritual and social transformation that takes place. Such histories are essential for the initiation of all young and new Church personnel into the work of evangelization and development in the given area. One may also fondly hope that this modest volume will inspire other dioceses to attempt to put on record the origins and development of the Church in their respective areas and among the various peoples.

This volume is published during the first centenary of the official establishment of the Catholic Church in Northeast India. I can only hope that the Church in Nagaland will grow fast and be of ever greater service to its people and perhaps beyond its borders.

This brief study is written by a lay Catholic scholar. It is a matter of pride for the local Church to have such scholars. We may recall here the role that must be played by the lay Catholic intelligentsia in the life of the Church and society in Northeast India and the duty of the whole Church to promote the emergence of an educated laity as Vatican II exhorts us :

For the gospel cannot be deeply imprinted on the talents, life, and work of any people without the active presence of laymen. Therefore, even in the very founding of a Church, the greatest attention is to be paid to raising up a mature Christian laity. (Ad Gentes, 21)

I place on record the appreciation of the whole Church of Nagaland and all those who have benefited and are still benefiting from the presence of the Church there for the work done by Dr. Syiemlieh.

Finally on behalf of Vendrame Institute Publications I want to express my gratitude to Bishop Abraham of Kohima for his constant interest, encouragement and assistance in the preparation and publication of this book.

This slender volume is dedicated to the first messengers of the Catholic faith to Nagaland and their immediate collaborators. May today's heralds of the Good News be inspired by their heroic spirit of sacrifice, trust in God and love for the people of Nagaland.

Shillong,
24 May, 1990.

Sebastian Karotemprel, S.D.B.