

**CHRISTIANITY  
AND  
MIZO CULTURE**

**MANGKHOSAT KIPGEN**



# CHRISTIANITY AND MIZO CULTURE

THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY  
AND ZO CULTURE IN MIZORAM

**Mangkhosat Kipgen**



MIZO THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

AIZAWL : MIZORAM

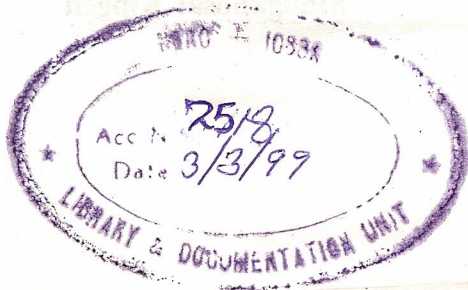
1997

Published by :

The Mizo Theological Conference, Mizoram,  
C/o Eastern Theological College,  
Rajabari, Jorhat - 785 014  
Assam, India

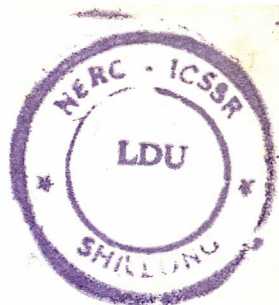
275.4166  
KIP

Copyright : Mangkhosat Kipgen, 1996



002518

Printed at :  
Assam Printing Works (P) Ltd.,  
Mahatma Gandhi Road,  
Jorhat - 1, Assam,



**This book is dedicated to my teacher :**

**Dr Frederick S. Downs,  
Professor of the History of Christianity,  
United Theological College, Bangalore  
and  
Consultant for Tribal Studies and P.G. Programme,  
Eastern Theological College, Jorhat**

## FOREWORD

It is an honour to have been asked by Dr. Mangkhosat Kipgen to write this Foreword. The publication of his doctoral dissertation is long overdue insofar as it makes an important, indeed unique, contribution to the historical study of Christianity in North East India.

In recent years there have been a number of studies of the impact of Christianity upon the tribal peoples of North East India. These have investigated the ways in which the new faith impacted upon the traditional societies and brought about social change. I myself have done studies of this kind, most recently in my H. K. Barpujari Endowment Lectures at NEHU on the impact of Christianity on the status of women among the northeastern hill tribes.

It is sometimes assumed that a normative Christianity was introduced and brought about wide ranging change. The Christianity that the missionaries established in North East India is perceived to be essentially the same as the Christianity found in their European or American homelands. Hence, in this historical paradigm, Christianity is seen as a given, unchanging factor in contrast with changing, evolving local societies.

Dr. Kipgen has chosen a different approach that is based on a different paradigm. He assumes that the interaction between the missionaries and the traditional culture of the Mizo people involved change on both sides. He therefore chose to study the way in which traditional Zo culture shaped Mizo Christianity, rather than the reverse. He comes to the conclusion that it was the engagement of Christianity with the traditional Mizo culture at its deepest level in the unique Mizo revival movements that accounts for its rapid growth in Mizoram.

In the process Dr. Kipgen makes valuable contributions to an in-depth understanding not only of Mizo Christianity, but also of Mizo culture. The book begins with a persuasive argument for the use of the name Zo for the numerous clans inhabiting the regions bordering India, Burma and Bangladesh in place of more awkward and inaccurate anthropological classifications like Kuki-Chin or Chin-Lushais. This chapter is likely to be frequently cited. It proceeds to an in-depth study of the traditional Mizo culture, demonstrating the interrelated-

ness of the political, social and aesthetic aspects which combined to create the integrating ethical code, *tlawmngaihna*. It also examines the central role of lyric poetry and song in the transmission of cultural traditions and values. He is to later argue that it was this aspect of the culture that was instrumental in the indigenization of Christianity. A separate chapter is devoted to the study of the religious aspect of the traditional culture, with attention being given to changes that had begun to take place even before the advent of Christianity. It is argued that there is significant continuity between the traditional and Christian understanding of religion.

After describing the introduction and growth of Christianity in Mizoram, the book proceeds to the key chapter in which the role of the Mizo revivals in bringing about the indigenization of the new religion is examined. It was this indigenization at a very fundamental level, i.e. not at a superficial level in which only outward forms are involved, that in turn accounts for the exceptionally rapid growth of Christianity among the Mizo people. In the process, his analysis of the concept of *Lunglen*, of the *Puma Zai* movement, and the adaptation into Christianity of *tlawmngaihna* make important contributions.

Most of the matter examined by Dr. Kipgen in this book has been touched upon by other authors. But the way he brings together the findings of others in support of his own insights makes this a book of the very highest order. It is required reading for anyone seriously interested in understanding the nature of Christianity among the Mizos or the other tribes of the North East. It will undoubtedly also offer valuable insights to anyone interested in the role of culture in social and religious change.

**Frederick S. Downs,**

Consultant

Tribal Studies

Eastern Theological College,

Jorhat, Assam

## PREFACE

The unusually fast growth of Christianity in Mizoram and the vigour of its life were the two factors that had attracted my attention as a student of the history of Christianity. Together they aroused my curiosity to seek for the hidden factors behind them. A preliminary research convinced me of the need to adopt a shift in the common paradigm that usually focuses on the impact Christianity has made upon the culture of the people who adopted it to the impact of the traditional culture on the Christianity which had become the religion of the people. The result has been richly rewarding as it made me see the Zo Christianity in a way that would not have been possible in any other way.

Originally this study was undertaken for a dissertation which was submitted to the Senate of Serampore College in 1992 for the degree of Doctor of Theology. With some modifications and improvement it is now presented to the reading public with a fond hope that it may in some way add to a deeper self-understanding in the people to which this history belongs.

In the process of preparation and publication of this book several institutions and many individuals have helped me in various ways. My deep sense of gratitude goes to all of them although only a few could be mentioned here.

I am deeply indebted to the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam and its Board of Governors (now College Council) for sponsoring me in my studies as a part of its faculty development programme. The Senate of Serampore College and the Programme on Theological Education of the World Council of Churches deserve my special thanks for enabling me to undertake my studies with a family scholarship and a travel grant to and from the United Kingdom. The 3-month long period of research I had in the United Kingdom was made possible by the timely grant given me by the American Baptist Board of International Ministry, Valley Forge, U.S.A., to which I am deeply grateful. Though short, it was an extremely fruitful period of work without which the contents of this book would have been of much less substance.

My special thanks also goes to the United Theological College, Bangalore, for the necessary provisions given me and my family

during my studies. I owe a great debt to this great theological institution of international standing for the many benefits I received during my repeated sojourns for higher theological learning.

The Librarians, Archivists and Staffs of the following libraries too deserved my deep appreciation for facilitating my research : The United Theological College Library, Bangalore; the National Library and the Newspaper Reading Room, both located in Calcutta; the Carey Library, Serampore; the NEHU Library and State Library, both in Shillong; the State Library, Guwahati; the Aizawl Theological College Library and the State Assembly Library, both in Aizawl; the Baptist Missionary Society Library, Gloucester Place and the India Office Library, Blackfriars Road, both in London and the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

I am deeply grateful to the Rev. F.S. Raper, former B.M.S. missionary to Mizoram and Dr. C.L. Hminga, former General Secretary of the Baptist Church of Mizoram for their kindness in sharing with me invaluable source materials in their possession. Later Dr. Hminga also had gone through the manuscript and offered suggestions which have been incorporated in the book. I also cannot forget the kind hospitality he and his family extended to me during my stay in Serkawn.

My sincere thanks are due to my friend Dr. Timothy Hembrom and family, Bishop's College, Calcutta; Dr. D. Singson and family, formerly of the Serampore College; the late Rev. Beiseia of Aizawl Theological College, Aizawl; the Rev. L.N. Ralte, former Senior Executive Secretary of the Mizo Presbyterian Church Synod, Aizawl; the Rev. K. Lungmuana, former Executive Secretary of Presbyterian Church of North East India, Shillong; Mr. H.S. Raychaudhari, General Secretary and Warden, YMCA Hostel, London; Dr. Kāikhohen Kipgen and family, St. Albans; the Rev. Prof. E. ap. Nefydd Roberts, Principal of the United Theological College, Aberystwyth; the Rev. & Mrs. J.M. Lloyd, former missionary to Mizoram, Prestatyn and many others for the kind hospitality and warm friendship extended to me in course of my research work.

Then there were those in positions of authority whose help and encouragement I wish to acknowledge gratefully : Dr. J.H. Thumra, former Principal of the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat; the Rev. Imotemjen Aier, former General Secretary of the CBCNEI, Guwahati; Dr. J.R. Chandran, former Principal of the United Theological Col-

lege, Bangalore; Dr. H.S. Wilson, former Director of the Senate of Serampore College, Bangalore; Dr. Samuel Amirtham, former Assistant Director of PTE/WCC, Geneva; the Rev. Raymond W. Beaver, former Area Secretary of BIM, Valley Forge; Mr. S. Mudd, Assistant Secretary (Oversea) of the Baptist Missionary Society, London; Mr. Alun Haolai and Dr. Hawingam, Haokip, President and General Secretary respectively of the Kuki Baptist Convention, Imphal and several others who in various ways helped me and made the process of my research going.

I am grateful to my wife, Tingkho, who took upon herself the burden of caring our children and running the family. The sacrifices she made for the success of my ministry in general and of my research work in particular has been tremendous. Our three children — Helam, Kim and Boipu - have been the source of joy and strength even in times of stress and strain for which I am thankful to them.

I am also grateful to the Rev. Colin Hunter, Pastor of the Box Hill Baptist Church, Australia. It was his suggestion and encouragement which finally started off the process for its publication. Equally grateful am I to Dr. K. Thanzaiva, Professor in Christian Theology at the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, for taking the responsibility of publishing the book on behalf of the Mizo Theological Conference. A special thanks is due to Ms. Susan M. Downs for her kindness in doing the final proof-reading of the book.

But above all else it is to Dr. F.S. Downs, former Professor of the History of Christianity at the United Theological College, Bangalore and currently Consultant for the Tribal Studies and Post Graduate Programme at the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, that my deepest gratitude is due. He has been my teacher and guide and it was from him I first learnt the taste of historical study. In the process of research and writing this book Dr. Downs had guided me with exceptional patience and understanding, giving wholeheartedly of his time and attention at every stage of my work. Finding no word nor way adequate to express my deep sense of gratitude I dedicate this book to him.

Jorhat,  
February, 1997

Mangkhosat Kipgen

## ABBREVIATION

BMS	Baptist Missionary Society.
BMS ANNUAL REPORT	The one Hundred and Eleventh Annual Report of the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society for the year ending.....
CLS	Christian Literature Society, Madras.
CMA	Calvinistic Methodist Archives, Aberystwyth.
IOL	India Office Library and Records, London.
Missionary Herald	The Missionary Herald of the Baptist Missionary Society.
South Lushai Mission Report	A Series of Annual Mission field reports on the work in the South Lushai Hills with various captions.
Welsh Foreign Mission Report	The Report of the Foreign Mission of the Calvinistic Methodist or Presbyterian Church of Wales for the year ending .....

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



FORWARD .....	iv
PREFACE .....	vi
ABBREVIATION .....	ix
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
A. The problem .....	1
B. Definitions .....	5
C. Scope .....	6
D. Previous Research .....	7
E. Method of Research .....	13
F. The Structure .....	14
II. THE PEOPLE AND THEIR EARLY HISTORY .....	16
A. Towards a Common Generic Name .....	16
B. The Zo Affinities : Political Implications .....	21
C. The Zos of Mizoram .....	28
D. Their Habitat .....	30
E. Origin and Early History of the Zos .....	31
1. Creation .....	31
2. Origin of the Zos .....	32
F. General Population Movement of the Tibeto-Burmans (Mongoloid) .....	35
G. Sojourn in the Plains of Burma .....	37
H. Sojourn in the Chin Hills .....	41
I. Entry and Settlement in the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) ....	43
1. Selesih : First Town of Mizoram .....	44
2. Ascendancy of the Sailo Chiefs .....	44
3. Expulsion of the Northern Clans .....	45
4. Intra-Clan Feuds .....	46
J. Isolation .....	47
1. Surrounding Religious Communities .....	47
2. Influence of Neighbouring Religions .....	49
3. Development of a Distinctive Culture .....	54
4. Conclusion .....	56

III. TRADITIONAL ZO CULTURE : SOCIO-CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS, FOLK TALES AND MUSIC .....	57
A. Political System .....	58
1. The Lal (chief) .....	58
2. The Council of Elders .....	59
3. Other Village Officials .....	60
B. Cultural Institutions .....	61
1. Zawlbuk .....	61
2. The Bawi System .....	73
D. The Economic System .....	75
1. Jhum Cultivation .....	75
2. Moveable Property .....	76
3. A Bamboo-Based Economy .....	76
4. Bamboo Famines .....	76
E. Customary Laws and Practices .....	77
1. Village Administration .....	78
2. Marriage .....	79
3. Divorce .....	80
4. Women's Position in Society .....	80
5. Inheritance .....	82
F. Popular Folk Stories .....	83
1. Legendary Stories .....	83
2. Jokes .....	85
3. Patriotic Stories : The Zo Braves .....	87
G. Folk-Songs and Lyrics .....	94
1. Origin of Zo Folk Songs .....	95
2. Songs Composed in the Chin Hills .....	96
3. Songs Composed After Entering Mizoram .....	100
IV. TRADITIONAL ZO CULTURE : RELIGION .....	106
A. Huais and Inthawina .....	106
B. Traditional Zo Theism .....	111
1. Inthawina vs. Sakhaw Biakna .....	111
2. Bawlpu vs. Sadawt .....	112
3. The Sacrificial System .....	112
4. The High God (s) .....	115

C. Life After Death .....	118
1. The way to the Other World .....	118
2. Entrance to Pialral .....	119
D. Thangchhuah Feasts as Religious Acts .....	123
E. Taboo .....	125
1. Discovery of a Water Spring .....	127
2. Cruelty .....	127
3. Oaths and Curses .....	127
4. Throwing Serhs .....	127
5. Obstructing Public Roads .....	127
6. Disturbing the Jhum Boundaries .....	128
7. Marrying One's Own Daughter .....	128
V. THE BRITISH ADVENT, ADMINISTRATION AND CULTURAL CHANGE .....	129
A. Earliest Contacts with the British : Raids and Occupation .....	129
1. First Contacts with British .....	129
2. Raids .....	130
3. British Government Policy Towards the Zos .....	130
4. The Lushai Expeditions .....	132
5. The Chin-Lushai Expedition and the Occupation of Mizoram, 1889-90 .....	136
B. Nature of British Administration : Non-regulated .....	138
1. Consolidation of British Rule .....	138
2. Shaping the Land .....	142
3. Regulating the Lushai Hills District .....	144
4. The Exceptions .....	146
5. Ruling Through the Chiefs .....	148
6. Circle Administration, 1901-2 .....	149
C. Changes in Social Customs and Traditional Institutions .....	152
1. Doing Away with "Barbaric Practices" .....	152
2. Curbing Nomadic Behavior .....	153
3. The Abolition of the Bawi System .....	153
4. Political Developments and the Abolition of Chieftainship .....	171
5. The Abolition of the Zawlbuk .....	175
D. The Ethical Code of Tlawmngaihna Survives .....	182

VI. INTRODUCTION AND GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY	....	188
A. Preparation : Dreams and Visions	.....	188
B. Preliminary Exploration by Christian Missions ..		191
C. The Arthington Mission	.....	192
D. Laying Foundations	.....	194
E. The Welsh Presbyterian Mission in the North	...	197
F. Baptist Mission in the South	.....	200
G. Lakher Pioneer Mission	.....	203
H. Other Denominations	.....	205
1. Salvation Army	.....	205
2. Roman Catholic Church	.....	206
3. Seventh Day Adventists	.....	207
4. United Pentecostal Church (UPC)	.....	208
I. Growth of Christianity	.....	209
VII. REVIVALS : INSTRUMENTS OF INDIGENIZATION	..	214
A. The Beginnings	.....	215
1. The Khasi-Jaintia Revival of 1906	.....	216
2. Preparation in Mizoram	.....	216
B. The Revivals	.....	219
1. The First Wave, 1906	.....	219
2. The Interval, 1906-1913	.....	222
3. The Second Wave, 1913-14	.....	234
4. The Third Wave, 1919-23	.....	236
5. The Fourth Wave, 1930-37	.....	242
C. Revival and Indigenization	.....	249
1. Ecstatic Phenomena	.....	250
2. Freedom of Expression, and Restrictions	....	255
3. Re-emergence of the Free Spirit	.....	258
4. Freedom of the Spirit and the Emergence of an Indigenous Church	.....	264
5. Spiritual Gifts and Excesses : The Fourth Revival	.....	287
6. The Church and Extremism	.....	300
7. Extreme Indigenous Sects	.....	309
Conclusion	.....	311
VIII. CONCLUSION	.....	313
BIBLIOGRAPHY	.....	320
APPENDIX	.....	342
INDEX	.....	346

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. THE PROBLEM

With the exception of the Christians of the St. Thomas tradition who have been found in southwestern India since the early centuries of the Christian era, most Christians living in the Indian subcontinent are the fruits of the work of western missions and indigenous Churches during the modern period, especially the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During those centuries Christian communities were established throughout the region. Some of these communities are small and still essentially western in what might be described as their ecclesiastical personalities. Others are dynamic and deeply rooted in the socio-cultural traditions of the people.

The Churches of Mizoram provide an example of the latter type of Christian community. During the first three decades of the present century the great majority of Zo people living within that state had become Christian. Then and in the subsequent years they developed indigenous forms of Christianity that are unique to their tribe. While members of other tribes in North East India became Christians in large numbers, the growth was not so rapid among them nor did they establish forms of Christianity so deeply rooted in their cultures. The reasons why this happened constitutes the main problem under investigation in this book.

Since the time of Robert de Nobili it has been recognized that the success or failure of Christianity in a particular place is related to the degree to which it has been meaningfully indigenized. De Nobili believed that one reason why Christianity was not being more widely embraced during his time was because at least in its Roman Catholic form it was believed to be alien to Indians. It was the religion of the "Franks" or "Parangis" which could not take roots in Indian soil. He therefore tried to do away with the "foreign aspect of Christianity" and adapted it to Indian forms of thought and life style. But while he was successful to some extent, it has been questioned as to whether or not his approach really went beyond external forms to the "soul" of Hindu India. Christianity remained only superficially indigenus.

During the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, individual Christian thinkers and a few mystics attempted to present the Christian faith in indigenous terms. To some extent they were successful. Narayan Vaman Tilak, one of the best known among them, was said to have "baptized into Christ the lyricism he had inherited from Tukarani and the old Hindu bhaktas."<sup>1</sup> But the man who perhaps penetrated most deeply into the soul of Hindu India was Sadhu Sundar Singh whose mystic life and work was in close harmony with the genius of the Sikh and Hindu religion. For a while he was able to stir up the Indian religious communities.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to know what the long term impact of Sadhu Sundar Singh might have been if his work in India had not been so frequently interrupted by foreign tours, and his unsuccessful efforts to evangelize Tibet where he suffered an untimely death. Attempts at indigenizing Christian theology by the Madras Rethinking Group, and the use of the meditative approach of Christian ashrams, and the use of traditional art forms as exemplified by the Dornakal cathedral were all important developments. But they never succeeded in implanting themselves in the Christian people as a whole. This may account for the fact that in most parts of Hindu India Christianity did not grow or develop a distinctively indigenous character.

For reasons that we will be investigating Christianity took a different course in what is today known as Mizoram. It is commonly assumed that rapid growth is to be expected among "primitive" people whose primal religious system lacks the tenacity of more "advanced" religions.<sup>3</sup> The rapidity with which the Zos of Mizoram adopted Christianity is therefore, according to this view, not surprising. The problem is that other peoples of the North East— such as the Khasis, the Garos and the Nagas — were equally "primitive" and isolated from their neighbours and otherwise have a modern history similar to that of the Zos of Mizoram. And yet Christianity took several generations to become established among them, and has not taken on indigenous forms comparable to those of Zo Christianity.

- 
1. C. B. Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History* (Revised ed. 1976), P. 111. Hereafter cited as Firth. *Indian Church History*.
  2. A. J. Appasamy, *Sundar Singh : A Biography* (1958, reprinted 1970) pp. 92-112.
  3. J. M. Lloyd, *On Every High Hill* (1956), p. 78. Hereafter cited as Lloyd. *High Hill*.

Nor were there differences in the missionary agents at work. The missionaries who introduced and nurtured Christianity among the Zos during the early years came from the same Evangelical Protestant background as the missionaries who worked among the other tribal groups. Despite denominational differences (the great majority of Protestant missionaries were either Baptist or Presbyterian), they shared a similar outlook in religious matters and were equally committed to converting the "heathen" to Christ. The method of evangelism used were similar — preaching, literary work, education and medical services being the main agencies. Actually, missionaries of the same mission, the Welsh Presbyterian, worked both in Mizoram and the Khasi Jaintia Hills of the then Assam province. They worked closely together and adopted the same methods of work. In fact during the very years when Christianity was growing so rapidly in Mizoram the Welsh Mission continued to place primary emphasis upon its work in the Khasi Jaintia area. Under these circumstances why was the response in Mizoram different than elsewhere, even in the North East among tribes of a similar background ?

This difference was obvious to the Zo Christians. E. M. Chapman and M. Clark reported that the response among them "made the Mizos feel that, like Israel of old, they were chosen of God" so that "He might use them to reveal Himself to other tribes."<sup>4</sup> While this attitude is perhaps understandable, any explanation of the distinctive developments of Zo Christianity based upon the idea that they were specially chosen by God over others is not only theologically questionable but is historically inadequate.

A few writers have attempted to go deeper into the matter. Among these there is agreement that there were several factors, both foreign and native, that contributed to the rapid and distinctive growth of Christianity in Mizoram. They do not agree on which the main factors were. To Chapman and Clark, the Zo code of conduct, *Tlawmngaihna*, was "probably the greatest of all."<sup>5</sup> They do not satisfactorily explain why this should be so. Zairema, a highly respected Zo church leader, attributed the rapid growth to the "full participation of Laymen,"<sup>6</sup> but does not develop the point further.

---

4. *Mizo Miracle*, ed. by Marjorie Sykes (1968), p.93. Hereafter cited as Chapman and Clark, *Miracle*.

5. *Ibid.*, p.89.

6. *God's Miracle in Mizoram : A Glimpse of Christian Work among Head-Hunters* (1978), p.12. Hereafter cited as Zairema, *God's Miracle*.

In fact the same was true of the Christian movement among all the tribes of the North East. The majority of writers, such as H. W. Carter, J.M. Lloyd, Saiaithanga, Liangkhaia and Lalsawma identify the revival movements as the main factor.<sup>7</sup> The difficulty with this explanation is that revival movements have taken place among other tribal communities in the North East—without similar results. The initial ecstatic revival experienced in Mizoram, in fact, originated in Wales and came to the Zos through the Khasi Church in Meghalaya. It did not have the same impact there. Why ?

In addition to the unusually rapid growth of Christianity among the Zos of Mizoram, another problem requiring explanation is the uniquely indigenous character of Christianity there. How is this explained ? Was it particular policies and methods of the missionaries who worked there ? We have already seen the factor that the same mission was working in the Khasi-Jaintia area without similar results which suggests that this is not the main reason. A further question that arises is whether or not there was any link between the rapid growth of Christianity and the indigenization of that religion in Mizoram ?

It is the purpose of this book to establish that there was indeed a linkage between indigenization and growth in Mizoram. It will be shown that the encounter between Christianity and the traditional Zo culture produced a uniquely Zo form of Christianity, and that it was this indigenization of Christianity which made it possible for the rapid growth to take place.

- 
7. H. W. Carter, ed., **Mizoram Baptist Kohhran Chanchin** (1945, 2nd ed. revised, 1981), p. 76. Hereafter cited as Carter, **Baptish Kohhran** ; Lloyd, **High Hill**, p. 78, and **History of the Church in Mizoram**; (1991), pp.192, 297. Hereafter cited as Lloyd, **Church in Mizoram**; Saiaithanga, **Mizo Kohhran Chanchin** (1969, reprinted 1976): Hereafter cited as Saiaithanga, **Kohhran** ; Liangkhaia, **Mizoram Harhna Thu** (1972), p. 26. Hereafter cited as Liangkhaia, **Harhna** ; and Lalsawma, "The work of the Holy Spirit and Tribal Religious Emotionalism : An Interpretation on the Christian Experience of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Relation to Some Theological Concepts and Practices among Tribal Christian Congregations in Assam from 1946-1956," (unpublished M. Th. Thesis, Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur, 1964), pp. 38, 39, 40. Hereafter cited as Lalsawma, "Tribal Religious Emotionalism".

## B. DEFINITIONS

Some of the terms used in this book require clarification.

The first of these is "growth". It is here used in two senses. It is on the one hand used to indicate an increase in quantity. Thus the rapid numerical growth of the Zo Christian community is indicated. On the other hand the term is also used to denote development or qualitative change. It is used in this sense when referring to the early development of the Zo Christians into a westernized church, and then with reference to the growth into a church with a distinctive Zo identity.

The term "indigenization" does not here mean simply the transfer of administrative authority from missionaries to Zos — the "three selfs" (Self-Support, Self-Propagation, Self-Government). It is used, rather, to indicate the impact of the traditional culture on the nature or personality of Zo Christianity, including the way the faith is understood and the way God is worshipped.

Another important term used throughout the book is "culture". While culture has been defined in a number of different ways, for our purposes we have adopted the classical definition of the well known anthropologist, Edward Burnett Tylor. In his book, **Primitive Culture**, published nearly one hundred years ago, he defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>8</sup> To Tylor's definition I have added one further element: "mental aptitude" or "temperament" which might be one of the things covered by his phrase "any other capabilities and habits." Certain significant aspects of Tylor's definition of culture may be usefully highlighted. One is his emphasis upon culture as a "complex whole", including both material and non-material aspects. This is particularly true of a close-knit tribal society like that of the Zos. The other important point in Tylor's definition is that culture is "acquired", indicating that it is dynamic rather than static. The culture of a community develops its own distinctive forms of characteristics which differentiate it from other communities. The ability of a community to maintain a distinctive identity depends upon the ability of its cul-

---

8. Quoted in John Friedl, **The Human Portrait: Introduction to Cultural Anthropology** (1975, reprinted 1981), p. 88.

ture to accommodate itself to significant impact of other cultural systems. It will be shown how in the face of the impact of aggressive western and Hindu Indian culture, the Zo culture not only survived but adapted itself to the new situation. Religion—in this case the Christian religion—played a central role in the process.

Another term that is used in this book which requires definition is the word "Zo". It is used to denote a tribe the many clans of which inhabit Burma (where they are known as Chins), North Cachar and Manipur (where they are known as Kukis), and Mizoram (where they are known as Mizos). They have traditionally been called Kuki-Chins or Chin-Lushais. In Mizoram proper they were called Lushais by the British. In this book it will be shown why the name Zo is best used as the inclusive name to identify this people.

The book is limited to a study of Christianity among the Zo people who inhabit what is now called Mizoram. This is the same area that constituted what was called the Lushai Hills District by the British, and later, in independent India until the establishment of the state, the Mizo District.

Finally, there are a series of words related to Christianity. The word "Church" (with a capital C) refers either to the proper name of established ecclesiastical bodies or to the Christian community of Mizoram as a whole. When "church" (with a lower case c) is used it refers to local congregations or buildings. "Christianity" is more frequently used than "Church" to designate the community as a whole in order to make the point that the study is more concerned with the history of the Christian people than with institutional ecclesiastical history.

### C. SCOPE

This study covers a period of six decades, 1894-1954, during which the whole of the Zo people living in Mizoram became Christian.<sup>9</sup> It deals with the socio-political context within which the changes that took place in Mizoram during this period must be understood. In order to understand how the Zo people reacted to these changes, and how they developed a new cultural synthesis distinctive to themselves

---

9. There are a few members of other tribes, such as the Chakmas, as well as a small number of other non-Zos resident in Mizoram who are not Christian.

it is also necessary to study the available evidence concerning the pre-British history and culture of the people. For reasons that will become apparent, the study concentrates on seeking to understand the growth of the Zo Christian community in Mizoram, growth being understood both quantitatively and qualitatively.

#### D. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The earliest written works about the Zos resident in the area of our study were produced almost exclusively by westerners, mainly military and administrative officers who had some connection with Mizoram. This connection related to the annexation and administration of the area by the British government, some of the earliest historical and anthropological works on the Zos were three books written by Tom Herbert Lewin: **The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein** (1869), **Wild Races of South-Eastern India** (1870), and **A Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India** (1912). Another of this period was C. A. Soppitt's **A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-Eastern Frontier with An Outline Grammar of the Rangkhoh-Lushai Language and A Comparison of Lushai with other Dialects** (1893). With the exception of occasional newspaper reports and brief allusions made by one or two writers like Father Vincentius Sangermano, these provide us with the earliest substantial information about the Zos.

A second type of writing comes from military officers who gave detailed accounts of military operations in what were then referred to as the Chin-Lushai Hills. These include R. G. Woodthorpe's **The Lushai Expedition, 1871-72** (1872), A. S. Reid's **Chin-Lushai Land: Including a Description of the Various Expeditions into the Chin-Lushai Hills and the Final Annexation of the Country, with Maps and Illustrations** (1893), and L. W. Shakespear's **History of the Assam Rifles** (1929). Here and there these writings provide unexpected anthropological insights into the culture of the Zos, though by and large they have little bearing on the subject of this book.

Recently the Tribal Research Institute, sponsored by the government of Mizoram, reprinted a number of these early works, thus making them available to scholars. It also published, for the first time, some of the confidential reports of the government. One of these, **Foreign Department Report on Chin Lushai Hills, September,**

1892, describes the intense efforts made by the British government to bring the Chin Hills of Burma and the North and South Lushai Hills districts of India into a single administrative unit. Follow-up efforts resulted in two important books being published. The first of these was Bertram S. Carey and H. N. Tuck's **The Chin Hills : A History of the People, Our Dealings with Them, Their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country**, Vol. 1 (1896, reprinted 1976) and the other was John Shakespear's **The Lushei Kuki Clans**, Parts I and II (1912). Though the original purpose of these books related to the proposed combination of the three districts into one, a proposal that was not accepted in the end, they nevertheless made important contributions to our understanding of the essential unity of the people concerned. To these should be added William Shaw's **Notes on the Thadou Kukis** (1929) and G. A. Grierson's monumental work, **Linguistic Survey of India**, III, 3 (1904), both of which make the same point from different perspectives. These books based on a certain degree of anthropological analysis show us the nature of Zo society and culture just at the time the area was beginning to come under alien administration. Another book which is valuable for the same reason is N. E. Parry's **A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies** (1928). These books significantly altered the image of the Zos in the minds of literate outsiders. They are valuable insofar as they provide the scholar with a basis for understanding subsequent changes. Today a number of books have been written by Zos themselves which provide other valuable insights into the traditional Zo society.

A fourth group of writings are concerned with the time subsequent to the establishment of British administration and concern such subjects as the government's dealings with the Zos and the impact of western culture upon the people. Sir Robert Reid's **The Lushai Hills** (1942) deals mainly with changes in the political life of the Zos. Two works which contain deeper anthropological insights are N. E. Parry's **The Lakhers** (1932) and A. G. McCall's **Lushai Chrysalis** (1949). As the name of Parry's book suggests, it deals mainly with the history and culture of the Maras (called Lakhers by the Luseis), a clan of Zos who live in the southern corner of Mizoram. He, however, makes significant comments on the Luseis or the Lusei speaking section of the Zo population. Both Parry and McCall were concerned about the traumatic cultural changes that had come upon the Zos as a result of the impact of western culture through activities of both the government

and Christian missions. While admitting that it was the advent of British power that "staggered" and "bewildered" the Zos, and "paralysed the people", they were convinced that the most active, dynamic and sustained instruments of change were the missions. As McCall put it, the role of the government was simply "the provision of law and order, and a modicum of utility services."<sup>10</sup> In fact they tended to see government as the upholder and preserver of the customs of the people over against the "full-scale assault" on those customs launched by the missionaries whom, Parry believed, were denationalizing the people.<sup>11</sup> Parry sought to preserve the pristine nature of Zo culture. While sharing the same concern, McCall believed that some change was not only inevitable but desirable. While admitting that change was inevitable, he pleaded that it should be indigenously ignited and properly guided, and not forced on the people by "over-zealous" outsiders. His book was an attempt to explain government policies in this respect, and to provide guidelines for the moral and economic development of the people. Another book written by McCall, *The Lushai Hills District Cover* (1972), prepared during 1938-39 as an official handbook for the administration of the district, had the same objective. Its purpose was to give guidance to administrators seeking to base British rule on traditional, if slightly modified forms of government through the chiefs. Parry defended the institution of the Zawlbuk (bachelors' dormitory) and unsuccessfully sought to revive it. Similarly, McCall defended the Bawi (slavery) system, and similarly failed. The accounts found in the above books are incomplete and certainly are not free from bias. They make important contributions to understanding certain aspects of the matter studied in this book, but do not deal with its subject directly.

More recent works, such as J. D. Baveja's *The Land Where Bamboo Flowers* (1970) and L. B. Thanga's *The Mizos : A Study in Racial Personality* (1978), provide fresh information about the Zo's socio-cultural life. Though one may not agree with his main thesis regarding the origins of the ills in Zo society, particularly the recent insurgency, Baveja's conclusions concerning the Zos' personality are

- 
10. *Lushai Chrysalis* (1949), p. 199. Hereafter cited as McCall, *Chrysalis*.
  11. *The Lakhers* (1932), p. 20. Hereafter cited as Parry, *Lakher*.
  12. *The Land Where Bamboo Flowers* (1970), p.22. Hereafter cited as Baveja, *Bamboo*.

noteworthy. A Zo, he noted, is a person with contrasting "moods" which are difficult to anticipate.<sup>12</sup> Thanga agrees with Baveja that "a Mizo is not easy to understand."<sup>13</sup> To understand the "mood" or, more accurately, the "mental aptitude" of the Zo is, in fact, the key to understand the phenomenal growth of Christianity among them about which this book is concerned.

One way in which the interaction between Christianity and culture of those who embraced it has been studied is to look at the impact of the former on the latter. Two recent studies along these lines are Kenneth Chawngliana's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "Christianity and the Mizo Society : The Study of the Impact of Christianity on the Mizo Social Structures" (University of Pune, 1978), and John Vanlal Hluna's **Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram : A Study of Impact of Christianity on the Political Development in Mizoram** (1985). Though it was not the main purpose of his research, Hluna devoted three brief chapters to the growth of Christianity. Without attempting an in depth analysis of the reasons for it, Hluna attributed the rapid growth of Christianity primarily to "the Mission 'policy' and its implication" and, additionally, to "the responses made by the Mizo people."<sup>14</sup>

The study of the impact of Christianity upon Mizo society has been undertaken by a number of writers, both westerners and Zos. The perspective from which such writings usually done is that of missionary expansion. The earliest works of this type were Grace R. Lewis' **The Lushai Hills : The Story of the Lushai Pioneer Mission**, (1970), M.E. Bowser's **Light on the Lushai Hills : The Story of Our Foreign Mission** (1930), Dorothy F. Glover's **Set on a Hill : The Record of Forty Years in the Lushai Country** (1944), and David Kyles' **Lorrain of the Lushais : Romance and Realism on the North-East Frontier of India** (1944). In common with most books of this type these were written mainly to inform western readers and to solicit their support for the agents, the missionaries — especially those activities which were "successful". The Zos are mentioned, of course, but only as the objects of missionary work. The descriptions of the people found in them are only a slight improvement over the newspaper reports. Their descriptions of the moral and religious life

---

13. **The Mizos : A Study in Racial Personality** (1978), p. 175. Hereafter cited as Thanga, **The Mizos**.

14. P. 14. Hereafter cited as Hluna, **Church and Political Upheaval**.

of the people were not reliable. This was because their purpose in writing was not to help their readers understand traditional Zo culture sympathetically, but to solicit their support in bringing about changes "for the better" in that culture. In the process there were distortions. Though the readership of these books was primarily western, the attitudes that lay behind them were communicated by the missionaries to the Zo Christians with the result that they did not attempt to see their traditional culture positively — and initially sought to adopt western culture in its place. It is clear that this approach is inadequate either for the purpose of developing self-understanding among Zos who happen to be Christian or for providing adequate historical explanation.

Though Lloyd wrote his *On Every High Hill* (1956) from this perspective, the book was an improvement over what had gone before insofar as he was more sensitive to the importance of the Zo culture. This is even more evident in his recent publication, *History of the Church in Mizoram* (1991). He had the distinct advantage of knowing the three languages necessary to have complete access to the sources — English, Welsh and Lusei — and was therefore able to draw on a wider variety of sources than other writers have. This helped him in his attempt to interpret what he described as "the profound changes which have taken place in the life" of the Zos of Mizoram.<sup>15</sup> But on the whole his approach remains traditional, particularly so with reference to the problem being investigated in this book.

There is one work published from a modern missiological perspective, C. L. Hminga's *The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram* (1987).<sup>16</sup> It discusses in detail the decadal growth of the Churches in Mizoram. He argues that the revival movements were the main factor behind church growth, as have many writers. Using the principles developed by Donald A. McGavran, he attributed the "fast growth" of the Church in Mizoram to revival, particularly the third revival. According to him, this revival was preceded by all the right conditions, such as "a long waiting in prayer for revival" and

---

15. See "Purpose of Narrative" under "Outline" in *Church in Mizoram*.

16. Originally written as a dissertation submitted to the Fuller Theological School of World Mission for the Doctor of Missiology degree.

"feeding on God's word."<sup>17</sup> These are the preparatory steps necessary for the occurrence of revival according to McGavran.<sup>18</sup> But neither Hminga nor McGavran's theories explain why revivalism became so much a part of Zo Christianity when identical preparation had taken place among similar tribal groups in the North East without similar results. A comparative missiological study of the revival phenomenon among the Khasi-Jaintias on the one hand and the Zos on the other might provide insights into the way in which such "preparation" interacts with indigenous cultural phenomena. Hminga, for instance, acknowledges that anthropological insights are to be considered as part of the "frame of reference", but he clearly does not regard the cultural traditions of the people as subjects for serious consideration.<sup>19</sup>

An interesting recent work has been written by a Zo scholar from Manipur, Lal Dena. While his book, *Christian Missions and Colonialism* (1988), is mainly concerned with the relationship between the British and foreign missionaries in Manipur and Mizoram, he also has one chapter entitled "Modus Operandi of the Missions and the Impact" in which he describes the way in which the missionaries conducted their work and the results. He observed that while the missionaries working in the two states used similar methods "the increase in converts was much more phenomenal in Lushai Hills than in Manipur."<sup>20</sup> He attributes this partly to the different structure of the churches in Mizoram and partly to the united efforts of the missionaries belonging to different missions working in the area.<sup>21</sup> While these are certainly factors to be taken into consideration, they are certainly subsidiary to the main factor — the nature and consequences of the encounter between Christianity and the traditional Zo culture which resulted in a distinctive kind of Zo revivalism.

The one study that most closely approximates, though on a limited scale, the approach of this book is Lalsawma's "Tribal Religious Emotionalism" to which reference has already been made. His writing contains deep insights relative to the revival movements, and particularly regarding the "extremist groups" which are his main concern.

---

17. P. 272. Hereafter cited as Hminga, *Churches in Mizoram*.

18. *Understanding Church Growth* (1970, reprinted 1982) pp. 166-7

19. *Churches in Mizoram*, p. 270.

20. P. 103. Hereafter cited as Dena, *Colonialism*.

21. *Ibid.*

The main flaw with his argument is that he came to the hasty conclusion that the revival movement in Mizoram was simply a repetition of the Welsh revivals. He did not take into account the extensive evidence which proves that the Zo revivals were quite different from those which had taken place in Wales. Failure to understand this makes it difficult to really understand the significance or the role of the Zo revival movements.

In his **Christianity in North East India : Historical perspectives** (1983) and his recently released book in the Church History Association of India's series on the **History of Christianity in India**, Vol. V, Part 5, **North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**, F. S. Downs breaks new historiographical ground with an emphasis upon the socio-cultural history of the people as the perspective from which the history of Christianity should be studied. Looking at it from this perspective, Downs suggests that the history of Christianity in Mizoram can best be understood when the revivals there are understood as instruments of indigenization. But insofar as his books cover the entire North East and cannot spend much time on Mizoram, and insofar as he lacks knowledge of the Lusei language Downs could not go deeply into the cultural roots of the movement. While generally agreeing with his hypothesis, the present writer attempts to find the answer to the question of why such revivals took place in Mizoram and not elsewhere by going more deeply into a study on the Zo culture.

#### E. METHOD OF RESEARCH

The method of research used in this book is based on the assumption that the history of Christianity is an integral part of the history of the people of Mizoram. It is written for their self understanding in the first place, and for the benefit of all historians and other scholars interested in the church in Mizoram. It seeks to go further than traditional approaches which provided data without interpretation or analysis, or which were based on ideological assumptions that do not take religious factors seriously, or which write from the perspective of foreign missions rather than of the indigenous peoples concerned. The approach used is that being promoted by the Church History Association of India's Editorial Board, namely, understanding the history of Christianity from the perspective of the people concerned. In this case that means the Zo people inhabiting Mizoram. There are two ways in which this could be done. One, which is currently popu-

lar, is to study the impact of Christianity upon the traditional socio-cultural life of the people. The other, and this is the approach adopted in this book, is to look at the way in which the socio-cultural traditions of the people have had impact upon Christianity, giving it a distinctive character not found among peoples of different socio-cultural traditions.

For this reason much time and space has been spent analyzing the main features of the traditional Zo culture in order that those historical processes the influence of which are evident in Zo Christianity today may be fully understood. For this purpose the writer has visited the National and Asiatic libraries in Calcutta, the Serampore college library, the district libraries in Guwahati and Shillong, the Aizawl Theological College library and the central library of the Baptist Church of Mizoram in Serkawn. The sources found there have been substantially supplemented by interviews and conversations with Church leaders and government officials who have personal and detailed knowledge of particular development under study. Further information was received through questionnaires sent to a number of senior Church leaders.

The writer also benefited a three month long visit to the U.K. where he had access to the Baptist Missionary Society Archive at its London headquarters, the archives of the India Office Library in London, and the Welsh Presbyterian Mission Archive in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. He also had opportunities to meet and interview some retired missionaries who had served for long periods of time in Mizoram. Some of them provided him with materials of great value.

Because I belong to a Zo clan from Manipur, I was able to utilize materials written in the language formerly known as Lusei but now called Mizo. The similarities between the culture of my own clan and that of the Zo residents in Mizoram also provided me with valuable insights that would not be available to others.

## F. THE STRUCTURE

As mentioned above, the structure of the book allots extensive space to the study of the cultural history and context of the Zo people. Chapter II introduces the Zos of Mizoram within the context of the larger community of ethnic Zos that inhabit surrounding areas. It investigates the political implications of the early history of the Zo people, beginning from the pre-history period down through the time

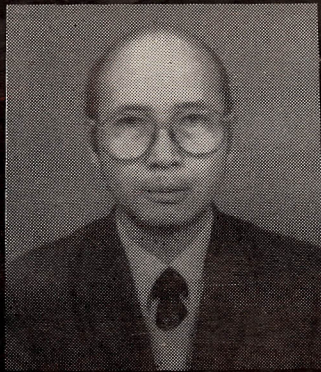
of their immigration to the plains and then hills of Burma up to the time of their settlement in the present Mizoram where they lived in isolation for a sufficiently long time to develop a distinctive culture.

Chapters III and IV describe the traditional Zo culture with the object of correcting errors found in early writings. While chapter III describes the historical development of the Zos' socio-cultural institutions:— such as the political system of village chieftainships, the **Zawlbuk** (bachelors' dormitory) and its role in the people's lives, the **Bawi** system of benevolent slavery, customary laws and practices, the historical development of folk songs and lyrics, Chapter IV deals with the religious dimension of traditional Zo culture. Special attention is given to the historical development of that religion prior to the coming of Christianity.

Chapter V briefly describes the period of the great changes in the political and socio-cultural life of the Zo people following the advent of British power in the region, with the subsequent annexation and administration by the British of the area now known as Mizoram. It is shown how these developments brought about change in such important cultural institutions as the **Bawi**, **Zawlbuk**, and chieftainship systems. These are of particular importance because Christians were deeply involved in these developments.

Chapter VI describes the introduction and growth of Christianity in Mizoram through the work of two missions mainly the Welsh Presbyterian Mission in the North and the British Baptist Missionary Society in the South.

Chapter VII is the main chapter, dealing with the series of revival movements that swept through Mizoram during the period under study. The movements are both described and analyzed with respect to their roots, development and consequences. It will be shown that it was in the revivals that the encounter between traditional Zo culture and Christianity as brought by the western missionaries took place, and that in them was formed a distinctively Zo form of Christianity.



Dr. Mangkhosat Kipgen, Professor of the History of Christianity and Vice Principal of the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, hails from the Manipur State of India. Born and brought up in a family of devout Christian parents, his aim in life as a young man was to be in God's ministry. After his initial theological training at the Eastern Theological College and a basic theological degree (Bachelor of Divinity) of the Senate of Serampore College through the United Theological College, Bangalore, he joined the teaching faculty of the Eastern Theological College in 1969. In course of time he earned his Master of Theology (M.Th.) and Doctor of Theology (D.Th.) degrees of the Senate of Serampore College. He was made Professor of the History of Christianity in 1983. Before taking up his present assignment he had also worked for some years as Finance Secretary and Bursar of the college.

### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

Most of the matter examined by Dr. Kipgen in this book has been touched upon by other authors. But the way he brings together the findings of others in support of his own insights makes this a book of the very highest order."

— Dr. Frederick S. Downs